

EMILE ZOLA: BLOOD, SEX & MONEY

# BLOOD

## **Episode 2: Fire** **Dan Rebellato**

Adapted from:  
**The Conquest of Plassans**  
**La Bête Humaine**  
by Émile Zola

**Second Draft** (June 2015)

Speaking characters

Narrator (Didi)

Abbé Faujas

François

Martha

Félicité

Rose	)	
Mrs Rastoil	)	doubled
Mrs Condamin	)	
Mrs Paloque	)	
Mayor	)	
Dr Porquier	)	doubled
Warder	)	

1.

DIDI (VO)

This is a thought.

A match is struck. Very close.

A twitch of the mind that sends a tiny impulse

Underneath this we hear the burning match being set to a trail of gunpowder or petrol. It fizzes and splutters and burns.

fizzing through the brain, producing sparks of memories and plans and feelings and ideas which in turn send signals through the body

The fuel meets paper and light wood. The paper catches quickly, the wood begins to crackle.

electrical signals pulsing from the brain to the spine to the nerves

The wood is burning hard, the heat is building, it's a living, crackling bonfire.

and from the nerves to the muscle and the body is alive, the whole body is alive, pulsing with energy and messages and signals and electricity, and all that, all that activity, all that light, is what leads from the mind to the brain to the spine to the nerves to the muscles to this:

Cut sound sharply. A door knocker raps smartly on a door.

2.

Birdsong. We are outside. It is a small rural town in France in the mid 1850s. A man has alighted from a carriage and we can still hear the horses. The door opens.

ROSE

Can I help you, sir?

FAUJAS I am Abbé Faujas.

ROSE Yes, sir?

FAUJAS Please tell your master that I have arrived.

ROSE They're just having lunch.

FAUJAS I shall not detain them long.

ROSE They're still eating.

FAUJAS I will simply introduce myself and then you may show me to my room.

ROSE I'm not sure...

FAUJAS Boy! Bring my cases.

ROSE Did you say 'your room'?

FAUJAS Lead the way, if you please.

ROSE (confused) Yes, your grace...

Opens the door further. FAUJAS enters.

3.

We are now inside. The family are eating.

FRANÇOIS (distant) Who was that, Rose?

ROSE This is Father Faux-Pas, sir.

FAUJAS Faujas.

ROSE I'm sorry, your worship.

FRANÇOIS Can I help you, sir?

FAUJAS Please, don't get up. I don't wish to interrupt your lunch. You are François Mouret?

FRANÇOIS That's right, sir. And this is my wife, Martha.

FAUJAS (splendidly) And I am Abbé Faujas.

Pause.

MARTHA ...Can we help you, sir?

FAUJAS No thank you, I shall trouble you for nothing. I am a man of simple tastes.

FRANÇOIS Right.

Pause.

Do you need a contribution to church funds? I'm afraid / my wife and I are not religious // in the slightest -

FAUJAS No no no. I wouldn't hear of it. Put your money away.

MARTHA // No...

Silence. FAUJAS is beaming beatifically.

FRANÇOIS So, forgive me, sir. But I'm rather at a loss...

MARTHA I think what my husband means, Father, is we're not sure why you're here.

FRANÇOIS My former parish in Besançon became unsatisfactory and it was recommended that I try Plassans.

Pause.

MARTHA I mean, Father, why are you here in our house?

FAUJAS Why, the room.

MARTHA The room?

FAUJAS Yes. I am taking a room in your house.

The COACHMAN comes in dragging a large case which he thumps down.

Thank you. / You may go.

FRANÇOIS I think there must be some mistake.

FAUJAS I don't believe so. You are François and Martha Mouret. This is the Rue Balande. And I (slight pause) am Abbé Faujas.

FRANÇOIS Indeed, that is the correct address, but, as you can see, we are not a boarding house.

FAUJAS Indeed not. That would be most unsuitable.

Pause.

FAUJAS Your brother was very specific.

MARTHA My brother?

FAUJAS Eugène. Do you mean to say he hasn't written to you?

FRANÇOIS We know nothing about this.

FAUJAS It was Eugene's suggestion that when I came to Plassans, I should take a room in your house.

ROSE Sir?

FRANÇOIS Yes, Rose.

ROSE A letter did come for you, sir. Yesterday. With a Paris postmark.

FRANÇOIS Well, where is it?

ROSE On the sideboard, sir.

FRANÇOIS That is not where we put letters, Rose.

ROSE It's where I put the letters, sir.

FRANÇOIS I'm sorry about this. Well get it for me, would you? Thank you. And the letter knife? (To FAUJAS) I have a letter knife. We're not savages here in Plassans.

ROSE gets the letter from the sideboard and the letter knife from a drawer and gives them to FRANÇOIS.

FRANÇOIS Thank you, Rose. You may go.

She leaves. He opens the letter and reads it. Small talk.

MARTHA                   And you're a, you're a priest I see.

FAUJAS                   I am Abbé Faujas.

FRANÇOIS               Well. I wish I had seen this before you arrived. I am sorry that we were not better prepared.

FAUJAS                   Think nothing of it.

FRANÇOIS               All the same, it will be rather difficult.

MARTHA                 (to FRANÇOIS) ...I suppose it wouldn't hurt to let the Abbé stay a week or two. He could use the guest room.

FRANÇOIS               Well. As you see, you have my brother-in-law and my wife on your side. Rose? Would you come here please?

Awkward silence.

FRANÇOIS               Did you have a pleasant journey?

FAUJAS                   We found it tolerable.

MARTHA                   We?

FAUJAS                   My mother and I. She will be joining us later.

MARTHA                   Here?

FAUJAS                   Quite so.

FRANÇOIS               Your mother is staying here?

FAUJAS                   Do not concern yourself, sir. My mother and I are used to privation. Ours is a simple life.

ROSE appears.

ROSE                     Sir?

FAUJAS                   Perhaps you have a mattress I could put on the floor?

MARTHA                   Rose, there's one in the attic.

FRANÇOIS                Will you be alright sleeping on the floor?  
A man of your position -

FAUJAS                   My mother will sleep on the floor. I shall  
take the bed.

MARTHA                   Your mother?

FAUJAS                   My mother is a simple creature. And I am  
Abbé Faujas.

Pause.

FRANÇOIS                Well. Would you like a hand with your  
trunk?

FAUJAS                   I shall manage myself. Please. Return to  
your lunch.

ROSE                     This way, sir.

ROSE leads FAUJAS upstairs, he  
dragging the case up behind him, step  
by step. FRANÇOIS and MARTHA hold  
their breath, listening. FAUJAS is  
just audible wheezing a little. When  
he gets to the top the case falls  
heavily and he lets out a cry of  
pain. FRANÇOIS and MARTHA let out a  
burst of giggling and mutual  
shushing.

MARTHA                   (whispering) I'm sorry but what an  
extraordinary man.

FRANÇOIS                (whispering) 'I am Abbé Faujas'.

MARTHA explodes with giggles.

MARTHA                   I almost thought I was hallucinating. He's  
so strange.

FRANÇOIS                When he just stood there, looking at us.

MARTHA                   And that cassock he's wearing. It's so  
thin. It doesn't look clean even.

FRANÇOIS                I'm a bit cross with your brother, just  
assuming we can put him up.

MARTHA                    There'll be some advantage to him,  
                                 somewhere down the line. Eugene doesn't do  
                                 favours for no reason.

FRANÇOIS                I suppose in Paris everyone assumes we  
                                 have nothing better to do in Plassans than  
                                 entertain his friends.

MARTHA                    Listen!

We hear thumping upstairs and maybe  
muffled curses. FAUJAS is perhaps  
moving furniture around. MARTHA and  
FRANÇOIS stifle their laughter again.

Should we go and help him?

FRANÇOIS                Oh I'm sure he'll be alright.

A big thump and a shout.

MARTHA                    He doesn't sound alright.

A thump.

Perhaps you should go up to him, François.

FRANÇOIS                Well, alright. (Walking up the stairs,  
half to himself). A priest! In this house!

4.

Going upstairs.

FRANÇOIS                Abbé? Abbé?

We're outside FAUJAS's room. He  
knocks. He waits. No response.

Abbé Faujas?

He knocks again.

FAUJAS                    (muffled) What is it?

FRANÇOIS                It's François.

FAUJAS audibly sighs and we hear  
bolts being drawn and a key turned.  
The door opens, but only a crack.

FAUJAS                   What do you want?

FRANÇOIS                (taken aback) I – I just wanted to be sure  
you had everything you need.

FAUJAS                   Yes, thank you.

He goes to close the door, but  
FRANÇOIS prolongs the conversation  
hoping to see inside.

FRANÇOIS                We don't – excuse me –

FAUJAS                   (wearily) Yes?

FRANÇOIS                We don't lock our doors in this house, as  
a rule.

FAUJAS                   No?

FRANÇOIS                We prefer not to.

FAUJAS                   I am a priest, sir. I have devoted my life  
to God. There is a delicate thread that  
connects me to Him and at times my faith  
requires me to contemplate, as directly as  
I dare, His Divinity.

FRANÇOIS                Yes, of course but –

FAUJAS                   At such times, I must not be interrupted.  
Neither the screams of children nor indeed  
the knocking of doors must come between  
Abbé Faujas and his Saviour.

FRANÇOIS                I see. Well, I just thought I'd –

FAUJAS                   Thank you.

He closes the door firmly.

FRANÇOIS                Right. Well. I'll just – go downstairs  
then. Right, yes, I'll do that then.

We hear Francois going briskly down  
the stairs.

Music.

DIDI (VO)                François and Martha know nothing of their  
strange guest, but soon they will, soon  
everyone will. Plassans, sleeping

Plassans, prepare yourself, Abbé Faujas stands above you in the night, waiting to place his hand over your mouth.

5.

DIDI (VO) That night, Mother Faujas arrived at the door.

Background: we hear the door opened.  
MARTHA gasping.

Dressed in black, veiled and forbidding, she said not a word but walked into the house and up the stairs. Her skirts rustling around her.

Background: we hear the skirts, the soft steps on the stairs. Mix into this a sound of ravens' wings or the scuttling of rats.

Somehow alerted to his mother's imminence, the Abbé opened the door and she slipped through it like a shadow through railings.

Background: the door opens.

FAUJAS (softly) Mother.

Background: the door closes.

DIDI (VO) In this house are rejoined two halves of my family, the Rougons and the Macquarts. François is the son of my daughter by Macquart and Martha the daughter of my son by Rougon. These are my children. In Martha there rages the hunger of the Rougons and in François, poor François, the folly of the Macquarts. In them I, Adelaide Fouque, forgotten in the asylum of Les Tuilettes, I see my own broken blood.

Why Abbé Faujas left Besançon no one knew. What business he had in Plassans, no one could say. Who was he? No one could discover.

6.

DIDI (VO)           The next evening, Félicité paid them all a visit.

MARTHA               Hello, mother.

FÉLICITÉ             Martha, darling. You look thin, child.

MARTHA               I'm just as I always am, mother.

FÉLICITÉ             Have you been starving her, Mouret?

FRANÇOIS            Ha ha. No indeed.

FÉLICITÉ             And how is your guest settling in?

FRANÇOIS            Our guest?

MARTHA               You know about the Abbé?

FÉLICITÉ             Of course, darling, I've known about it for yonks.

FRANÇOIS            Really? First we heard about it was yesterday.

FÉLICITÉ             Well Eugene consulted me of course and I was sure it would be alright. It is alright isn't it?

FRANÇOIS            Well —

MARTHA               It's fine, mother.

FÉLICITÉ             I knew it would be.

FRANÇOIS            We might have had guests.

FÉLICITÉ             Yes but you never do, darling.

MARTHA               Will you stay for dinner?

FÉLICITÉ             But it's a Monday.

MARTHA               Yes?

FÉLICITÉ             You know I have my Salon on a Monday.

MARTHA               Of course you do.

FÉLICITÉ             My Mondays in the Yellow Drawing Room have become a fixture.

FRANÇOIS            So how can we help you, Félicité?

FÉLICITÉ            I've come to see the Abbé.

MARTHA              Abbé Faujas?

FÉLICITÉ            Unless you have any other Abbés here.

FRANÇOIS           I don't think he'll come. He keeps himself  
to himself.

FAUJAS comes down the stairs.

FÉLICITÉ            Speak of the devil and he shall appear, if  
you'll forgive the phrase.

FAUJAS              Good evening, Madam.

MARTHA              Father, this is my mother, Mrs Rougon.

FÉLICITÉ            I have come to whisk you away.

FAUJAS              Indeed?

FÉLICITÉ            You are to be an honoured guest at my  
Salon.

FAUJAS              I'm afraid I had planned to take a walk  
and then retire early and read.

FÉLICITÉ            I think my son Eugene Rougon would prefer  
it if you came.

Beat.

FAUJAS              Let me get a coat.

FÉLICITÉ            And change your cassock perhaps.

FAUJAS              This is the only one I have.

FÉLICITÉ            How fascinating. My carriage is outside.  
I'll be waiting. Martha darling, you must  
come for dinner soon. François.

DIDI (VO)           Pierre and Félicité's Salon was the most  
prestigious Salon in Plassans. It was also  
the only Salon in Plassans.

Sound of polite conversation.

FÉLICITÉ Now Abbé, I hope you are finding our town agreeable.

FAUJAS I have scarcely had the time to –

FÉLICITÉ Especially after that beastliness in Besançon –

FAUJAS Madam, please.

FÉLICITÉ (sotto voce) Now you must meet Mrs Condamin (married to the forestry commissioner). Emily, may I introduce you to the Abbé Faujas?

MRS CONDAMIN Good evening, Abbé.

FAUJAS I am Abbé Faujas.

MRS CONDAMIN And what brings you to Plassans, Abbé?

FAUJAS I ...

FÉLICITÉ You've been in Besançon, haven't you, Father?

MRS CONDAMIN Oh! Practically on the Prussian doorstep. I can well imagine you wanting to escape for some pure Mediterranean air.

FAUJAS That's right.

Awkward pause.

DIDI (VO) Abbé Faujas did not enliven the Salon. He was like a dark cloud in the Yellow Drawing Room.

FÉLICITÉ This is the town physician, Dr Porquier.

PORQUIER I understand you've just arrived in our little town, Father.

FAUJAS That is correct.

PORQUIER Will you be staying long?

FAUJAS Until my work is done, sir.

PORQUIER And what work is that?

FAUJAS A private matter, sir.

DIDI (VO)           And the Abbé's social manners could be rather awkward.

FAUJAS               Mrs Condamin.

MRS RASTOIL         No Father, I am Mrs Rastoil. I believe you are residing with the Mourets? Their garden adjoins ours.

FAUJAS               Yes it does.

Silence.

MRS RASTOIL         Well I suppose I should circulate.

FÉLICITÉ             Oh dear, Father.

FAUJAS               What is it, madam?

FÉLICITÉ             I hope you'll make a success of Plassans, after that unfortunate misunderstanding in Besançon.

FAUJAS               That money was just resting / in my account -

FÉLICITÉ             Oh quite, quite.

FAUJAS               I just need a project. If I can find something this town needs, I will bring Plassans to heel before the end of the year.

FÉLICITÉ             I must mingle. You sit in the corner and try to be charming.

DIDI (VO)            Soon, the room had all spoken to Abbé Faujas and did not feel the need to go back for more. Abbé Faujas sat himself in a chair in the corner where he sat unnoticed for the rest of the evening, listening to all of Plassans regale each other with their news.

Out of the polite conversation these separate fragments emerge:

MRS CONDAMIN        There were arrests. I saw them myself. They brought five girls out.

PORQUIER            It's all over town. There's house where he takes them. The poor children. It's disgusting. A respectable man like that. But nothing can be done. It's obvious. He's too powerful. No one will dare speak against him.

MRS CONDAMIN      Scratch a god-fearing town like Plassans, and you find always sin, black sin, not half an inch from the surface.

7.

The MOURET home. Dinner table. François is reading a letter.

FRANÇOIS            Oh dear oh dear.

MARTHA             What is it?

FRANÇOIS            Oh nothing.

He chuckles to himself again.

DIDI (VO)            The next day, reports of the priest's appearance at the Salon reached François.

FRANÇOIS            Dear oh dear.

MARTHA             You know you're going to tell me.

FRANÇOIS            Just a note from Dr Porquier about our Holy friend.

MARTHA             What about him?

FRANÇOIS            It seems he did not make such a good impression at your mother's Salon last night.

MARTHA             I don't know why you're so mean about him?

FRANÇOIS            Let me tell you, I have a good deal of sympathy for the man. It can't be easy. A man of faith in an age of reason.

MARTHA             Not this again.

FRANÇOIS Not that it matters to me, darling. As you know, politics, religion, I rise above it all.

MARTHA I'm going to ask them to have dinner with us.

FRANÇOIS He'll only turn you down again.

MARTHA Holding out a hand of fellowship, that's all.

Footsteps heard on the stairs.

MARTHA He's coming. I'm going to ask.

FRANÇOIS I warned you.

FAUJAS appears; he is on his way out.

FAUJAS Good afternoon...

MARTHA Abbé —

FAUJAS Madam?

MARTHA I know you like your privacy and you don't want to be a nuisance —

FAUJAS Yes?

MARTHA But I wondered if you and your mother would consider eating down here with us this evening.

FAUJAS Here?

MARTHA Yes. Surely better than eating in your room.

FAUJAS Thank you. That would be most kind. We will be here at 7.30 this evening. Good day to you both.

The front door opens and closes and he is gone.

MARTHA See?

FRANÇOIS If he actually shows up.

8.

DIDI (VO) As promised, at 7.30 precisely, the priest and his mother presented themselves at table.

MARTHA Do you find the sun very strong here in Plassans, Madam?

Silence.

FAUJAS My mother does not like to speak during dinner, do you mother?

MARTHA Oh. I'm sorry, madam.

MRS FAUJAS slurps her soup.

FRANÇOIS We hear you attended my mother-in-law's Salon, yesterday evening.

FAUJAS I did.

MARTHA François.

FRANÇOIS And how did you find it?

FAUJAS I'm afraid these social engagements do not agree with me. When I am among crowds, I feel quite alone. Only when I am in Communion with my Lord do I feel at peace.

Silence.

FRANÇOIS I was saying to Martha, it's rather a novelty to have a believer in the house.

FAUJAS Indeed?

FRANÇOIS I'm afraid religion is all superstition to me, sir. You'll have to forgive me but I have little patience with Bible talk. I rise above it.

ROSE clears the dishes and goes.

MARTHA My husband is very rude discussing religion at the table.

FAUJAS Not at all.

FRANÇOIS Rise above it! Rise above it!

MARTHA I'll get us coffee.

She leaves. After a pause.

FAUJAS Tell me, Mouret, have you heard of Mr Grandmorin?

FRANÇOIS But of course. He built the railway.

FAUJAS He is, I understand, a frequent visitor to Plassans.

FRANÇOIS Paris and Plassans are at either end of his railway line.

FAUJAS I've heard that he visits the orphan girls who beg on your streets.

FRANÇOIS Mr Grandmorin is a very charitable man.

FAUJAS You see nothing sinister, then, in his attention to these... children?

FRANÇOIS Sinister? No. Why should I?

FAUJAS I only ask.

FRANÇOIS I mean, he built the railway.

MARTHA returns, followed by ROSE bearing a pot of coffee and cups on a tray.

MARTHA Coffees.

AD LIB Thank you.

FRANÇOIS My wife and I like to play Piquet in the evening. Only for coins, of course. I'm not a gambling man. Do you play?

FAUJAS My mother enjoys cards. I'm sure she could pick it up.

FRANÇOIS I would hate to take even small change off a lady of your advanced years. Let's not play for money while you learn the rules, madam.

FAUJAS I will keep your wife entertained while you play.

FRANÇOIS

Of course, of course. Now, to decide who deals we take a card each. So, you have the Jack of Clubs and I the Ten of Diamonds, so you deal but let me do that for you. 12 cards each (he deals) and the rest stay face-down between us.

We move over to FAUJAS and MARTHA's conversation now, but the following one-sided dialogue continues underneath.

Now. The aim is to achieve runs and points and sets. You can exchange a number of cards and then we – five? You have five? I see you have played before. Well, 'Not good'. I have a point of four. Sequence? Ah three. Sorry, I have five. Quint! Sets? 4! You have four Aces! Now that is remarkable. But beginner's luck I say. I suggest we shuffle and start again. This time you must give us a chance to exchange and consider strategy! Would you like to deal? Indeed. I'll shuffle (He shuffles) and there you go. Twelve each. (She deals.) Thank you. The rest – that's right. Now then. Hm. (Silence as he peruses his cards).

The following conversation is sotto voce, increasingly intimate.

FAUJAS

I am troubled by your town, Madam.

MARTHA

Troubled by Plassans? Why?

FAUJAS

I sense danger here.

MARTHA

What sort of danger?

FAUJAS

Sin, Madam.

MARTHA

Sin?

FAUJAS

The old fault.

MARTHA

I don't understand.

FAUJAS

I can smell it on the air, Madam. Sins of the blood and the flesh.

MARTHA My husband and I don't believe in that /  
sort of

FAUJAS Your husband, no. But you are troubled,  
are you not, madam? By sin?

MARTHA No, Father. Really -

FAUJAS The ancient errors we carry in the blood.

MARTHA What do you mean 'blood'?

FAUJAS In it, we bear the defects of our  
ancestors.

Beat.

MARTHA What did he tell you?

FAUJAS Excuse me?

MARTHA My brother. Eugene. What did he tell you?

Beat.

FAUJAS What do you think he told me?

MARTHA About our grandmother. Adelaide.

FAUJAS Tell me about your grandmother.

MARTHA She went with a pirate or something. Bore  
him children.

FAUJAS Sin, you see. Everywhere there is  
corruption of the body, there is  
corruption of the soul.

Pause.

MARTHA I am afraid, Father.

FAUJAS What of?

MARTHA My grandmother's weakness, what if it's in  
me.

FAUJAS You fear for your soul.

MARTHA My mind perhaps. Sometimes, at night, I  
lie awake in the dark, and the worst  
thoughts come to me and I can't control

them. What sort of person can't control their own mind?

FAUJAS Your grandmother's sin runs in your blood, child. You have a chance to wash your family's sins.

MARTHA I'm not a believer, Father.

FAUJAS I have in mind to found a home, a children's home, run on religious principles.

MARTHA A children's home.

FAUJAS Clean your family's stain from your heart and from this house.

MARTHA What can I do?

Back to the Piquet.

FRANÇOIS Confound it!

MRS FAUJAS is giggling.

All the luck seems to be on your side this evening, Madam.

MRS FAUJAS scrapes her winnings across the table, laughing.

FAUJAS I think we have taken up quite enough of our hosts' time.

FRANÇOIS Will we see you here tomorrow?

FAUJAS We would be very honoured, would we not, Mother?

MRS FAUJAS giggles.

FRANÇOIS Give me a chance to win some of my money back.

MARTHA Goodnight, Father.

FAUJAS Ten o'clock, tomorrow morning, at Saint Saturnin.

MARTHA Yes, Father.

FAUJAS Goodnight, Mouret, goodnight Madam.

They go upstairs. The rustling of MRS  
FAUJAS's skirts as she glides  
upstairs. The wings and the patter of  
rats' feet mixed in.

FRANÇOIS Saint Saturnin? What's this about?

MARTHA Nothing, my love. Abbé Faujas wants to discuss a project I might be able to help with.

FRANÇOIS Goodness me. My own wife, fraternising with the clergy!

MARTHA Let's go up to bed.

FRANÇOIS You'll be going to confession next!

MARTHA Don't be silly.

FRANÇOIS Shall I bring you up some Holy Water?

MARTHA (Going upstairs) Give it a rest, François.

9.

DIDI (VO) Let me tell you about blood. Blood is a battleground.

We hear sounds of a nineteenth-  
century war, maybe 1870. Footsteps,  
horses' hooves in earth, distant  
artillery fire, a clatter of  
weaponry.

The blood of two beings, brought together by love and sin, they join to make a third, a child. In this child two bloods now flow.

The earth is now wet, muddy, bloody.

Some blood is strong, some blood is weak and in this child these bloods battle for supremacy.

The mud is deeper, wetter, we hear  
mortal cries.

Down the family tree, the strong blood must run. Curling around the branches, oozing through the ridges of the black bark, sinking into the dark earth to feed the roots.

A horse sinks into deep mud, animal cries of despair, distant gunfire. Into this, slowly we introduce a spangly heavenly shimmering sound.

No blood is bad, no blood is good. It is only weak or strong.

We are in a cell. Perhaps a faint sound of birdsong.

I am still here. Adelaide Fouque. In the asylum of Les Tuilettes. From my window, on a good day, I can see the steeple of Saint Saturnin in the town of Plassans. And is there that Martha Mouret presents herself, to take instruction from Abbé Faujas.

10.

We are inside the Church of Saint Saturnin. A large door opens. The heavy latch, the hinges, the scrape resonate in the high stone vaults. An organ is playing. We should in some sense hear the air thick with candle wax and incense.

MARTHA

Hello?

Her voice echoes back at her, which surprises her.

Hello?

FAUJAS

Martha.

MARTHA

... Father ...

FAUJAS

You seem nervous.

MARTHA

I've never done this before.

FAUJAS

Done what?

MARTHA

Set foot in this Church.

FAUJAS                   Never?

MARTHA                   My husband doesn't like me to come here.

FAUJAS                   Well you're here now.

MARTHA                   Yes, Father.

FAUJAS                   I have spoken with an architect sympathetic to our plan. We cannot hope to build a children's home from nothing, but he advises that we might raise funds to convert -

MARTHA                   Raise funds, but I -

FAUJAS                   Don't interrupt - we could convert the old parsonage. It's derelict now but it has several large rooms, a courtyard and an elegant entranceway that would be most suitable for our purposes.

MARTHA                   But how will we raise funds?

FAUJAS                   I oversaw a project of this kind in Besançon. You need to gather the most influential ladies of the town to support you. Start with your mother. She will advise you.

MARTHA                   Should we not talk to the ladies together?

FAUJAS                   No. I would not be connected with the Home. This is your enterprise, not mine.

11.

The Yellow Drawing Room.

FÉLICITÉ                 Darling, but what a very charming idea. I would love to join your committee and of course your father and I will make a small contribution. But tell me, this isn't entirely your idea is it?

MARTHA                   Yes it is.

FÉLICITÉ                 Really, darling? I rather thought our friend the priest might have a hand in it.

MARTHA He may have encouraged me but it's all my idea, I assure you.

FÉLICITÉ Of course, if you say so. Well, I am happy to help, though I suspect you'll not find everyone as willing as I. Young Mrs Condamin lives entirely for pleasure these days.

Cut to:

MRS CONDAMIN I try as you know, to set a certain standard, with my fine things and little luxuries. I consider that charitable work of a sort. If the better sort of person doesn't set an example, what hope is there for the lesser sort? I would be honoured to help, Mrs Mouret.

MARTHA Thank you, Mrs Condamin.

MRS CONDAMIN I'm afraid you may not be so fortunate with Mrs Rastoil. She is too concerned with her suppers to have a truly charitable soul.

Cut to:

MRS RASTOIL Without proper leadership, a civilization will always grow wild. It does not surprise me to see these vagrant girls on our streets. We have an Emperor but an Emperor is not a King. So we must all hold the structure together ourselves. Of course I will join your Committee. It is an excellent idea of yours, Mrs Mouret.

MARTHA Thank you Mrs Rastoil.

MRS RASTOIL I'm afraid you'll have a job persuading poor Mrs Paloque. I'm afraid her disadvantages of appearance have left her quite embittered.

Cut to:

MRS PALOQUE I long to be selfish, to say, Cecile Paloque, you have done your bit for the world, but still my profound kindness tells me to do more. I am its puppet, Mrs Mouret.

MARTHA                    You are indeed, Mrs Paloque.

12.

Church.

FAUJAS                    I am pleased, Martha.

MARTHA                    Really? Thank you, Father.

FAUJAS                    And you didn't mention my name?

MARTHA                    No.

FAUJAS                    Good.

MARTHA                    Oh.

FAUJAS                    What?

MARTHA                    Just to my mother. She guessed at your involvement and -

FAUJAS                    (low and close) I told you I should not be involved in this. Why do women find it so hard to be obedient?

MARTHA                    I'm sorry, Father.

FAUJAS                    I want to trust you, Martha. But how can I?

MARTHA                    Please, Father...

FAUJAS                    You're like a little girl who knows if she misbehaves, she will get a smack, but she does so all the same.

MARTHA                    It was thoughtless.

FAUJAS                    If our plan, our good plan is to succeed, I will need you to be entirely submissive to me, Martha. Do you think you can do that?

MARTHA                    (catching in her throat) Yes, Father.

FAUJAS                    I hate to be disappointed Martha. Will you disappoint me?

MARTHA                    No, I promise.

FAUJAS I do not want to become angry, Martha.

MARTHA I am yours to command, Father.

13.

The MOURET home.

FRANÇOIS So I hear you're going to put an end to immorality in our little town? What an excellent idea. Good luck with that.

MARTHA You don't need to be sarcastic.

FRANÇOIS Sarcastic? Moi?

FAUJAS Perhaps we should eat.

FRANÇOIS Absolutely. I'm starving. Tuck in.

MARTHA No.

FRANÇOIS What?

MARTHA Since the Abbé is eating with us, I think we should say grace.

FRANÇOIS (laughs) Say grace?!

MARTHA Not for me. For him.

FRANÇOIS You have got to be / joking

FAUJAS I am perfectly happy to say a few words.

FRANÇOIS I'm sure, but —

FAUJAS It will be no trouble.

Beat.

(in a murmur) Heavenly Father, bless the food on our tables and the bodies that receive it; may we give thanks for our health and prosperity, for family and friends, fortune and mercy, may you bless all that love and are loved by us. Amen.

MARTHA (choked) Amen.

FRANÇOIS, FAUJAS and MRS FAUJAS start eating.

FRANÇOIS Martha? Are you... why are you crying?

DIDI (VO) The Children's Home charity drive united the town. Plassans thought it such a good idea that within a few weeks everyone, even its strongest critics, had claimed it as their own.

14.

Bar room.

FRANÇOIS No no. I can't claim credit for the home. Not entirely. My wife certainly had a lot to do with it. Once I'd planted the idea, of course.

15.

Summer evening.

DIDI (VO) But at the same time, everyone somehow knew that behind it all, the real credit went to Abbé Faujas. One summer evening, as the Abbé stood at his first-floor window, in the garden to the right Mrs Rastoil's royalists turned and all raised their glasses to him. At the same time, to the left, the guests of the Emperor's sub-deputy also turned and nodded respectfully to acknowledge the new moral guardian of Plassans.

Plassans. He has you between his fingers. Watch him as he pushes his ringed fist into your throat.

16.

Inside the Church. The door opens. No organ. It is deathly quiet. MARTHA enters.

MARTHA (nervously) Hello?

Satisfied she is alone, she takes a couple of steps in. We hear her

breathe in the smell of the air. She takes another couple of steps towards a font. She places her fingers in the water. We hear the water play around her fingers. Her breath catches as she feels the cool water on her hands. Whole scene very sensual.

FAUJAS (silently appearing) Martha?

MARTHA (jumps and gasps)

FAUJAS We weren't due to meet today, were we?

MARTHA No. No. I was just passing and with the midday sun, I'm so hot my shirt is sticking to my skin.

FAUJAS So you came into the shade of Saint Saturnin.

MARTHA Yes.

FAUJAS The water you are cooling your hands in, you know it is Holy?

MARTHA Yes, yes I know.

FAUJAS It is more usual to take two fingers, like so (he shows her, taking her hand, he presses her fingers into the water) then you trace a cross on your brow. Like this. (He holds her hand and presses her own fingers against her skin.)

MARTHA's breath catches.

Or not. As you wish.

Pause.

MARTHA Work is proceeding well. The façade is nearly complete and the rooms on the west side have been repainted.

FAUJAS I am glad to hear it.

MARTHA Everyone is talking about it, you know.

FAUJAS So I believe.

MARTHA All of Plassans speaks of you as a great man, Father.

FAUJAS I have no need for thanks. God is my judge.

MARTHA I think you are a great man, all the same.

FAUJAS You think so, Martha?

MARTHA The greatest man in Plassans.

FAUJAS Are you forgetting your husband?

MARTHA François thinks he knows everything but he doesn't have an grain of your wisdom, Father.

FAUJAS All the same, a woman's duty is to her husband. You must obey, Martha. That is your duty.

MARTHA He does not treat me well.

FAUJAS Do you want to be treated well?

MARTHA What do you mean?

FAUJAS Is that what you really want? I look into your soul, Martha.

MARTHA I will do... whatever you ask...

FAUJAS I believe you will, child.

MARTHA I am your vessel, Father.

Beat.

Father.

FAUJAS Yes, child?

MARTHA I have to ask you something.

FAUJAS What is it?

MARTHA I have to ask something of you.

FAUJAS Be quick.

MARTHA I want you to hear my Confession.

FAUJAS Confession?  
MARTHA Please.  
FAUJAS No. I will not.  
MARTHA Please, Father.  
FAUJAS Soon but not yet.

He turns and walks away.

DIDI (VO) At first Martha disliked the Church with its cold grey walls and smell of candle grease and incense. Then she became used to it. Later she came to admire it. Within months she looked forward to visiting it. In time, she dreaded leaving it.

17.

The MOURET home. A door opens. This conversation should escalate into a proper row.

FRANÇOIS Oh she's back.  
MARTHA Yes. Is there anything left for dinner?  
FRANÇOIS Rose left you something under a plate.  
MARTHA Thank you.

She goes into the kitchen.

FRANÇOIS I mean it's no Communion Wafer but it'll have to do.  
MARTHA (Off) Ha. Ha. Ha.  
FRANÇOIS Seriously, where have you been?  
MARTHA (Off) Inspecting the works, checking the budget, a hundred and one things that / have needed -  
FRANÇOIS That are nothing to do with this house.

She returns with a plate.

MARTHA François, I'm too tired for this.

FRANÇOIS Too tired to clean, too tired to tidy, too tired to set the table -

MARTHA How many times do I have to say: I am busy with the Home?

FRANÇOIS This house could burn down you wouldn't notice.

MARTHA Don't be ridiculous, François.

FRANÇOIS I found Desirée playing in the garden this afternoon. No one looking after her. She had earth in her mouth!

MARTHA Why don't you keep an eye on her?

FRANÇOIS You're their bloody mother!

MARTHA Don't talk to me like that.

FRANÇOIS I'll talk to you any way I want.

MARTHA Then I'm not listening.

FRANÇOIS No, course not. All you care about are those gutter kids.

MARTHA I'm going upstairs.

FRANÇOIS What about your own kids?

MARTHA My own kids? And there was me thinking they were ours.

FRANÇOIS You know what I mean.

MARTHA Oh I know exactly what you mean.

FRANÇOIS Don't twist my words just because you're feeling guilty.

MARTHA What would I have to be guilty about?

FRANÇOIS I don't know. Um, neglecting your kids? Spending more time with the priest than your own husband?

MARTHA François...

FRANÇOIS           What do you in the Church?

MARTHA             You wouldn't understand.

FRANÇOIS           Martha, you don't even believe!

MARTHA             When did we last talk about what I believe, François?

FRANÇOIS           That's it. You don't go in that Church any more. I forbid it.

MARTHA             You can forbid me all you like, I'm still going.

FRANÇOIS           (yelling) Open your eyes! It's - all - crap!

Pause.

MARTHA             This is not a fit house for our children.

FRANÇOIS           What?

MARTHA             I will not have *my* children brought up a house where people show contempt for common decency.

FRANÇOIS           What are you talking about?

MARTHA             They're going tomorrow.

FRANÇOIS           You can't do that -

MARTHA             Why not? I'm their mother.

FRANÇOIS           Stop. Stop stop stop.

MARTHA             I'm going upstairs. Don't follow me.

She goes up.

FRANÇOIS           What? Martha!

MARTHA             Goodnight!

We hear a distant door slam.

18.

Town square. A small brass band is heard.  
Chatter.

MAYOR (up on a stage) Today is a very special day. Today Plassans inaugurates the Work of the Virgin Home for Lost Children!

Cheers, applause and a band plays a little fanfare.

DIDI (VO) By early September, work on the Home was complete.

We're up on the stage. We hear this over the top of the music.

FÉLICITÉ Congratulations, Faujas.

FAUJAS Thank you, Madam Rougon.

FÉLICITÉ A great success.

FAUJAS You're very kind.

FÉLICITÉ I presume the accounts are available to inspection?

FAUJAS Madam! I resent the implication -

FÉLICITÉ I'm just ribbing you, Faujas. You've done well. You have Plassans on its knees before you.

The music stops. Underneath:

MAYOR But now let us thank the Father of this project, whose unblinking eye has kept everyone honest. Please will you put your hands together for Abbé Faujas.

Applause.

FÉLICITÉ Of course this is just a first step. We still have the small matter of the election.

FAUJAS I understand.

FÉLICITÉ I hope so, Faujas.

Applause. We get closer and focus in on one pair of applauding hands.

19.

DIDI (VO)

No one applauded more vigorously than François, who tried to heal the rift with his wife by elaborate displays of affections. But in Martha blood was battling blood and a small unbalancing had now triggered a feeling of rapture, of absorption in the heavens, which Martha mistook for revelation.

The Abbé took advantage of their mutual silence to establish himself more fully in the house, the garden and even in the alley between the houses. He arranged for workmen to open the garden gate and spent each morning engaged in whispered negotiation with the neighbouring families, before returning to Saint Saturnin.

20.

Church interior. Organ very heavy. Thick incense. Doomy sensibility.

FAUJAS

Mrs Mouret?

Pause.

Martha?

MARTHA

(on the point of tears:) I'm sorry, Father.

FAUJAS

What's wrong?

MARTHA

I need absolution, Father. I need forgiveness or punishment for my sins.

FAUJAS

How long have you been sitting here?

MARTHA

I don't know.

FAUJAS

You should go home, child.

MARTHA

Hear my confession, Father, I beg you.

FAUJAS            You can give your confession to Abbé Surin.

MARTHA            I don't want to confess to him. I want to confess to you.

FAUJAS            I have told you already. I will not.

MARTHA            Then give me communion.

FAUJAS            Communion.

MARTHA            I long to feel my Lord's body. I yearn for him, Father.

FAUJAS            Martha –

MARTHA            Please. Father. For me.

FAUJAS            Do not beg me, woman.

MARTHA            As a priest, you may not refuse me.

FAUJAS            Very well. This is the body of Christ. Open your mouth and you will receive.

MARTHA            Yes, Father.

FAUJAS            I press the body of Our Saviour to your tongue.

DIDI (VO)        With two fingers, Abbé Faujas pushed the sacrament into the crying woman's mouth.

FAUJAS            And this is the blood of Christ.

DIDI (VO)        And tilting her head back, he poured the thick liquid onto her tongue.

MARTHA gags, she recovers, she swallows.

FAUJAS            Go home, child.

                    21.

The Garden. A small party is taking place. FRANÇOIS enters from the house.

FRANÇOIS        Father?

FAUJAS Ah, Mouret.

FRANÇOIS But – what’s going on here, Father?

FÉLICITÉ I said you wouldn’t mind.

FRANÇOIS Félicité, what an honour.

FAUJAS We had a small celebration.

FRANÇOIS What’s happened?

FÉLICITÉ We have found a unity candidate to represent our town. The Mayor Mr Delangre.

FAUJAS He commands the confidence of all Plassans.

FÉLICITÉ And of the Emperor too.

EVERYBODY The Emperor!

FRANÇOIS Good-oh. And that’s good news because?

FÉLICITÉ It is nothing more than self-indulgence to think it can elect its own representatives against the wishes of the Emperor.

EVERYBODY The Emperor!

MRS RASTOIL And you are the man we have to thank.

FRANÇOIS I am?

DR PORQUIER Why yes. By generously opening your garden gate, the Abbé was able to broker the discussions that led to this most satisfactory conclusion.

FÉLICITÉ Gentlemen, please. A toast: to François and the Emperor.

EVERYBODY François and the Emperor.

Cheers. The cheers die in their throats. Silence.

FÉLICITÉ Martha? Martha darling...

MARTHA François?

FRANÇOIS Martha! I didn’t know you were here.

PORQUIER Is everything alright, Mrs Mouret?

FRANÇOIS Please, go back in, darling.

MARTHA I can't touch Him. He hurts me.

Disquiet.

MRS RASTOIL What do you mean, Martha?

FÉLICITÉ Martha, talk to me.

FRANÇOIS My wife is not well. Please, my love...

MARTHA I want to love Him.

Embarassment in the crowd.

I long to touch him.

FRANÇOIS Let's go in.

MARTHA (being led inside) Sometimes I feel / I could just... reach out... and my hands would brush against... His body...

FRANÇOIS (going in) Do, please, everyone, carry on.

DR PORQUIER What do you make of that?

FAUJAS A troubling development, Doctor. We must all remain vigilant.

22.

Night. The Mourets' bedroom. MARTHA his having a bad dream. She is speaking and gasping, her words cycling round and round.

MARTHA God, indivisible and perfect and blessed in Himself, in His perfect goodness freely created man to make him share in His own blessed life. Which is why, at every time and place, God comes close to man.

Her breathing is fast and jagged. She starts to writhe and slap the bed. FRANÇOIS wakes.

FRANÇOIS Martha? Martha! What are you doing!  
Martha!

We hear him trying to restrain her.  
She starts to shout the catechism.

Martha? What's the matter? Martha?

She starts to attack him.

Stop, Martha, it's me, it's François!

We start to hear a familiar spangly  
heavenly shimmering sound underneath  
it all. Martha shakes and convulses.  
A particularly powerful spasm sends  
her from the bed to the floor. She  
still screaming the catechism but now  
she is also slapping and punching  
herself.

Rose! Rose! Somebody! I need help! Help!  
(back to MARTHA) Martha. Wake up, please.  
You're hurting yourself. Please. (He tries  
to hold her down.)

The door bursts open. ROSE and FAUJAS  
are there. MARTHA is whimpering and  
praying, twisting under him.

ROSE Sir, what are you doing?

FAUJAS Mouret?

FRANÇOIS She was – she was having a dream – I  
think. I don't know. I was trying to wake  
her up.

ROSE Let me have a look. (She gasps)

FAUJAS What is it Rose?

ROSE These marks.

FRANÇOIS She did that to herself.

FAUJAS Come away from her, Mouret.

FRANÇOIS She was having a fit of some kind...

FAUJAS Please take your hands off her.

ROSE                    Shall I get the doctor?

FRANÇOIS                I wasn't doing anything!

FAUJAS                  Good idea. Run around to Dr Porquier.

ROSE                    Yes, sir.

MARTHA                  (weakly)    .... come to me ...

FAUJAS                  The doctor is on his way.

MARTHA                  ... Save me ...

FAUJAS                  You're quite safe now

23.

DIDI (VO)                This is how it happens. An idea passes from mouth to mouth, but in each mouth it alters, it evolves. Ideas survive only if they can change to suit their new circumstance. What Rose saw she told the Doctor and the Doctor told his wife and his wife told her friends and what starts as

ROSE                    We burst in and he was on top of her, holding her arms

DIDI (VO)                Turns into

MRS RASTOIL             He's cruel to her. I believe he beats her.

DIDI (VO)                And becomes

MRS CONDAMIN            Mark my words, François means to kill her.

24.

Plassans street. FRANÇOIS is walking.

DIDI (VO)                Mouret knew that something had changed but he was not sure what. He felt he was being at once observed and ignored.

FRANÇOIS                Good morning.

TOWNSWOMAN             Don't answer him.

TOWNSMAN            Monster.

DIDI (VO)            He decided to make a show of his  
unconcern. He took his hands from his coat  
pockets and instead he swung his arms  
confidently as he walked.

TOWNSMAN            Look at him, swinging his arms like an  
ape.

TOWNSWOMAN        He's no better than an animal.

25.

François opens the door. The organ is or  
is not playing.

FAUJAS              What are you doing here?

FRANÇOIS            I've come to see Martha.

FAUJAS              Do you think that's wise?

FRANÇOIS            Don't be ridiculous. She's my wife.

FAUJAS              Mouret, you're not well.

FRANÇOIS            What are you talking about? I'm fine.

FAUJAS              You seem agitated.

FRANÇOIS            I'm not agitated.

FAUJAS              I'm concerned about you.

FRANÇOIS            What are you doing here?

FAUJAS              I have a pastoral role at The Children's  
Home –

FRANÇOIS            No. In Plassans.

FAUJAS              I needed a change. Plassans was  
recommended to me.

FRANÇOIS            Were you sent here?

FAUJAS              Sent? By whom?

FRANÇOIS            My brother-in-law.

FAUJAS I am a humble priest, Francois.

FRANÇOIS We elected the wrong Deputy didn't we? Is that really what this is all about?

FAUJAS These paranoid delusions worry me, Mouret.

FRANÇOIS Don't you worry about me –

FAUJAS Perhaps you should get some rest.

FRANÇOIS I don't need a rest –

FAUJAS Have some time away.

FRANÇOIS I'm perfectly well, thank you.

FAUJAS No unusual experiences?

FRANÇOIS What do you mean?

FAUJAS Hearing voices?

FRANÇOIS Certainly not.

FAUJAS Imagining people are talking about you?

FRANÇOIS The voices I hear are quite real enough I can assure.

FAUJAS So you have heard voices?

FRANÇOIS Don't try to trick me, Faujas.

FAUJAS What about now? What can you hear?

FRANÇOIS Just your voice. And I assume you're real.

FAUJAS Anything else?

FRANÇOIS Nothing. Just you and the organ music.

FAUJAS Organ music?

FRANÇOIS From the Church.

FAUJAS There's no organ playing.

FRANÇOIS Yes there is. Listen.

FAUJAS It's a Thursday. The organist never plays on a Thursday.

FRANÇOIS Well he's playing right now. You can hear it. Can't you?

Pause. The organ does or does not play.

FAUJAS Mouret. May I suggest we ask Dr Porquier to drop by this evening.

FRANÇOIS I have no need of Dr Porquier or anyone else.

FAUJAS Just get his opinion.

FRANÇOIS I'm perfectly well. Tell Martha I called for her.

FAUJAS As you wish.

FRANÇOIS I'll be at home.

He goes and slams the door behind him. The organ music does or does not continue.

26.

The street again. François walking. Children's footsteps running, laughter.

FRANÇOIS (shouting) I know what you're thinking!

Silence.

I can hear you, you know?

Silence.

Doesn't bother me!

Silence.

He carries on walking.

27.

DIDI (VO) That night, Martha's convulsions were worse than ever.

Underneath: we hear them.

Rose called for Martha's mother.

FÉLICITÉ Martha, darling, it's mummy.

MARTHA (spaced) I reach out to Him but He doesn't listen.

ROSE He's got her terrified, look.

FÉLICITÉ Martha, listen to me. Has François hit you? Has he hurt you?

FRANÇOIS (back of the room) The flaming cheek!

PORQUIER Be quiet, Mouret. You'll have your chance to speak.

FÉLICITÉ Martha. Did François hit you? Did he give you these bruises?

ROSE She'll deny it, watch.

MARTHA François? No. No.

ROSE You see? He's a brute.

FÉLICITÉ Who did this to you?

MARTHA (getting upset) He is cruel.

FÉLICITÉ Is he, Martha?

MARTHA I try to love Him but He has forsaken me. (cries)

FÉLICITÉ That's enough now. Have some rest.

ROSE You see? 'Cruel'.

PORQUIER (standing, talking to ROSE) Give her this. Mix one spoonful into a cup of hot water every three hours. It will steady her nerves.

FÉLICITÉ François? What do you have to say for yourself?

FRANÇOIS Nothing to declare!

PORQUIER Can you explain these bruises? The scratches on your wife's arms?

FRANÇOIS Nothing to do with me!

FÉLICITÉ Has anyone else been in here tonight?

FRANÇOIS She does it herself.

FÉLICITÉ Herself? And why would she inflict these wounds on herself?

FRANÇOIS I don't know!

PORQUIER We only want the truth. You're not in any trouble.

FRANÇOIS Trouble? How could I be in any trouble?

ROSE He's lost his mind.

FRANÇOIS I am here, you know.

ROSE Not for long, sir.

FRANÇOIS What does that mean?

FÉLICITÉ Why does she say you're cruel?

FRANÇOIS I don't know. (moment of sad lucidity) Maybe, maybe I haven't been a good husband to her.

PORQUIER See, he admits it.

FÉLICITÉ Shall we fetch Abbé Faujas?

FRANÇOIS No! (getting angry) That scoundrel. He can't even hear the organ. What kind of priest doesn't hear the organ?

FÉLICITÉ The organ?

FRANÇOIS Oh but I can hear it. I can hear the music alright. I know what's going on.

PORQUIER You're a good man, Mouret. But perhaps you've been working too hard.

FRANÇOIS Yes perhaps.

FÉLICITÉ Maybe it would be good if he got away for a little while. Clear his head.

FRANÇOIS But I'm needed here.

FÉLICITÉ Rose can look after things while you have a little rest.

FRANÇOIS A rest?

PORQUIER Just a little rest.

FRANÇOIS It's true I have been under some strain.

FÉLICITÉ That's settled then. I'll send a carriage for you tomorrow morning.

Hard cut to:

28.

Outdoors. Morning. Horses and a carriage trundling.

FRANÇOIS (shouting out of the window) I'm going for a bit of a rest.

DRIVER Is that right, sir? (Laughs)

FRANÇOIS That is right.

DRIVER Happy holiday to you, sir! (Laughs)

FRANÇOIS Where are we actually, that is to say, going?

DRIVER Les Tulettes, sir.

FRANÇOIS That rings a bell. Nice is it?

DRIVER Oh the best, sir. Beaches. Palm trees. Sunshine.

FRANÇOIS Les Tulettes. Yes, I'm sure I've heard of it somewhere.

The carriage rides off.

29.

Les Tulettes. It is quiet but perhaps there are sounds in the distance, echoing down the corridor. For the first time, DIDI sounds like she is in a place.

DIDI (VO) He was here. I knew he was. My own flesh and blood. On the other side of this wall. Sometimes I would tap.

She taps something hard against a stone wall. It resonates dully.

He couldn't reply. They bound his arms.

She taps again.

But when he was here, I pressed my lips to the wall, unknown and unheard, sending love through the stone, through the bricks and bars, to my grandson, my boy.

FRANÇOIS (calling, from the next cell) Room service? Room service!

DIDI (VO) I have been in Les Tulettes 20 years and I still have my wits. It only took him a week here to lose his.

FRANÇOIS Is the concierge available? I should like to order breakfast in my room!

DIDI (VO) But he has the frailty, the flaw, the fault in the blood. My blood is strong but it broke my boy.

FRANÇOIS I think my trousers need pressing. Would you send a valet to my suite?

DIDI (VO) From this distance, Plassans seems calm and serene. But go into the houses and the blood is high.

30.

FAUJAS's room. A furious knocking on a door.

MARTHA Abbé! Abbé!

More knocking.

Abbé Faujas!

Sounds of keys turning, bolts drawn.  
The door is opened a crack.

FAUJAS Mrs Mouret!

MARTHA I need to talk to you.

FAUJAS It is not convenient.

MARTHA I have to talk to you now.

Beat.

FAUJAS Very well. Come in.

He opens the door. MARTHA enters his room.

FAUJAS Well?

MARTHA I owe you so much, Father. Before you came to our house, I had nothing. I believe my soul itself was dying. And you saved me. You are my Saviour.

FAUJAS And?

MARTHA Since you came, I have lived by you and through you. I have prayed, every morning and every night. But, Father, I am suffering.

FAUJAS How can I help you, child?

MARTHA In all these months, Father, God has not spoken to me.

FAUJAS You must have faith. He will come.

MARTHA I have tried, Father. I have tried to dissolve my will into my devotions; I've given all I have, all I am, to the Lord my God. But I have felt nothing.

FAUJAS What are you telling me?

MARTHA I have felt nothing. All this time, longing for God and nothing. Before you came to this house, I was at peace. You held out for me the prospect of divine

grace and at first, oh Father, the joy I felt. The warmth that spread through my body and soul.

FAUJAS Yes yes, faith is what truly sustains us.

MARTHA For faith, I have torn up my life. I have sent my children away. I have surrendered my happiness for a higher contentment. My own husband who loves me is taken from me. And yet I feel nothing. You promised me comfort and I have none. You promised me serenity but my mind is needles and knives. You promised me salvation but I am damned.

FAUJAS Do not say those words lightly, child.

MARTHA I am not a child. All of my yearning for God but God has not spoken to me.

FAUJAS Martha -

MARTHA Father, I need to know that you've not made a fool of me.

FAUJAS Made a fool? What do you mean?

MARTHA Does he speak to you, Father?

FAUJAS Of course.

MARTHA What does it sound like when God speaks to you?

FAUJAS That question is blasphemous / and absurd  
-

MARTHA I long for Him, Father, and yet -

FAUJAS Yet what.

MARTHA I must confess.

FAUJAS Not here.

MARTHA I must, Father. It's not my husband who's mad, it's me. My body has ached. At night I feel it burning with sin and I throw myself on the cold floor. I feel devils biting at my skin and I beat them away

with my fists. I am so deep in sin,  
Father.

FAUJAS           Come to me tomorrow at Saint Saturnin, / I  
will see you. I cannot take your  
confession here.

MARTHA           (screaming) I don't want to confess to you  
as a priest. I want to confess to you as a  
man.

FAUJAS           Do not raise your voice / to me, Mrs  
Mouret.

MARTHA           (determined) I love you, Father. You must  
know that; you must know that I've loved  
you since you first arrived. I thought we  
might somehow have a union in divine  
spirituality. I emptied my house, threw my  
children and husband out for you. I  
crawled to you and became your slave.

FAUJAS           Stop this at once –

MARTHA           All this time, in prayer, building the  
Home, submitting to you wishes, I have  
wanted you as a man, not as a priest.

FAUJAS           Shut up. Shut up you disgusting, evil  
woman.

MARTHA           Father –

FAUJAS           (His full misogyny coming out) How dare  
you enter my room and tempt me with your  
foul desires? Why, why did I ever think  
you could ever overcome the weakness of  
your sex and become pure? You're like all  
women; evil, unclean. Your bodies ooze  
with sin. You stink of it, woman. Your  
foul body disgusts me. (advancing, sudden,  
violent) Get out of this room before I  
beat the sin out of you...

MARTHA screams and runs to the door,  
throwing it open:

31.

Hallway. MARTHA bombs out of FAUJAS's room  
and runs down the stairs.

ROSE Ma'am? What's the matter

MARTHA François will save us. François will save us.

ROSE Ma'am?

MARTHA (shouting) I'm going for my children, then I'm going to get François.

We hear the front door slam.

ROSE What's got into her?

FAUJAS More delusions. Please set the table for me and my mother this evening and then leave us.

ROSE Yes, sir.

32.

DIDI (VO) The next morning, Martha presented herself at Les Tuilettes.

WARDER Do not approach him. Do not attempt to make any contact with him. Do not raise your voice or contradict him. (Unlocking and opening the door.) He may not recognise you. Do not be distressed; it's not uncommon. François. You have a visitor.

MARTHA François?

FRANÇOIS Ah, Martha, my darling.

MARTHA François. I'm here.

FRANÇOIS I'm afraid you find me at a disadvantage. I seem to have caught my sleeves in this jacket.

MARTHA Can't you take that thing off him?

WARDER No, Miss.

FRANÇOIS This hotel's not all it's cracked up to be, I must say. I shall be writing a pretty stiff letter to the proprietors on my return.

MARTHA                    François. This isn't a hotel –

WARDER                    Don't contradict him, Miss.

FRANÇOIS                The service – and the food! Still, I rise above it, as always.

MARTHA                    How – how have you been?

FRANÇOIS                Pretty tip top, yes I think I can say that. I do hope you're keeping on top of things at home. The garden in particular will need cutting back.

MARTHA                    Oh François...

WARDER                    Don't approach him.

MARTHA                    I'm sorry, François. I'm so sorry.

FRANÇOIS                Oh there there. Keep your chin up, old girl. All will be well.

MARTHA                    I should never have let him stay. I'm so so sorry.

FRANÇOIS                Let who stay?

MARTHA                    Abbé Faujas. It's my fault. I'm sorry.

Beat.

FRANÇOIS                Who? (darker) Faujas? ABBE FAUJAS? LET HIM ROT IN HELL. LET HIM BE BURIED IN THE EARTH. I WOULD RIP THE SKIN FROM HIM. I WOULD SUCK THE BLOOD FROM HIS HEART. / I WILL BREAK EVERY LAST ONE OF HIS DRY OLD BONES. I WILL TEAR THE HAIR FROM YOUR HEAD. I WILL PULL THE NAILS FROM YOUR FINGERS. I WILL PUSH KNIVES INTO YOUR THROAT AND HEART AND CUT THE SKIN FROM YOUR BACK! FAUJAS! DO YOU HEAR ME? I KNOW YOU FAUJAS! YOU ARE THE DEVIL! YOU HEAR THAT, FAUJAS! I KNOW WHO YOU ARE! YOU ARE THE VERY DEVIL HIMSELF!

WARDER                    I better take you out of here, Miss.

MARTHA                    François, please!

WARDER                    This way, Miss. Come on, Miss.

MARTHA is bundled out, weeping. The door is slammed behind them and FRANÇOIS can still be heard raging behind the oak door.

33.

We are in a different room and FRANÇOIS can be heard, even through the stone.

DIDI (VO)

Why did I do what I did? A twitch of the mind. Something selfish perhaps? Or something loving. I can't say.

Underneath we hear her murmuring to the WARDER and he responding non-committally.

I have been here a while. I have favours I can ask. They know me. They don't question it. However strange the request.

Which is why, later that morning, when François awoke, this happened.

34.

François wakes with a start. In all the following he is talking to himself. His madness manifesting as a kind of hypertrophy of the bourgeois manner.

FRANÇOIS

Ah, my jacket's untangled itself. Finally! Haha! But – well now. Dear oh dear. Someone's left the –

He goes over to the door and opens it. The door swings noisily on its hinges.

35.

The corridor outside.

FRANÇOIS

Hello?

His voice echoes emptily back to him.

I said, hello?

Again.

Most lax. Most lax. I'm afraid this shall also go in the letter. Ha ha. Although – ah now! Since I'm here, why not take it up with the duty manager in person?

He sets off down the corridor.

Why not indeed? No time like the present. Yes I shall take my complaint to him myself.

36.

MONTAGE:

He's walking down a staircase.

FRANÇOIS

...Polite but firm. No need for rudeness. Ha ha. No indeed. No need for that. I shall simply lay out the facts as I see them...

In the entrance way.

FRANÇOIS

No need for rudeness, for raised voices. No indeed. Never one for that. We can discuss these things in a ... in a...

Looks around. It's deserted.

Hello?

Pause. Dings reception bell.

Helloo-oo?

Pause.

Staffing issues. Tut tut. More grist to my mill alas.

Pause. Something in the back of his mind tells him this shouldn't really be possible.

So I'll be going now! I'll just – head out then.

Beat.

Bye then!

He walks out of the asylum.

37.

DIDI (VO) Les Tulettes is a little over ten miles from Plassans, over fields and through woodland.

FRANÇOIS is walking across a muddy field. It begins to rain.

FRANÇOIS Oh goodness. Tut tut. No umbrella. The ill-prepared traveller is a fool indeed. Still, rise above it, François. Rise above it.

DIDI (VO) Including an hour and a half sheltering beneath a tree and a few misdirections, night had already fallen when François reached the walls of Plassans.

38.

The Mouret dining room.

FAUJAS We dine alone tonight, mother. Martha is staying with Félicité and Rose has been sent for. So the house, at last, is ours.

MRS FAUJAS laughs softly.

I shall be sorry to leave Plassans, now that we have so successfully become its masters. But the Election is assured and Besançon will be forgotten. I might reasonably expect some higher reward.

MRS FAUJAS sits and begins eating and drinking (but not Archers-eating-acting please).

This foolish little town has been a tiresome chore but it will have been worth it, after all. Wait.

MRS FAUJAS pauses in her meal.

Did you hear something?

Pause.

I thought I heard something in the garden.

He gets up to have a look.

39.

The garden. We hear the garden gate slowly squeak open.

FRANÇOIS

(under his breath) Must oil that. Add to my to-do list. Nasty squeak. Bring down the neighbourhood. Goodness me, the garden. What a state. That wife of mine. Lacks the requisite greenery of the fingers. Ha ha. Now is that her in there I see?

40.

Inside.

FAUJAS

It's too dark to see. Probably a bird. I hope you're enjoying your meal, mother. Would you like some fruit, too? There are some pears on the side. Let me help you.

He sets the fruitbowl down on the table.

41.

Garden.

FRANÇOIS

No. No I don't believe it is her. Rodents unless I'm very much mistaken. Oh dear me, dear me. Only one thing to do with rodents. Smoke 'em out. Yes indeed. Humane, simple, effective.

He starts to gather sticks as he speaks and stacks them slowly against the back door.

DIDI (VO)

This is a thought.

A match is struck.

A twitch of the mind that sends a tiny impulse fizzing across the brain.

The paper catches immediately. The twigs start to crackle.

An electric charge, An idea with a future, an idea with force, an idea whose time has come.

42.

Inside.

FAUJAS

Do you smell something, mother?

Pause.

Would you check the kitchen? The stupid girl must have left something cooking.

43.

Garden.

FRANÇOIS

Nothing like a roaring fire. Cold winter evening. Yes indeed. Watch the sparks rise up, rise up, rise above it, rise above it all.

The fire grows.

And now, if the wind is in the right direction, which surely it is, we begin to smoke out the vermin.

44.

Inside. Very smokey. FAUJAS coughs.

FAUJAS

It's coming from outside, mother. Mother? Mother! Where are you! I can't see you! Open the front door mother. I'll open the back.

45.

Garden.

FRANÇOIS           And here they come.

We hear the bolts being drawn and the door opens. The fire, injected with a new rush of oxygen, roars.

Faujas!

FAUJAS           Mouret?

FRANÇOIS        Listen.

FAUJAS           Get away from me.

FRANÇOIS        I said listen.

FAUJAS           What is it?

FRANÇOIS        Music.

We hear organ music. Perhaps a chorale. It mixes with the flames. It is entirely in FRANÇOIS'S head.

DIDI (VO)        The Macquarts are a fighting family. It's in the blood. And so François, though he had never laid a punch on anyone, set upon the priest with ancestral strength.

FAUJAS           Get off me, you damn fool. We have to get out. The house is burning.

DIDI (VO)        The flames had crept into the house. Soon the old dry dining room was ablaze. François had pinned the priest down in the hall, his hands around the Abbé's throat.

FRANÇOIS        Die, Father, die.

DIDI (VO)        As the last breaths left the priest's body, François turned to see a terrible sight. Mrs Faujas, the mother, her dark skirts caught in the flame ran towards him, her eyes terrible and her black mouth open.

We hear MRS FAUJAS screaming.

She knocked François to the ground, his head cracking bloodily against the stone floor.

We hear that.

She whirled, looking blindly for a door, the flames biting at her legs and arms. She turned in the smoke, her skirts glowing orange, then red and then, suddenly, she became a pyre, collapsing in a gasp of flame and fire.

The fire surges and we hear the house itself begin to collapse in on itself.

46.

The fire fades out leaving only the organ music and now, we are in Saint Saturnin.

MAYOR

(from the pulpit) A tragedy has befallen Plassans. We have lost three of our friends. Mr François Mouret, an upstanding member of our community, notwithstanding the late faltering of his powers. Mrs Faujas, whose presence we all recall with fondness. And her son, Abbé Faujas, the originator and presiding genius behind our Children's Home, a man whose modesty was the equal of his extraordinary moral gifts. But my words are empty. Perhaps the finest tribute has been paid already by Plassans in electing as Deputy Mr Delangre, a candidate in the Abbé's own image, someone who can unify and inspire. / Although purely a spiritual man, I know Abbé Faujas would have taken some pride in seeing Plassans come together in unity as it has today. To lose someone so dear is always the deepest of pains, a pain that cuts into our very sense that life has meaning. But with faith, all things are meaningful. God heals all and with Him, there is no sadness, no injustice, no pain. Let us pray.

The congregation kneels.

47.

DIDI (VO)

It was almost fifteen years ago that my grandson and granddaughter came to this place. I'm not a woman of faith myself but I catch myself sometimes wishing they could hear me and forgive me.

Sometimes I think I can hear poor, confused François walking the corridors.

We hear footsteps outside, echoing.

And then I wonder. Is that him? Or someone else.

The footsteps quicken, become scuttling, the scuttling of rats. We hear raven wings, perhaps these wings are on fire. Organ music begins.

Build and cut suddenly.

THE END