

LE  
COUVENT,  
OU  
LES VŒUX FORCÉS,  
DRAME EN TROIS ACTES.

Par M<sup>ME</sup> DE GOUGES,  
Auteur de *l'Esclavage des Noirs*.

*The Convent, or the Forced Vows, a three act Drama by Mme de Gouges,  
Author of Black Slavery.*<sup>1</sup>

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THE  
CONVENT  
OR  
THE FORCED VOWS,

THREE ACT DRAMA.

*Performed in two Acts, and restored to three at the Théâtre Français, Comique et Lyrique,  
in the month of October 1790.*

To this day this drama been performed at least eight-four times.

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IN PARIS  
AT  
WIDOW DUCHESNE, rue Saint-Jacques.  
WIDOW BAILLY, barrière des Sergens.  
And at the Novelty Merchants.  
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MARCH 1792.

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<sup>1</sup> Written in the spring of 1790 this play was de Gouges's commentary on the political and philosophical movements that led to the de-sacralization of the Catholic Church in France. Being anticlerical by nature she abhorred the greed and hypocrisy of the higher orders within the Church and always made a distinction between them and lowly priests who were often a force for good in their local communities. In early November 1789 a decree made church property a state asset. On the 13 February 1790 monasticism that had no social purpose i.e. did not support educational or charitable work was abolished and vows were no longer binding; nuns and monks were free to leave their communities. From May to July 1790 the Constituent Assembly debated the role of the clergy and the state. On 12 July the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was decreed and reluctantly endorsed by Louis XVI in August. It totally reorganised the French church. Henceforth all clergy would be voted for by citizens, they would be salaried servants of the state and obliged to swear to be faithful to the nation, the constitution and the king. The play was first performed in October 1790 at the Théâtre-Français comique et lyrique, rue de Bondy, near the boulevard Saint-Martin where it appears to have had forty-two performances over two years. The play was audacious in showing the inner sanctum of the convent; some critics complained that if this fashion were to take root actors would soon be celebrating mass on stage.

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## PREFACE.

I HAVE already proved that I have been persecuted since birth; that nothing has gone well for me, and that in reality true joy is unknown to me, despite the Heavens having created my soul to taste its delights. Literature is a passion that drives one to delirium. This passion has constantly occupied me for ten years of my life. It has its anxieties, its alarms, its torments, just like those of love.

*Black Slavery*, in the circumstances, should have been the greatest success: this success was poisoned by appalling and iniquitous obstructions.<sup>2</sup> To divert myself from my torments I travelled to Versailles with all the Deputies of France; I threw myself blindly, recklessly, into politics and philosophy. My patriotic writings caused all the nascent parties to rise up against my good intentions. Barely had I entered the fray with the true pillars of France than the dandies at Court cried out 'how audacious, what enterprise' and claimed that I should rather make love than books. I could have believed them if they had been of a kind to persuade me. They could only offer me vice and ridicule, I love only virtue. This lesson and this criticism did not correct me, I continued to write.

The question of vows torn from young people of both sexes was being debated: this question inspired my Drama *Forced Vows*. All the Clergy who distinguished themselves on this matter gave me the means to establish the character of the Priest in my Drama. I pulled a quill from the wing of each one. The eloquence and erudition of Misters Taleyrand [sic], Seyès [sic], and especially the religious purity of M. Abbé Goutes, gave me enough to draw out this character. Abbé Maury was the inspiration for my Vicar General's character.<sup>3</sup> But in all fairness, I only created a caricature, the real Abbé Maury has a great deal more wit than my Vicar General. A victim of fanaticism, as will become clear in due course, this subject must have appealed to me more than to anyone else; also I worked on it swiftly. I

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on this play and its reception see both *Zamore et Mirza* and *L'Esclavage des Noirs* on [www.olympedegouges.eu](http://www.olympedegouges.eu).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754 – 1838) born into the high nobility, was ordained in 1779 but renounced the religious life to participate more fully in the politics (and secular activities) of his time. He successfully navigated the upheavals that occurred during his lifetime and managed to achieve high office under Louis XVI, during the revolution, under Napoleon 1, Louis XVIII, Charles X and Louis-Philippe. A politician and diplomat whose career still polarizes opinion, his extraordinary achievements culminated in the Congress of Vienna of 1814/15.

Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748 – 1836) a priest who rose swiftly to high positions within the church he is principally famed for writing two widely read key texts of 1789 *Essai sur les privilèges* and *Qu'est-ce que le tiers état ?* Elected a deputy in the same year he was committed to the Revolution and worked tirelessly for the political system of representation that he favored. Robespierre called him the Revolution's mole for his ceaseless activity in the subterranean areas of power. Perhaps his ability to avoid the limelight while being intellectually and politically engaged saved his life during the Terreur.

Jean-Louis Gouttes (1739 – 1794) was both a working member of the clergy and an active deputy from 1789. A supporter of the revolution and its early reforms and considered by most who knew him to be a man of integrity he was guillotined for speaking out against the Terreur and its complete suppression of the Catholic church.

Jean Siffrein Maury (1746 – 1817) was a colourful character from humble southern origins who fiercely defended all royal prerogatives to such a degree that his life was often in danger; an ex-courtier and preacher he took to politics becoming a famed orator whose biting witticisms garnered him the hatred of his adversaries. He was fiercely against the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and emigrated in 1791.

delved into the heart of the National Assembly to gather my material. I communicated it to a great number of people in Versailles; all gave me a good account of it; everyone encouraged me to have it performed; but despite the first rays of liberty censorship was feared. No Author had yet brought this subject to the Stage.<sup>4</sup> The great question debated by the National Assembly had to be championed. My Play could perhaps contribute to this but, despite my inventiveness, the decree of fate, the irrevocable decree that pursues me, wanted to give me the appearance of an imitator.

I took this Drama to *MONSIEUR's* Theatre, Foire Saint-Germain, around the month of February 1790.<sup>5</sup> This Establishment accepted it, but demanded of me a very long time before performing it: I took it off them to give it to the Theatre of the *Palais-Royal*.<sup>6</sup> It was kept from me for two months without any news. I conveyed a second manuscript to M. Monvel who found the Play charming, and I could well believe him.<sup>7</sup> He shared with me the pleasure he would have in playing the role of the Priest, and it was certainly my intention to offer it to him; but the implacable d'Orfeuille, as dead set against my Plays as a *Comédien Français*, found pretext after pretext.<sup>8</sup> I was asked for a third Act, I thought it fairly necessary but all these delays began to irritate me.

My son took the manuscript from me, and, unfortunately for me, took it to the Théâtre Français, Comique et Lyrique.<sup>9</sup>

It was ordained that everything that bore the name of Théâtre Français would be fatal to me. My Play was received enthusiastically (it is the first, they say, and the only dramatic one to be performed on this Stage). Despite my son's entreaties I had difficulty deciding. He brings one of the Directors to visit me; I consent to give him my Play: he begs me to have it censored without delay.<sup>10</sup> My Censor was M. Dupont-Dutertre, then the Mayor's Lieutenant, and today the Minister of Justice.<sup>11</sup> He was fussily punctilious with the licences; he approved the Work, judging it as a connoisseur. His approbation even indicated to me all the changes that I then made; I knew the style needed to be contained since it was the rough draft that had been censored. Whatever my dislike of correcting, I readdressed my Play and then delivered it to the Director, not wishing to go to this Theatre's rehearsals. He asked my permission to make cuts and to change a few words here and there. I agreed blindly and my Play would have been disfigured if I had not asked for the return of my manuscript. I learnt that he had taken it upon himself to include a scene of his own making, and that it was so bad, so foreign to the action and subject of my

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4 The debates on religion did throw up a plethora of plays on the subject but in general they were one act comedies not dramas seriously addressing the issues; de Gouges's play was indeed one of the first to be created specifically presenting the political arguments as they unfolded, entertaining the audience while informing them about the appalling effects of cloistering young people against their wishes.

5 This theatre, founded in January 1789, was under the protection of Louis XVI's brother, known as 'Monsieur'. Originally installed in a part of Tuileries palace it had to move nine months later when the royal family were brought to live in Paris. While the theatre management awaited the building of a new auditorium they occupied a space in the grounds of the Saint-Germain fair from January to December 1790.

6 In 1785, when the duc d'Orléans (later Philippe-Égalité) inherited the Palais-Royal from his father, he built the complex that still stands today, including within it a new theatre.

7 Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel (1745 – 1812) was an actor and playwright and member of the Comédie Française. He spent a significant time in Sweden, helping to modernise the country's theatrical tradition. Imbued with the spirit of the Revolution he returned to Paris and joined Talma and others to open the Théâtre-Français de la rue Richelieu in April 1791, later renamed Théâtre de la République. He performed in a play written by himself entitled *Les Victimes cloîtrées* (The Cloistered Victims) in March 1791.

8 D'Orfeuille, in partnership with Gaillard, had taken on the management of the theatre at the Palais-Royal.

9 This theatre opened in June 1790.

10 The director was probably a man called La Brut, the same as the Labreux mentioned by de Gouges in a later passage.

11 Marguerite-Loius-François Duport-Dutertre (1754 – 1793) was a lawyer who became a municipal officer and was nominated by Lafayette as the first Minister of Justice in November 1790 during which time he fought to abolish the death penalty. He was generally respected as a man who believed in law and order and worked hard for others, never lining his own pockets. Following political upheavals he left office in March 1792 but was accused of conspiracy and guillotined after refusing to rebut the charges made against him.

Drama, that the Actors, as they read it, cried with laughter. Clearly this man had designs on this Play, for he engaged my son, with some subtlety, to hasten its performance, and to declare himself its Author alongside himself, but to keep me in ignorance of this project. Like a scatterbrain my son agreed to it. So, said he, we will both call ourselves the Authors, and it will proceed faster. So be it, replied he, as long as it is performed straight away. The Play is performed with the greatest success.

I was in the countryside; on my return I learnt the news, and see placarded by my door: *The Forced Vows, by Mme de Gouges and M. Labreux....!* By *Mme de Gouges and M. Labreux*, I cried out in sepulchral tones. Since when have I been in partnership in a Theatrical production? Everyone opens their eyes as wide as mine. I cried Murder! Rape! Plagiarism! Justice!...Oh! Yes, Justice, nothing had been established. My play was still following its course. To prosecute wretches is to cover oneself with ignominy. More moderate and disinterested people, knowing of my bad luck, consoled me by saying: "This mishap serves you well; if your enemies had known you were its Author, it would have been dropped, or they would have found a way to stop its performance." You are right, I told them, and forcing myself to stifle within me the cry of Nature, I abandoned this Play to its fate. It reached eighty performances. Today I am taking back my somewhat exhausted offspring; but I have given it renewed vigour with a third Act, I have made the dialogue more active, and improved its style. Now I plan to have it performed on another Stage. I believe that it is fit to be played anywhere. Gentlemen Directors of the Théâtre Français, Comique et Lyrique will kindly give me an account of the takings, my Author's share I will give to the Soldiers of Château-Vieux, and give me an account of the manifest theft of half the glory of this piece, and to particularly furnish me with the approbation that allowed them to present it.<sup>12</sup>

Now I ask Readers, along with all Authors established or emergent, if they have ever suffered brigandage of this type. It is cruel for a man, it is atrocious for a woman for, in this matter, it is commoner for a man to give to a woman, but for a man to steal from a woman!!! That is out of the ordinary. To be sure I am not surprised by this theft, and in the end I will be forced to believe that I resemble the great talents since every day I am pillaged.

Several Savants have remarked that *Black Slavery* had produced little ones, like *The Decided Coquette*; I have recognized entire scenes in several Plays at the Italians. In *Zélia*, in the famous *Zélia*, at the Theatre in the rue de Louvois, the Playwright did not even give himself the trouble to disguise M. de Saint-Frémont's Story, but his artistry was better than mine for he kept the two rivals alive.<sup>13</sup> One must assume that M. Dubuisson likes

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12 In late August 1790 a mutiny broke out in the military garrison of Nancy. Three regiments were involved, two French and the Châteauevieux Swiss Guards. The issues centred on financial disagreements and a growing tension between enlisted men and the officer classes (Mirabeau and others had suggested a total reform of the military following 1789 to break the tradition of nobles exclusively occupying the higher ranks, but this had never taken place). Soldiers from other regiments were sent to quell the Nancy insurrection. The ensuing fight killed many including civilians: when peace was restored the French regiments were disbanded and the remaining Swiss mutineers were severely punished by their own authorities, some put to death, over a hundred imprisoned with, or without, hard labour. This Preface was written in March 1792 by which time attitudes towards the mutineers had swung the other way and the Swiss Guards were seen as maligned heroes. At the end of the month the freed soldiers marched triumphantly into Paris. On 15 April a procession was organised on their behalf. Popular opinion was divided as to whether or not a civic ceremony in their honour should be accorded to them. De Gouges was prepared to support the soldiers with the offer of any profits from this play but disapproved of the public rejoicing as she felt it ignored the innocent victims of the revolt (see *Le Bons sens français* on [www.olympedegouges.eu](http://www.olympedegouges.eu) for more details).

13 *La Coquette fixée* by Claude-Henri de Fuzé, abbé de (1708 - 1775), Charles-Antoine de la Bruère (1714 - 1754) and Louis Jules Mancini Mazarini (1716 - 1798), was written in 1746; it was performed twice at Théâtre Italien between 1789 and 1790. *Zélia* by Paul-Ulric Duboisson (1746 - 1794) with music by Prosper-Didier Deshayes (175? - 1815) was first performed in October 1791, with forty-one subsequent stagings over the next two years. Saint-Frémont is a character in de Gouges's *L'Esclavage des noirs* who married for love

polygamy, and that at this time he wishes to introduce this taste into France. I cannot believe he will have much trouble; but I, who desire all or nothing, I took pains to have the former one die. I found this method more dramatic, more theatrical, and above all more moral. I conceived of this Drama ten years before that of M. Dubuisson. As it has been in print for five years he has had the time to study it; and it pleases me to see that a consummate Playwright has neither scorned imitating an ignorant woman nor even appropriating her intentions, her wishes and her exact phrasing. One must concede, M. Dubuisson, that you believed my Drama to be lost in the shadows, and it no doubt pained you to see such a pretty Story disappear from the stage. You will at least allow that, following its success, I should at least attempt to relaunch *Black Slavery*. I concede that my Play has no connection with this duplicitous concern, I dare say, cleverly done; you have stolen only the Story, much good may it do you. I prefer complaining to restitution. You, and M. de Labreux will formally swear that I, and many others, have no need of anyone else's property; certainly you could steal from me in the same way numerous times before you ruined me, and one knows only too well that my great fortune in this genre is to be *Spoilt for Choice*.<sup>14</sup> If some Financier or other, keen on the wit and glory of others, wished to acquire a thousand and one manuscripts, I am ready to negotiate with him in good faith: in all seriousness, I would be the woman to conclude this bargain, and even to keep the secret when my Plays triumphed: but when they are stolen from me! That's quite another story, as the saying goes.

There, I am fittingly avenged, and I sincerely hope that in future my plays will be requested of me with more honesty and legality, and that decent takings will become the rule. I declare that I will no longer give my Works either to Authors, Actors or the Public. The bad one that is paid for is always good; the good one that one gives away is always worthless. I have learnt to make a proverb from this experience. I have a fancy to make a fortune, I want to make it, and I will make it.

I will make it, I say, in spite of the envious, of criticism and even of fate itself for I am well aware that I have to bare my teeth to it if I want to give as good as I get. I see also that our life is nothing but a game, and the one who does not know how to calculate always loses. Mathematically, I have learnt to live at my own expense.

I end by asking the Public to be fair to my feeble productions: to beg its indulgence, would be going too far; but if I can obtain some fairness that will be more than enough for me.

Rereading this Preface I notice that it is impossible to have such a rough draft printed without it being revised and corrected. That is usually what I do with Prefaces. Therefore, I recall to this one the Reader's indulgence, despite appearing to defy it earlier.

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## CHARACTERS.

THE ABBESS.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

JULIE, a novice.

SISTER AGATHE.

THE MARQUIS DE LEUVILLE.

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having been told that his previous companion, by whom he had a child out of wedlock, was dead.

<sup>14</sup> *L'Embarras des Richesses* was a play written by Léonor-Jean-Christin Soulas d'Allainval (1696 - 1753). It was considered his best play but was probably only given four performances. The operetta based on the play written in 1782, libretto by Jean-Baptiste Lourdé de Santerre (1732 - 1815) and music by André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry (1741 - 1813) was far more successful. De Gouges's readers would have appreciated the pun.

THE CHEVALIER, son of the Marquis.  
A GRAND VICAR.  
A PRIEST.  
ANTOINE, the gardener.  
SEVERAL NUNS.  
A COMMISSARY.  
SEVERAL SOLDIERS.

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THE  
CONVENT  
OR  
THE FORCED VOWS.

FIRST ACT.

*The set represents the back of a Convent. At the rear of the stage is a door for deliveries.*

FIRST SCENE.

THE CHEVALIER DE LEUVILLE, ANTOINE.<sup>15</sup>

THE CHEVALIER, *following Antoine.*  
Antoine, my dear Antoine.

ANTOINE, *walking around the stage.*  
Not doing it.

THE CHEVALIER.  
My friend.

ANTOINE.  
It's pointless.

THE CHEVALIER.  
At least hear me out.

ANTOINE.  
I be deaf.

THE CHEVALIER.  
Speak to me for a moment.

ANTOINE.  
I be dumb.

THE CHEVALIER.  
I promise you....

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout the scene The Chevalier addresses Antoine using the informal 'tu' while Antoine responds formally with 'vous'.

ANTOINE.

I be incorruptible.

THE CHEVALIER.

This purse....

ANTOINE, *looking at the purse, aside.*

It's plump.

THE CHEVALIER.

Take it.

ANTOINE.

Really?

THE CHEVALIER.

It's all yours.

ANTOINE, *receiving the purse.*

Thank ye kindly.

THE CHEVALIER.

You're no longer deaf.

ANTOINE.

Nor dumb. Come rattle off yer yarn. Quick.

THE CHEVALIER.

I languish, I burn, I'm in love.

ANTOINE.

Who with?

THE CHEVALIER.

With an adorable woman, an angel who lives in this convent.

ANTOINE.

What kind a story is that you're givin' us? If it were a demon, well and good; that crafty spirit 'as thread 'is way more than once among our Beguines.<sup>16</sup>

THE CHEVALIER.

Ah! If I named the one I love, you would agree with me that she is adorable.

ANTOINE.

I'd 'ave to love 'er to say it as you do. She's not one of our Nuns then; I can't guess which one's given you an eyeful. You'll be 'aving to name 'er if you wants me to be useful to yer.

THE CHEVALIER.

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<sup>16</sup> Beguines were a female lay Christian order created in the Low Countries in the 12<sup>th</sup> century who chose to live in poverty and chastity helping the poor and the sick. The women took no vows and were free to leave at any time. Never a large organisation, their numbers diminished from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century: the term beguine was often used pejoratively to indicate an excessively religious and superstitious woman.

Julie is taking her vows today; imagine my torment, my dear Antoine.

ANTOINE.

Ah! It's about the Novice. I'd about almost guessed it: but what the deuce do you want me to be doin' for yer, at the actual ceremony?

THE CHEVALIER.

Get me in.

ANTOINE.

Whoa! Introduce the wolf into the sheepfold; it's not the method that's lackin', since I was goin' to town when I met yer, to fetch a Director. If it were possible, (*reflecting*) eh! Me beauty, why not. I 'ave 'ere just the thing....

THE CHEVALIER.

Tell me, is it still the same Capuchin who comes here?

ANTOINE.

No, sometimes he's not at the Monastery so then it's the first available one.

THE CHEVALIER.

You've just given me a charming idea; what if I took the place of this first available one, what if I put on a Capuchin's habit? You could say that the Director was away. This stratagem is admirable, divine.

ANTOINE.

Admirable, divine, for you, but for me.....Oh! Oh! Mister Chevalier, puttin' you in the place of a Confessor so that you can learn all the secrets of our little Sisters. And what would Religion have to say? Oh! Seriously, thinkin' about it, it's too much, too much.

THE CHEVALIER.

Your fear is ridiculous, your scruples are unreasonable. Do you think this is the first time a lover has got in to these asylums disguised in religious clothes? Believe me, my dear Antoine, in these retreats there are often adventures that the public knows nothing about. Besides, I take full responsibility and I promise you a reward worthy of the service you will have done me.

ANTOINE.

Done, I can't resist no more. Just the other day I bought a Reverend's effects; I planned to make a straw Capuchin for the Carnival to entertain our village girls; you'll put it on to entertain the Novice, who seems to me to be so sad, and come what may, it's agreed; but will yer be able to put on the pitiful air, the nasal tone of a poor devil? Well it's your affair, once in the Convent, I won't answer for you.

THE CHEVALIER.

I have to conquer my lover's repugnance and persuade her to leave her prison.

ANTOINE.

It may well be you that she loves, and you 'ave to be convinced of it, and I don't mind putting m' shoulder to the wheel. I wouldn't do it for all an' sundry. Pah! It wouldn't do me no good. See, it don't upset me when some pretty face locks 'erself up in this cage, as I always gets little presents. Each 'as 'er own little garden: Antoine, over here, Antoine over

there; look at my parterre; water me flowers, they're thirsty; and the sweetmeats and bonbons fall upon me like 'ail, and what with all that I'm popular with the local girls 'cause I share out me sweetmeats. But Miss Julie, though she's very pretty....

THE CHEVALIER.

Oh! Yes. Very pretty.

ANTOINE.

Though she's so kind, so good, that she's like an Angel...

THE CHEVALIER.

Yes, my friend, she's a celestial creature.

ANTOINE.

Meanwhiles, what if this creature didn't love yer. I've seen 'er suffer such burnin' sorrow to take the veil, it makes me myself upset.

THE CHEVALIER.

Well! My dear Antoine, that's another reason to risk everything.

ANTOINE.

Do you want to don the 'abit for a good cause?

THE CHEVALIER.

Yes, this is the only means left to me to prevent the greatest of all tragedies plus I'm not donning his outfit from irreverence for Saint-Francis, but from absolute necessity.

ANTOINE.

I was sure of it; so.....

THE CHEVALIER.

Listen; Julie, as you know, has been brought up in this convent since her earliest days, but what you don't know, is that she was put here on my father's orders, and it is still his will forcing her to take her vows today. That's all I have been able to learn about Julie's fate, the rest is a mystery. You don't know my father. Violent, despotic, he finds the slightest resistance to his will an unpardonable injury.

ANTOINE.

If 'e's that sour, how'll 'e take to yer escapade?

THE CHEVALIER.

That's my affair, I'm an adult, and despite all the respect that I owe him, nothing can stop me escaping from such a tyrannical guardian. You can see that his determination to make a Nun of Julie gives me the opportunity to imagine something.....odious maybe. My love grows inspired by the pity I feel for her fate: it was born in the parlour where I glimpsed her occasionally when I came with my father to pay my respects to the Abbess.

ANTOINE.

All well and good, you love 'er, which is nothin' if not natural. But if she don't love you, what's the point of all your plottin', that's what worries me, and you don't even consider it.

THE CHEVALIER, *disconcerted*.

If....Julie....doesn't love me....you say?

ANTOINE.

Yes. I've not seen nothin' that suggests she shares your beautiful sentiments.

THE CHEVALIER.

On that score I'm no more enlightened than you.

ANTOINE.

Blast! I've always heard tell that you only set out on a perilous adventure to gain somethin' by it, and you're takin' this one on without knowin' if Julie will thank ye kindly.

THE CHEVALIER.

Oh! I'm sure she'll love me.

ANTOINE, *mimicking him*.

Oh! I'm sure she'll love me. The young doubt nothin'; they're all the same. And what if she didn't love yer, but loved another. Ah, well! You'll be in a pickle won't yer?

THE CHEVALIER.

Ah! I promise you. It's impossible. She's never seen another man, other than me and my father.

ANTOINE.

And me, well, what d'you take me for? A blockhead? And do you imagine that through the screen in the transept we don't watch passers by. These young women have eyes everywhere. They've a look as long as, as long as, an Astrologer's lorgnette.

THE CHEVALIER.

You're making me tremble. She's loathe to pronounce her vows only because her heart is disposed to love.

ANTOINE.

And what if these dispositions were disposed towards another than you, I can't repeat it enough.

THE CHEVALIER.

You're right.....what if it were another.....

ANTOINE.

Maybe not, when you saw 'er, did you speak to 'er?

THE CHEVALIER.

Never.

ANTOINE.

Did you make faces at 'er?

THE CHEVALIER.

Without speaking, my mouth told her many things?

ANTOINE.

Did she notice?

THE CHEVALIER.

I doubt it, my eyes almost endlessly fixed on her, always saw hers modestly lowered.

ANTOINE.

Well, there's a love that's gettin' ahead, but every bit counts. If you persist in your plan, I'll 'elp you.

THE CHEVALIER.

If I persist in it, never doubt it. Two days ago I discovered by accident that my father, along with the Abbess, had fixed today for Julie's ceremony to take her vows. Desperate, beside myself, I've dreamt of a way of preventing it; pressed for time, I can only envisage this disguise....

ANTOINE.

Quiet....here is company.

THE CHEVALIER.

Will you get me into the convent soon?

ANTOINE.

Not yet; do we not need to appear to have come from town, and do we not need to have time to robe yer....let's retire....See, is that not your father with the Grand Vicar and our good Priest.

THE CHEVALIER.

Ah! Lord, have I come too late!

## *SCENE II.*

THE MARQUIS DE LEUVILLE, THE GRAND VICAR, THE PRIEST.

THE MARQUIS.

Reverend, in any other circumstances your reasoning would be fine but in this case it does not apply.

THE PRIEST.

What particular interest obliges you to wish, so imperiously, that Julie takes her vows?

THE GRAND VICAR.

Are you implying that the Marquis needs to justify his behaviour to you? I know his reasons, that should satisfy you.

THE PRIEST.

Forgive me, Sir, I realise that your position of Grand Vicar gives you an authority in the Convent that I lack, but at least my nature is enough to excuse my behaviour: I do not believe that the Marquis can dispense with hearing his Pastor's representations.<sup>17</sup>

THE GRAND VICAR.

They are pointless, and if needs must, I recommend that you keep quiet.

THE PRIEST.

Your tone obliges me to justify my entreaties. (*to the Marquis.*) Sir, read the letter that I have just received.

THE MARQUIS, *reading.*

'This moment is the only one left. Sir, I implore you, with all the feelings of piety and religion that are yours, to come; stop, or at least delay, the vows that are being torn from the unfortunate Julie. To encourage your zeal, know that the stubbornness of the Marquis de Leuville hides an iniquitous mystery....Time may reveal it....I can say no more....'

(*Aside, a little apart, troubled.*) It's Angélique, it's my Sister who has written these lines; could she have informed Julie of the secret of her birth?

(*To the Priest, having recovered from his discomfiture.*) Well, well, this letter is anonymous. Do you find such a thing worthy of consideration?

THE PRIEST.

Be careful, Sir, certain circumstances, vague truths, that I recalled when reading it....Once upon a time you had a Sister....A marriage that you did not approve....The sudden death of her spouse.....The disappearance of this sister and her infant child.... A veil, impenetrable until now, has made of this event mere conjecture.

THE MARQUIS, *with concentrated fury.*

Reverend....

THE GRAND VICAR.

Who charged you with caring for the Marquis's family, and how could you, forgetful of charity, allow yourself such odious suppositions.

THE PRIEST.

Heaven, understanding the purity of my intentions, knows that I am not supposing, I am warding off rumours injurious to the Marquis of Leuville.

THE MARQUIS.

Do even better, give up this opposition, which by the way will achieve nothing, since the wishes of the novice are assuredly decreed between the Abbess and myself.

THE GRAND VICAR.

Consider, finally, the interest of Heaven that awaits this new triumph of religion. Leave innocent hands in peace to consecrate themselves to the faith of the Altars.

THE PRIEST.

Ah! If this sacrifice were voluntary, if it were consummated in an age when reason and experience permitted one to measure its depth, then, though it is against nature, I

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<sup>17</sup> De Gouges uses the word *represailles*, literally reprisals. I have found no meaning for reprisal/*represaille* in the past that is different to modern usage. This term seems so at odds within the context of the scene that I have assumed, perhaps incorrectly, that it is a typo for 'représentations'.

would willingly applaud it. But at sixteen, at this time of life, when the heart is unsure and seeks to know itself, when first impressions begin to develop; at this age when innocence is so shy that it bends under the yoke that is imposed upon it without daring to complain. To command a denial of oneself, to order the most inconceivable of all sacrifices, to shackle a child, blindly docile, with ties that will never break, that is to offend the Supreme Being, to oppose the eternal laws of creation, and render barbarous the cult of a God of peace.

THE GRAND VICAR.

How dare you. Why these pronouncements against this religion whose severity you misunderstand? Do you forget that it only admits to its Altars hands that are pure and without stain? Do you forget that to renounce the world is the first duty of those who dedicate themselves to the sacred ministry?

THE PRIEST.

Would to Heaven that no human motive had ever called that ambitious crowd to join it, those who see in the sacerdotal life merely an easy path to fortune and the ability to procure for themselves all the pleasures of indolence and luxury! Then the Church would have no need to blush at its Clergy's corrupt ways: less opulent, they would be more respectable.

THE MARQUIS.

What! You, whose zeal is so pure, whose ways are so austere, you would preach a lesson sadly made fashionable by supposed Philosophers, you would eulogise error?

THE PRIEST.

Religion does not command us to be deaf to the voice of nature. To reconcile dogma with the duty of society, that is the precept, that is the lesson that we owe to men. Allow those women to consecrate themselves to serve the altars whose particular vocation comes at an age when reason has been able to sufficiently enlighten them on the choice of a state where it is so hard to please oneself. But renounce the tyrannical power to condemn to sorrow the innocent timidity that you shackle in the Cloisters. Consider that the right to freely choose one's place in society belongs, by nature, to all sentient beings, and that the highest of all duties is to be useful.

THE MARQUIS.

Superfluous reasoning that cannot shake my determination. Julie has no fortune; her dowry is paid, her vows pronounced. In a few days I will be forever rid of her care, that I have willing undertaken.

THE PRIEST.

Fear selling her duty at too high a price....no doubt generous.....Unhappy feeble Sex, too often sacrificed to barbarous conventions, you are forbidden to decide for yourself the least important considerations of fortune, and yet you are bound by inviolable sermons, you are asked to sign a contract that makes reason tremble.

SCENE III.

THE SAME, ANTOINE.

ANTOINE, *wiping his forehead.*

Phew! At last I've arrived.

THE GRAND VICAR.

Ah! It's you, Antoine, you are very hot and bothered.<sup>18</sup>

ANTOINE.

I've only been from here to town and back again. The young Novice may be bein' stubborn, but I've brought her a Reverend Father who'll make her see sense.

THE MARQUIS.

Is he good and strict?

ANTOINE.

In our time I've yet to see a more scowlin' Monk, cavernous eyes, wrinkle browed, sunken cheeked, and a beard that is terrifyin'.

THE GRAND VICAR.

And you call him?

ANTOINE.

Father Hilarion.

THE PRIEST, *aside*.

Wretch, who will spread disquiet in this timorous soul, and manage to throw her into the abyss.

THE MARQUIS.

Pray, ask the Abbess to come to the parlour, where the Grand Vicar and I will repair.

ANTOINE.

Right away. (*Aside.*) Then I'll come back and get Father Hilarion, through the gardens, into the Chapter house where he'll indoctrinate the Novice.

#### SCENE IV.

THE SAME, *apart from* ANTOINE.

THE PRIEST.

I will not leave you, Gentlemen, allow me to accompany you to the parlour. It may be only too necessary to remind the Abbess that she must not allow any violence to be done to Julie's dispositions?

THE GRAND VICAR.

Excuse yourself from this task.

LE MARQUIS.

Our measures are taken, no obstacle can halt their effect.

THE PRIEST.

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<sup>18</sup> Antoine is addressed by the familiar 'tu'.

Well, understand what humanity and religion oblige me to do. I will appear at the ceremony for none is entitled to forbid me from attending it; there I will loudly proclaim the natural rights and liberty. If the Novice hesitates, if I notice any violence, I will place my protestation at the clerk's office of the court of justice, and will confer on your victim the power to break vows that are clearly forced.

THE GRAND VICAR, *apart, to the Marquis.*

The executioner will keep his word. Let us attempt to soften his resolve with the hope of reward.

THE MARQUIS, *to the Priest.*

Such conduct, Father, would be contrary to certain arrangements in which you have an interest. I am a relative and friend of the Minister responsible for the benefice portfolio. I have already obtained his pledge in your favour. Be aware that I can hasten its effect, or return his pledge to him in a manner that would rid you of any hope for the future.

THE GRAND VICAR.

The virtuous reputation of the Father had also inspired my opinion. My influence on our Prelate's mind is well known. A certain prebendary will be vacating, at any moment, an opulent Chapter....

THE PRIEST.

Thus, for the price of my complaisance, I could, shortly, see myself invested as a Canon, or given a rich Priory?

LE MARQUIS.

Undoubtedly.

THE GRAND VICAR.

You can count upon it.

THE PRIEST.

Gentlemen, keep such propositions for venal souls. I would become opulent by forgetting my duties! My congruent portion, a feeble patrimony, economy and sobriety, these are my riches. I desire no others; they are sufficient unto my needs, and to the succour that a Pastor owes his Parishioners.

#### SCENE V.

THE SAME, ANTOINE.

ANTOINE.

Gentlemen, the Abbess awaits you in the main parlour.

LE MARQUIS.

We are on our way.

THE GRAND VICAR.

Father, if our friendship, if our offers do not move you, at least fear our discontent.

THE PRIEST.

Neither promises, nor threats will prevent me doing my duty.

SCENE VI.

ANTOINE, *alone*.

I told our Capuchin, good and proper, not to make a scene. He promised me he'd only make his self known to his Julie, and exhort her only to be strong; so, no risks for us. After all, twenty-five *louis* in the purse he's let me 'ave, and that other reward he promises me, is more than enough to make up for the risk I be takin'. Oh! If our Beguines discovered us.....What a racket!

SCENE VII.

ANTOINE, SISTER AGATHE, *at the back of the stage, in the garden*.

ANTOINE.

Sister, you've come at just the right time, Father Hilarion is about to arrive and you can introduce him into the Chapter house.

SISTER AGATHE, *through the screen*.

Everything is prepared for the ceremony; we're only waiting for him to conquer the Novice's irresolution.

ANTOINE.

Quite, here he is.

SCENE VIII.

ANTOINE, SISTER AGATHE, THE CHEVALIER.

ANTOINE,

I'm coming, come in, Father Hilarion.

THE CHEVALIER.

Ah! So, my Sister, this Convent encloses a straying lamb who is resisting Heaven's call. Would this be the fruit of bad advice given to her by some Nuns, perhaps?

SISTER AGATHE.

Alas, father, we do our best to conquer the tempting spirit but, as you know, even the most righteous sin seven times a day.

THE CHEVALIER.

Who then can be encouraging her worldly inclinations?

SISTER AGATHE.

Only God knows how to penetrate the inner recesses of the heart. Mother Abbess, Monsieur de Leuville and Sister Angélique have not yet been able to overcome her resistance.

THE CHEVALIER, *animatedly*.

Sister Angélique, did you say, who is she?

SISTER AGATHE.

Julie's best friend, one of our Sisters to whom she is the most attached, and who cared for her the most in her childhood.

THE CHEVALIER.

But does this Sister know the Marquis de Leuville?

SISTER AGATHE.

Ah! Very well, they often share long conversations, and never have we been able to ascertain why.

THE CHEVALIER, *apart*.

I see a chink of light! It's her, without a doubt, it's my aunt. Oh cruel brother. (*To Agathe.*) Introduce me to the Novice as soon as possible, I wish to speak to her alone. I will be able to see into her heart; I will discover this mystery that is being hidden from you.

*Sister Agathe opens the screen and lets the Chevalier pass through.*

#### SCENE IX.

ANTOINE, *alone*.

Good, that's 'im inside, now let 'im behave as he should, and I'll answer for it all. But these lovers, they be so imprudent, that they can be taken by surprise. Let's keep watch and while they chatter, I'll try and be close so that I can warn 'em when the enemy approaches.

End of the first Act.

### ACT II.

*The Set represents the Chapter House, arranged for the veil taking ceremony. There is a type of altar in the middle, on which can be seen a large book.*

#### FIRST SCENE.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE, JULIE.

JULIE, *in the greatest despair*.

No, I will not pronounce this sermon...ill-starred...why am I of this world?

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

My girl, have a bit more faith in yourself....How unhappy you make my days! You have no idea how much I care for you.

JULIE.

Oh! Madame.....Oh! Mother....may I call you thus?

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Yes, my dear, call me mother, I am more entitled to this name than you realise.<sup>19</sup>

JULIE.

You alone do not cruelly rebuff me....why are you crying? Are you moved by my fate? Ah! No doubt you disapprove of the violence they want to subject me to.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

I, who wish only for your happiness, contribute to your misfortune!

JULIE.

Strengthen my soul against the persecution that awaits it: tell me that Heaven does not condemn my resistance, and that I cannot offend it by refusing these vows that my heart defies.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Alas! You are not the first victim sacrificed to the caprices of unjust parents.

JULIE.

Parents! And who are mine? I do not know who I am, abandoned in infancy, do I know my family? Why it cast me out of its bosom? Am I being tyrannised by my own parents? Must I only know them through their persecution? And if I have none, if I am abandoned to the mercies of Providence, of what import are my vows to all of nature?...Oh! Mother, whoever you are, if you are still alive, why do you not appear to tear me from my oppressors.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE, *clasping her with intense emotion.*

My daughter! My daughter! (*She pulls away and says, aside.*) I was about to give up my secret. Inhuman brother! Your tiger's soul might soften if you were to witness nature fighting so.

JULIE.

And you too, my sole support, you also distance yourself from me. I was so comfortable in your arms; why rebuff me? I cannot explain the attraction it has for me. Ah! Let me indulge in these kisses that lighten the load of my deplorable existence.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Yes, my child, have faith in a friend unhappier than you.

JULIE.

You, unhappy! And you console me! So it is only in the bosom of the unfortunate that one finds compassion?

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

I am even more to be pitied given that your sorrows add immeasurably to mine.

JULIE.

Oh the power of virtue, that forgets its own suffering to offer consolation to the heart of the oppressed!

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<sup>19</sup> Throughout the scene Julie addresses Sister Angélique formally using 'vous'. At this point, Sister Angélique switches to 'tu', perhaps to alert the audience to a weakening of Sister Angélique's resolve.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

All that your persecutors are undertaking against you echoes, alas, in this heart so torn apart!

JULIE.

That is taking kindness too far. Your courage in defending me against the quarrels, the humiliations that have been heaped upon me, have exposed you too often to the anger of the Superiors!

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

I am only too happy to suffer if it can spare your sorrows....

JULIE.

Ah! You cannot know them all.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

My daughter, do you have a secret to tell me? Enclosed in this Cloister since your infancy, I cannot imagine the source of all your despair. Could I have been misled when I believed your repugnance to be based solely on a lack of vocation?

JULIE.

May it please Heaven that another feeling....! (*She stops herself in order to halt the avowal.*)

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Go on, open up your heart to me.

JULIE.

The effort is too great for me, let my secret die with me.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Die! You who are dearer to me than life itself. Ah! That would be to drag myself into the grave. Do not refuse to confide in me entirely. If I cannot offer you any hope, I will at least share your pain, it will then be a lighter burden.

JULIE.

I can no longer resist the power you have over me; learn that....someone's coming....The cruel ones come to hasten my end. Don't abandon me.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Put your mind at rest, save your energy to resist them: should their anger overwhelm me, I would yet oppose the tyranny that is being used against you with all my power.

## SCENE II.

THE SAME, THE ABBESS, SEVERAL NUNS.

THE ABBESS, *to Julie, in a hypocritical voice.*

Now is the time, my Sister, when you will beat Hell in a victory that will please Heaven: only a few moments more and you will forever bind yourself to the most saintly

duties.....You are weeping, my Sister, no doubt it is the joy of leaving behind the slavery of the world that makes you shed tears.

JULIE.

How poorly you interpret the despair that overwhelms me!

THE ABBESS.

What are you saying, my Sister? Would you resist the power of grace?

JULIE.

No, Madame, no interior voice calls me to the state that I am supposed to embrace: I would be offending religion itself if I dared to pronounce vows that my heart denies.

THE ABBESS.

This indecision is the Angel of darkness's snare; my dear daughter, have the courage to overcome it, walk to the altar with a strength of purpose worthy of the favours that Heaven reserves for you: take the example of our Sisters, see them congratulate themselves on their chaste ties that separate them from a corrupt world.

JULIE.

I admire their constancy without being able to imitate it.

THE ABBESS.

Remember that you have no other choice, consider it a merit to obey necessity.

JULIE.

Oh! Why should I be doomed to it? Tear away the veil that covers up my birth; if I am of poor parents, I will go and share their misery. Have generous hands looked after my infancy only to then persecute me? I am not asking to leave this Cloister, but at least to delay the ceremony that would prove an irritant to religion. Allow my heart the time to ready itself.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Have pity on her youth, give her tears a bit more time.

THE ABBESS.

Impossible, my Sister. The Marquis de Leuville demands that her vows be pronounced today, or he will cease payments on her behalf.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE, *aside*.

Cruel man, pursuing his iniquities.

JULIE.

Ah! Madame, do not block pity from your soul. If Monsieur de Leuville ceases to be my benefactor, allow me to do the most menial tasks in the house. I will not be a burden. I will submit to anything until my repugnance is overcome.

THE ABBESS.

You insist in vain, without a dowry you will not be accepted, Monsieur de Leuville would no longer consider sacrificing his money.

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

I was sure it was he alone who was determined to destroy Julie. (*Holding Julie in her arms.*) Unfortunate girl! Your loss is the pinnacle of a barbarian's vengeance. (*To the Abbess.*) Madame, would you serve his objectives, by contributing to the sacrifice of this innocent victim? If you knew....

THE ABBESS.

Yes; I know that you encourage Julie in her disobedience; I was informed about it, and you are confirming my suspicions. Imprudent nun, whose perverse advice opposes the voice of Heaven, retire.....I order you to keep the most absolute silence, or fear that....

JULIE, *holding back Angélique.*

Ah! Madame, would you sentence her for her compassion?

THE ABBESS.

Out, I say, and do not leave your cell unless I order it. (*She exits.*) And you, who dare disregard the submission owed to your benefactors, do not entertain the hope that we will give in to such criminal resistance.

### SCENE III.

THE ABBESS, JULIE, THE CHEVALIER, SISTER AGATHE.

THE ABBESS.

Come, reverend Father, see if you can bring this straying lamb back to the fold; it would be a miracle worthy of Heaven and its august interpreter.

THE CHEVALIER.

This then is the Novice who is to take her vows.

THE ABBESS.

Yes, this is the rebel: we will leave you alone with her in order not to distract you in your pious exhortations. (*All the Nuns leave after kissing, one after the other, the Capuchin's robes.*)

### SCENE IV.

JULIE, THE CHEVALIER, *as a Capuchin.*

THE CHEVALIER, *aside.*

What a moment, for the two of us!

JULIE, *aside.*

All the blood in my veins has frozen. I cannot bear it.

THE CHEVALIER.

Heavens, she's fainted! (*He takes her hand.*) Julie, adorable Julie, come round, these moments are precious to us. I am not planning to add to your torments. Open your eyes to the light, and see me only as the one who can console you.

JULIE.

You console me! You who have been chosen to bring about my destruction!

THE CHEVALIER.

You misunderstand, I am neither you oppressor nor implacable. Have confidence in me, and count on my every effort to assure that your days be less stormy.

JULIE.

These words reassure me (*aside, considering the Capuchin.*) Ah Father! How can I escape the sacrifice that is being forced upon me. Resistance is henceforth useless; I am overwhelmed by all that besets me and my bravest friend, who sustained my strength of purpose, is taken from me. Penitence, reproaches and humiliations may be the price of the gentle interest she dared to show me.

THE CHEVALIER.

I am come to take her place without endangering you; have faith that my advice will conform to your situation, and that, far from blaming you, I myself will strengthen you in your resolve.

JULIE.

Then you are indeed an Angel of peace sent by Heaven itself to protect me.

THE CHEVALIER.

I am but a mere mortal in whom you inspire feelings worthy of your youth, your beauty and your misfortunes. Explain yourself without digression or fear. What is the source of your repugnance for the cloister?

JULIE.

I do not fear this asylum, and I never thought to leave it. A stranger in the world, what could such an unfortunate seek there, one abandoned from the crib to the care of Providence. The only favour that I beg is to live among these Nuns until my vocation should be decided.

THE CHEVALIER.

But if you have no aversion to this state, how can you fear committing yourself to it by a solemn vow?

JULIE.

The state of my heart at the present time prevents me from devoting myself to the service of Altars.

THE CHEVALIER.

Explain yourself, Julie: what is this imperious feeling whose power you are experiencing? Could it be just a vague concern, or has it become fixed upon some object? At your age the soul opens itself easily to the impressions of sensibility. Do not hold back a useful avowal if you want me to be of use to you.

JULIE.

How painful it is to admit to being guilty!

THE CHEVALIER.

Eh! Of what could you be guilty? Do you think that Heaven could condemn feelings whose seed it sowed in your soul? Ah! You must believe that nature is never in opposition to the Creator, and that in its development it is only obeying the eternal laws that he set

down for it. Oh supreme wisdom! What temerity to conceive such an unusual opinion of your justice. Would you lay an unavoidable trap for human weakness in order to punish it eternally! Blasphemers of a kind God, you alone merit the tribulations with which you horrify misled minds thanks to your doctrine.....Julie, be reassured, Heaven will never be angered by a virtue that yields to the sweetest sentiments of nature.

JULIE.

What am I hearing!....These words bring me back to my senses, you are bringing calm to my troubled spirit. Yes, I will have the courage to reveal to you my most secret thoughts. An inclination that I have fought in vain makes me tremble at the vows that are being forced upon me.

THE CHEVALIER, *aside*.

Oh Heaven, I tremble. (*Aloud.*) Proceed I beg you, and do not hide the slightest thing from me. Since when and on what occasion did this inclination take root?

JULIE.

In the parlour, where twice I appeared alongside the Abbess.

THE CHEVALIER, *aside*.

Twice with the Abbess! (*Aloud.*) And do you know if the object that your heart has chosen shares your inclination?

JULIE.

How would I know? I yearned to fix my eyes on him, but the constraint in which I am held, the presence of the Abbess and Monsieur de Leuville, forced me to look away.

THE CHEVALIER, *aside, joyfully*.

Ah! I breathe again. (*Aloud.*) One more word, Julie, was his son not with him? Would he be favoured?.....

JULIE, *hesitating*.

He is the only man, with his father, whom I caught sight of.

THE CHEVALIER, *casting aside his beard and robe*.

Julie! Oh my dear Julie! You see him at your feet.

JULIE.

Oh Heaven! It's him. What are you doing? Flee, unfortunate one!

THE CHEVALIER, *getting up and stopping Julie*.

Have no fear.

JULIE.

You are heading for disaster, you are doubling my alarm! What would become of me if you were discovered?

THE CHEVALIER.

Dare to follow me, dare to break out of this bastion. Woe betide the brazen one who would oppose it.

JULIE.

Follow you! Forget my duties! No, never.

THE CHEVALIER.

You are my spouse; your first duty is to have faith in me entirely.

JULIE.

Such happiness is not to be for the unfortunate Julie.

THE CHEVALIER.

No power can take me from you, I have reached my majority, I have a right to chose a companion. Your consent alone will decide your fate; come.

JULIE.

Don't hope for that, leave me to my destiny. Do not add to the horror that is all around me with the sight of you pursued like a guilty man. For pity's sake, for me, go away.

THE CHEVALIER.

No, cruel one! I'm staying, and were I to die for it, I would prevent this awful sacrifice.

JULIE

What reward do you expect for your obstinacy?

THE CHEVALIER.

Death, or your hand.....come....(*He drags her away.*)

#### SCENE V.

THE CHEVALIER, JULIE, THE ABBESS, SEVERAL NUNS.

JULIE.

We are lost. (*She falls on to a chair, the Chevalier places himself in front of her.*)

THE ABBESS.

Oh, profanation! A man in this place, alone with Julie! Satan has introduced himself amongst us under these respectable vestments.

THE CHEVALIER, *in a firm tone.*

Recognise me, Madame. I have come to challenge you for this victim, you will have to tear my life from me before you can reach her.

THE ABBESS.

Monsieur de Leuville's son! Tremble rash man, your father is coming.

THE CHEVALIER.

I know what I can expect from his implacable nature.

THE ABBESS.

Imprudent young man! I can still save you, flee, go away

THE CHEVALIER.

I, flee! I, abandon Julie to your brutality! My spouse!

THE ABBESS.

Your spouse!

THE CHEVALIER.

Yes, my spouse, since an absolute determination and the most tender love unites us.

THE ABBESS.

Julie, your silence lends authority to this audacity.

JULIE.

Ah! Madame, save him from his despair. Allow the punishment for an involuntary error to fall on me alone. Let Monsieur de Leuville remain ignorant of his son's rashness. (*She goes as if to throw herself at the Abbess's feet.*)

THE CHEVALIER, *stopping her.*

What are you doing, Julie? We can expect nothing from these souls hardened by false piety. I swear in the sight of Heaven, I will not leave here unless it is to take you to hymen's altar. Neither fear nor respect will force me otherwise.

#### SCENE VI.

THE SAME, THE MARQUIS, THE VICAR GENERAL, THE PRIEST.

THE MARQUIS.

What do I see? My son!

THE ABBESS.

This son, unworthy of you, inveigled his way into this sanctuary wearing these sacred vestments. We surprised him leading Julie away, who no doubt is complicit in her transgression.

THE MARQUIS.

Wretch! How can you justify yourself?

THE CHEVALIER, *in a firm tone.*

That you will always find me acquiescent and respectful if you approve of my heart's choice.

THE MARQUIS.

Leave, and do not force me to invoke the justice of men to tear you from this place.

THE CHEVALIER.

I will leave, so long as Julie can follow me, and that you promise to unite us.

THE MARQUIS.

You resist although you have just sullied yourself by this crime? An abduction in this sacred sanctuary...Do you realise where such profanation can lead you?

THE CHEVALIER.

To nothing, in this time of enlightenment and justice. I am not profaning the Altars, I serve them by defending oppressed innocence. Attribute the need for my disguise solely to the horrible tyranny that you exercise over this innocent victim. Each one of us is free to choose. The laws of humanity, the rights of nature, will protect us against fanaticism and the vengeance of pride.

THE MARQUIS.

If I were to listen to my fury alone....Beware of irritating me further....Go, I say, before I give in to my indignation.

THE VICAR GENERAL, *aside*.

What a favourable moment for me to take revenge on this rebellious priest! Let me hold him responsible for the wrongdoing of these young people. (*To Monsieur de Leuville.*) I will go and fetch reinforcements, and come back straight away. (*He exits.*)

#### SCENE VII.

THE SAME, EXCEPT THE VICAR GENERAL.

THE CHEVALIER.

I have already told you: I will only leave accompanied by Julie, to go to the foot of the Altars to ratify the vow I have made to her.

THE MARQUIS, *to the Abbess*.

Madame, allow me to call in the Law that I may have recourse to justice in order to punish the disrespectful audacity of one who dares profane this sacred place.

THE ABBESS.

Monsieur, you have my permission, we need an example. You owe it to the creed, to the religion, to heaven itself.

THE PRIEST.

Ah! Monsieur, what will you do? Fury is blinding you, it is your son whose loss you are seeking. His crime is excusable. Youth, beauty, Julie's misfortune, have led him astray. Listen to softer council. He will submit if the ceremony is delayed.

THE ABBESS.

What words from a Pastor! Is this how you defend these Virgins of God from worldly passion.

THE CHEVALIER.

Very well, given this condition I will no longer insist, as long as I am promised, solemnly, that Julie will no longer be tormented, and that I will be free to see her in the presence of my father and all the Nuns, so that I can convince them that my intentions are pure and laudable.

THE MARQUIS.

Listen to him, he is still presuming to lay down the law. For the last time, no respite if you persist.

THE CHEVALIER.

In the face of inhumanity and injustice, disobedience is a duty.

THE MARQUIS.

Your loss is inevitable, ingrate, I will disinherit you, and have you locked up for the rest of your days.

JULIE, *throwing herself at the Marquis's feet.*

Ah! Monsieur, have pity on your son, I alone am guilty.

THE MARQUIS.

There is only one way left to save him, it is to instantly go up to the Altar and pronounce your vows. I swear I will forget his crime.

JULIE, *getting up.*

Oh God! Give me courage. Forgive my weakness if my heart belies what my mouth will utter. (*She walks up to the Altar, with a swift movement the Chevalier stops her.*)

THE CHEVALIER.

Julie, what are you doing? (*Julie, after disengaging herself, walks to the Altar.*)

THE PRIEST.

Stop, unfortunate girl, violence is manifest: God rejects vows that are not freely pronounced. (*To the Abbess.*) Madame, I enjoin you, with all the authority of religion, to prevent the sacrilege that would befall you and those you rule. (*Aside.*) But, what do I hear, a crowd approaches! The law is coming to our aid! Oh divine providence! Save the victim.

#### SCENE VIII.

THE SAME, THE COMMISSARY, THE VICAR GENERAL, ANTOINE, [SOLDIERS].

THE PRIEST, *to the Commissary.*

Come, Sir, come and join me in stopping the violence that they are seeking to exercise against this innocent creature. True Magistrates support the oppressed.

THE VICAR GENERAL, *aside.*

Wretched man. (*Aloud.*) Do you think that this gentleman is unaware of his duty or what he owes to law and order? No not flatter yourself that you can lead him astray: to take away by force a young person who yearns to devote herself to God!

THE PRIEST, *to the Commissary.*

I leave to your judgement the care of punishing the guilty. A father may give up his own son, but as for the Novice, I will defend her against all of you; the Gentleman [sic] that you have brought will place her under the protection of the law.

THE ABBESS.

Are those who have no connection to the world still dependant on its laws?

THE COMMISSAIRE, *firmly.*

I believe that they have never been exempt from it in any century. Did you call for me, Madame, in order to refuse them? If you believed that you could escape them, you are wrong, and to prove it, I will begin by ordering you to no longer exercise your authority over the victim who refuses to devote herself to the Altars: from this moment she is free in this sanctuary, while awaiting for the Tribunal to decide on her leaving if she prefers to live in the world.

JULIE.

No, Sir, I do not wish to leave, I cherish my refuge, but let me not be forced to offend Heaven any longer. (*To the Chevalier.*) Farewell, Monsieur, forget the unhappy Julie, and renew your bonds with a father whom you should obey. (*She exits.*)

THE CHEVALIER.

What, Julie! What, are you abandoning me! She's left without hearing me. (*Throwing himself at his father's feet.*) Ah! Take pity on my despair! If you do not grant me Julie, I will kill myself in your presence. (*He pulls out a pistol, and goes as if to blow out his brains; a Guard stops his arm.*)

THE MARQUIS, *to the Commissary.*

You see, Monsieur, with what violence?....

THE COMMISSARY.

This concerns me, Soldiers, seize this young madman. (*To the Chevalier.*) I am angry, Monsieur, that your imprudence obliges me to take this precaution; give up your arms, unless you wish to force me to use violence.

THE CHEVALIER.

Sir, I obey.

## SCENE IX.

THE SAME, ANTOINE.

ANTOINE.

Quick, Monsieur le Commissaire, come quick, the street's full of people and the gates of the Convent 'll be forced open unless you bring order.

THE ABBESS.

What are you saying, Antoine? And why are Virgins in their sacred sanctuary being troubled.

ANTOINE.

Ah! Madame Abbess, they say you knows full well, I'd never dare say all that is mentioned on your account, on Monsieur de Leuville's and on the Vicar General's; my eardrum was shattered by it. While the people speaks so the Novice won't pronounce her vows.

THE VICAR GENERAL, *to the Priest.*

There, Sir, is the fruit of your forbearance!

THE PRIEST.

There, Sir, are the effects of your persecution. (*To the Commissary.*) Come, Monsieur, let us go and calm these agitated people. Let your kindness, rather than your severity, restore them to their duty.

End of the second Act.

ACT III.

FIRST SCENE.

SISTER AGATHE, SISTER FÉLICITÉ.

SISTER AGATHE.

Come, come, hurry along, my Sister, I made a sign to you in the refectory and no doubt you realise why.

SISTER FÉLICITÉ.

If I have an idea, my Sister, it is surely to talk about Sister Julie's adventure. Now the enigma is explained: it's a man, a man, my Sister, who leads her astray, away from God.

SISTER AGATHE.

A man! Paradise will never be open to her, to abandon God for a mortal! But, my Sister, like her we are also to be pitied, you don't know what I have heard.

SISTER FÉLICITÉ, *interrupting her.*

What, my Sister. Ah! Don't hide anything from me, I'm always the last in the Convent to hear any news.

SISTER AGATHE.

Ah! My Sister, if only I were ignorant, like you, of all that threatens us!

SISTER FÉLICITÉ.

You make me tremble, my Sister, are there still some men hidden in the Convent?

SISTER AGATHE.

No, my Sister, but soon they will have no need to hide, they will enter freely in our Cloisters; vows will no longer be pronounced, and each one of us will be what we will, or what we can, for you will allow, my Sister, that we are attached to our customs, and if our dissolution takes place, with no thought of the consequences, it will expose us to unusual temptations.

SISTER FÉLICITÉ, *in a hypocritical tone.*

Ah! My Sister, what have you told me? I feel myself dying of fright. And will we be allowed to marry too? I tremble at it! Men are dreadful.

SISTER AGATHE.

My Sister, try and get over it, you're not there yet; it is true that the advances should make us tremble. Well! Having spent the best years of our youth in Cloisters, will we be forced to reappear in the world, weakened by all imaginable privations!

SISTER FÉLICITÉ.

My Sister, I am only twenty-three, do you find me very changed since I have been amongst you?

SISTER AGATHE.

I am two years older than you, Sister Félicité, do you find me very drawn?

SISTER FÉLICITÉ.

You are as fresh as a rose, Sister Agathe.

SISTER AGATHE.

You delight me. If you return to the world, you will not fail, my Sister, to find Chevaliers as Sister Julie has; but Sister, let us part, here is the Abbess.

### SCENE II.

THE ABBESS, SISTER FÉLICITÉ, SISTER AGATHE, SEVERAL NUNS.

THE ABBESS.

Sister Agathe, ask Sister Tourière to call Antoine, he must come and speak to me here. I think he is in the garden, wave to him from the transept, do not go down to the parlour. Go, and come back quickly. (*Sister Agathe exits, bending to the ground in obeisance to the Abbess.*)

### SCENE III.

THE SAME, EXCEPT SISTER AGATHE.

*Sister Félicité brings a chair for the Abbess.*

THE ABBESS.

I'm much obliged, Sister Félicité, you are thoughtful, and the most methodical of the young Nuns. (*Aside.*) I must lead them very gently in these troubled times; it is the youngest who are the most cross-grained. (*Aloud, as she sits down.*) What an affront to us, my Sisters, that Sister Julie has shown by her example that we were not immune to temptation! Sisters of God, as alarming as it is unexpected this fall is a sign of Heaven's wrath. Beelzebub is on the earth; my Sisters, do not doubt it; we are approaching the end of the world. May the guardian Angel be among us: let us pray once more to keep at bay the ruination that seems ready to fall upon this peaceful sanctuary. Come, my Sisters, come, let us redouble our flagellations. (*Several Sisters grimace.*)

SISTER FÉLICITÉ, *aside*.

That ceremony's out of fashion.

A NUN, *whispering to Sister Félicité*.

What are you saying, Sister Félicité. For the most disciplined of Nuns, it is hardly penitential.

### SCENE IV.

THE SAME, AGATHE, *bowing to the Abbess.*

AGATHE.

Madame, Antoine has gone out, Monsieur de Leuville and the Vicar General ask to speak to you.

THE ABBESS.

Show them in, I am beholden to them, they are the only protectors left to us, by God's grace. Go in my Sisters. (*The Nuns exit one side, bowing to the Abbess; the Marquis and the Vicar General enter from the other.*)

SCENE V.

THE ABBESS, M. DE LEUVILLE, THE VICAR GENERAL.

THE MARQUIS.

Madame, although I do not agree with the Vicar General, I could not refuse to accompany him. He assures me that you can consecrate Julie at the Altar despite the Magistrate's prohibition.

THE ABBESS.

Sir, I must in order to set a good example, if I can. I had called my Gardener to beg you to both join me here, precisely to suggest this to you. I congratulate myself that Heaven gave us both the same thought, pious souls are united in saintly sympathy! Here are my suggestions. I will keep Julie under observation, far from the eyes of Sister Angélique; she is emotional, anxious, troubled; the fear that you may disinherit your son and that he may be locked up will encourage her to pronounce her vows straight away. All is calm at the moment, I will have her come before you.

SCENE VI.

THE SAME, ANTOINE, *listening from the back of the stage, and having heard the Abbesses's last words.*

ANTOINE, *aside.*

Wow! That's 'ow we make a mockery of justice and the rest of us too, I didn't set things out on such a good path for 'er to pronounce 'er vows. I'll first let the Priest know, he's the nearest to the Convent, and he alone is worth two, and after I'll go and get Monsieur le Chevalier and the Judge. (*He exits.*)

SCENE VII.

THE SAME, *except ANTOINE.*

THE ABBESS, *to Monsieur de Leuville.*

You seem to be disconcerted, Monsieur.

THE VICAR GENERAL.

I no longer recognise Monsieur de Leuville. If your courage leaves us, then all hope of preserving the honour of the Altars goes with it.

THE ABBESS.

Yes, Sir, the more the step is perilous the more one must know how to exert oneself in order to take it. The people of the Convent, Nuns, Novices, Pensioners, all are aware that your son is Julie's lover; that under cover of a sacred vestment he profaned this sanctuary; Julie, pronouncing her vows, would calm minds, reaffirm the faith, and no one could doubt that it was Heaven who produced this great reversal. Julie rebellious, Julie in love, then a repentant Julie will produce, in that moment, a miraculous effect; but she must be persuaded to make this sacrifice voluntarily and for that we depend on you alone.

THE VICAR GENERAL.

What we have failed to gain through force we must obtain through deceit. But, Monsieur, you seem not to approve our plan?

THE MARQUIS.

Alas! you are both aware of my adventure with my Sister's spouse. This secret is still shrouded in the shadows; I fear that my sister may discover it at the very moment you drag her daughter to the Altars.

THE ABBESS.

Fear naught, Monsieur, Angélique is locked up and can only be let out on my orders.

THE MARQUIS.

And are you not concerned that, by informing your Nuns, she may win all of them over?

THE ABBESS.

I will take measures, but the most pressing thing is to curb Julie. We have no time to lose. You must see her and you must tell her of your intentions.

THE MARQUIS.

I do not know if at this moment it is not pity, rather than fear, that speaks to me on behalf of this unfortunate child....nonetheless I will stifle these inner murmurings....Yes, I hope that I can finally overcome them.

THE VICAR GENERAL.

It is in your interest that people remain unaware of this girl's existence, and once her vows, are pronounced, a thick veil will cover up her birth. Angélique herself would not dare tear it down, and your peace of mind will be forever assured, alongside that of the Abbess.

THE MARQUIS.

I concede: may we never repent of this stratagem!

*The Abbess goes to the altar, and rings using a bell pull.*

SCENE VIII.

THE SAME, SISTER AGATHE.

THE ABBESS.

Sister Agathe, fetch Sister Julie. She must come alone, do you understand?

SISTER AGATHE, *bowing*.

Yes, Madame, I understand clearly, you will be obeyed. (*She exits.*)

SCENE IX.

THE SAME, *except* SISTER AGATHE.

THE MARQUIS, *aside*.

Yet another problem! For all my dissimulation, her youth, her misfortune, her generosity towards my son, deep in my soul it all counts in her favour.

THE VICAR GENERAL.

Be sure, Monsieur, to show yourself hardened to tears and lamentations.

THE MARQUIS.

I will renew my efforts, but I am not sure to succeed.

SCENE X.

THE SAME, JULIE.

THE ABBESS.

Draw closer, unfortunate young woman that Heaven is still protecting; come, my daughter, come, cease to fear our presence. We only want what is best for you.

JULIE, *sorrowfully, aside*.

Heaven! Monsieur de Leuville! What will become of me in my misfortune!

THE ABBESS.

I am assured that you have not engaged Monsieur's son in steps that would bring about his downfall should you refuse to save him.

JULIE.

Eh! what can I do, Madame; has Monsieur not himself given up his son into the hands of Justice?

THE VICAR GENERAL.

Yes: but he is the father, and if you joined with him, his son would have nothing to fear; his tranquility, his honour, the repose of the Convent in which you have lived since childhood, all depends on your renunciation of the world.

JULIE, *to the Marquis*.

I thought, Sir, that we had agreed to defer the moment that called me to the Altars.

THE ABBESS.

Ah, my daughter! Is there a more favourable one than the one in which you find yourself? Your vows, once pronounced, will silence slander: Heaven will protect you, the behaviour of Monsieur's son will be seen as the youthful imprudence of a young man in

which you had no part, his father will not disinherit him, and by doing your duty you will be making him happy.

JULIE.

Cruel duty! So be it, you demand it, I consent. (*To the Marquis.*) But promise me, Sir, that you will pardon your son, and that you will never reproach him for his behaviour.

THE MARQUIS, *a little less severe.*

Yes, my child, yes, unfortunate Julie, I promise to forget it all, to take an interest in you, and to always be a father to you.

JULIE.

These words reassure me, I feel calmer. (*To the Abbess.*) Well, Madame, order the ceremony. It is done.....

*The Abbess rings.*

#### SCENE XI.

THE SAME, SEVERAL NUNS.

THE ABBESS.

Come closer, my Sisters, carry the mortuary cloth, and let the agony be tolled.<sup>20</sup> The church will be open to the people once the ceremony is over, lest it be interrupted. (*Addressing the Nuns, while Sister Agathe drapes the mortuary cloth in the middle of the Stage, at the foot of the Altar.*) See, my Sisters, the example that Julie is giving you. Satan had set a trap for her, God frees her from it through his divine grace.

JULIE, *aside.*

Alas! May this clement God hear the fire that burns in my heart!

THE ABBESS, *taking her by the hand.*

Come, my Sister, come, God is waiting for you with open arms.

*Julie advances, hears the bell, and faints into the arms of the Abbess.*

#### SCENE XII.

THE SAME, THE PRIEST.

THE PRIEST.

Heaven, what do I see! I was not deceived. (*To the Vicar General and the Abbess.*) Minister of Peace, and you, Madame, is this how you keep your promise?

THE VICAR GENERAL.

What right have you to speak in this way?

THE PRIEST.

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<sup>20</sup> The mortuary cloth and agony, or death knell, symbolised the postulant's renunciation of the world. Generally postulants spent the days preceding their initiation in meditation, thus the abbess's haste is particularly unseemly.

The right that belongs to my nature; that of a free religion that you should defend if you understood your duty: this duty that you may disapprove of in me, but that Heaven approves.

THE VICAR GENERAL.

It ill becomes you to invoke heaven, you who offend it.

THE PRIEST.

I who serve it, I who at least seeks to interpret its wise decrees for the good.

THE VICAR GENERAL.

You are in the wrong, I can tell you.

THE PRIEST.

You more than I, Sir. If I am not mistaken, my error at least tends to harm no one.

THE VICAR GENERAL.

Carry on, Monsieur, carry on, and through your wise counsel distance Julie from the Altars where she was about to consecrate herself willingly, before you appeared.

THE PRIEST.

What are you suggesting? I, distance from God a heart that would willingly devote itself to his religion! Give me more credit. If Julie is decided, if her vows are not forced....

THE ABBESS, *interrupting him*.

No, Monsieur, no, Julie wishes to renounce the world, and she herself has ordered the preparing of the ceremony.

THE PRIEST, *to Julie*.

So, my child, I cannot disapprove of your resolve, the world has its hardship, the sanctuary is sweeter for truly religious souls; but is this really a voluntary decision?

JULIE, *deliriously*.

Yes, Monsieur, do not doubt it. Yes, I will voluntarily renounce all that is dear to me in the world. God will take pity on my grief, on this torn heart, (*Crying*.) and I will no doubt be happy. To save my lover, I am chaining myself to these Altars with eternal bonds; he will follow me everywhere; deprived of him in every way, he will be always in my sight. In my sweet dreams, his picture will help me to bear the weight of my chains. At the feet of my God my lover will follow me. I will show Him the one that my heart adores.....

THE PRIEST, *greatly surprised, to the Abbess*.

O Heaven! Is this the resolve of the unfortunate girl.

THE ABBESS, *embarrassed*.

Sir, I am as surprised as you are. (*To Julie*.) Julie, are you forgetting....My child, return to reason, if you knew the world and its dangers, its perfidy, you would tremble in fear and this retreat would no longer seem repugnant.

THE PRIEST.

Eh! Madame, end this most cruel persecution. If the manifest suffering of this orphan cannot touch your soul, at least consider your own interests: a general agitation excites the Kingdom; the most important of all revolutions is almost upon us; the abuses

and tyranny of your kind, Madame, and of ours, have for a long time discouraged hearts and soured spirits. In the end constant persecution produces independence, and independence can produce the calamities of the type now threatening this unfortunate Kingdom. Fear attracting men's vengeance to this house, at times it can be swifter than that of God. Is it not up to us to give an example of humanity and justice? The people already know that you are forcing a victim to consecrate herself to the altars, and I can see them inclined to defend her. It takes only a spark to light a fire, and if we want to save our august religion from ruin.....

THE VICAR GENERAL, *interrupting*.

Are you presuming to save the religion whilst you yourself envelop it in licence and disorder?

THE ABBESS, *to Julie*.

You alone, my daughter, can avenge the God we adore, and glorify his Altars.

JULIE.

Well! Madame, I can no longer resist: what would I become in the world, unknown, without assistance, and deprived of all that I love? So long as my benefactress is made available to me. (*To the Priest.*) Respectable Pastor, do not deprive me of your presence, deign to come and see me sometimes, and inspire my strength and courage.

THE ABBESS, *embracing Julie*.

My daughter, all your wishes will be granted.

*The Abbess makes a sign to the Nun who tolls the agony. Julie goes to prostrate herself at the foot of the altar. A loud noise is heard.*

### SCENE XIII.

THE SAME, THE CHEVALIER, THE COMMISSARY, ANTOINE, SEVERAL SOLDIERS.

JULIE, *getting up, troubled*.

Heaven! It's him!

THE CHEVALIER, *in a headlong dash*.

Yes, cruel one, it is I who have come to tear you from your enforced vows. (*To the Commissary*) And you, Sir, the organ of the law, see how she is treated in this sacred place.

THE COMMISSARY, *to the Abbess*.

Madame, what does all this paraphernalia signify? Had I not ordered you to suspend the ceremony?

THE ABBESS.

What right have you, Sir, to come and command a heart? Julie wishes to stay amongst us. A momentary lapse could not outweigh her duty or her God within her soul. She is asking to take her vows; can I refuse such a praiseworthy intent? Far from opposing myself to her zeal, I have encouraged it. I have done my duty, and you Sir, knowing the importance of my position, must judge whether or not I need reproach myself for it.

THE COMMISSARY.

No, Madame, if it is so, the Novice must pronounce her vows in my presence and must make her last wishes known to me.

THE ABBESS, *whispering to Julie.*

My daughter, if you resist you will lose your lover and the creed of your God; courage, and you save the Altars. Remember Angélique.

JULIE, *aside.*

By sacrificing myself I am the only one lost, and I save everything I love; it's done, I am determined. (*She walks towards the Altar.*)

THE CHEVALIER, *alarmed.*

Julie, my dear Julie, what are you going to do? (*She is held back.*)

JULIE.

My duty...Attach myself by an eternal tie to the Altars. I swear.....

SCENE XIV, THE LAST.

THE SAME, ANGÉLIQUE.

ANGÉLIQUE *entering just as Julie is about to pronounce her vows.*

STOP! No, this awful sacrifice will not take place. (*She takes her in her arms.*) No, barbarian, she will not be torn from my arms. Ministers of a peaceful God, saintly Virgins, and all of you listening to me, there is my brother (*She points to the Marquis.*) and the murderer of my husband; here is my daughter, all that remains of a dolorous union.

JULIE.

You, my mother! Ah my heart had already told me.

THE CHEVALIER.

My aunt, my dear aunt!

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Know that having married without his permission, this implacable brother provoked my husband to a duel in which he lost his life. Locked up in this Cloister by an order that was an abuse of authority, endless persecutions forced me to take the veil, and this child was placed at my side; but thanks to a cruelty of particular refinement, and appalling threats, I was forbidden from making myself known to her, or to call her by the sweet name of daughter.

THE MARQUIS, *aside.*

This is just what I had expected! Am I to be exposed to such confusion!

THE PRIEST, *to the Marquis.*

Sir, recognise the hand of God who wishes to lead you to repent. There are so many reasons to be just! The reproaches of your own conscience, the indignation, horror and contempt that will be heaped upon you. Ah! You could still avoid all these troubles by sincerely returning to virtue and the sentiments of compassion and nature.

THE MARQUIS.

Oh! Lacerating remorse! Barbarous prejudices! To what excesses have you led me....Wise and generous Pastor, intercede mercifully on my behalf with Heaven and with men.

THE PRIEST, *to Angélique, Julie and the Chevalier.*

My children, come closer; your father, your brother is returned to you. (*Sister Angélique holds her arms out to the Marquis, the Chevalier and Julie throw themselves at his feet.*)

THE MARQUIS, *raising them up.*

My children, what are you doing? It is I who should ask your forgiveness. Victims of my hate, and you, my Sister, whom I persecuted for so long, will you ever forget my wrongs towards you?

SISTER ANGÉLIQUE.

Oh my brother, they are forgotten.

THE MARQUIS.

Come to my arms, come and ease my heart of this weighty remorse that oppresses it. (*He presses her to his bosom.*) Nature! How unhappy is he who rejects its salutary joys! Never have I so delighted in the happiness of being alive. My friends, can you forgive me?

THE CHEVALIER.

Oh my father, no longer reflect on the past.

THE MARQUIS.

I will reflect on it, my son, to remind me of all that I must do to make amends for my persecutions. (*He takes Julie and the Chevalier's hands.*) My niece, and you my friend, be happy. Let my example serve as a lesson for you. Remember that your prime duty is the happiness of your children. (*To Angélique.*) My sister, you ratify their choice. (*He leaves his children, Angélique takes his place.*)

THE MARQUIS, *to the Abbess.*

Madame, you witnessed my injustice, you witness my repentance. I leave you to fulfil an important obligation both for you and for me. My sister is retained in this Cloister by indissoluble vows, you are charged with her wellbeing. Ah! May she henceforth find joy in the calm and tranquility that her virtue deserves.

THE ABBESS.

I promise she will, Sir; this touching scene has taught me a new duty, and the Priest will henceforth be the Pastor that I consult regarding the administration of my house.

THE PRIEST.

Madame, it is not to me that you owe justice, it is to truth, it is to the creed of a God who is the enemy of persecution. But let us put the past behind us, and may a sweeter moral make these asylums less redoubtable in future.

ANTOINE.

Phew, I came out of that with glory, what a lot of to-do, and my shrewd Novice nearly made us all come a cropper. Turns out it's all come round to our advantage. Chances are she'll not jib at saying yes to the Chevalier. No doubt God 'll permit us to live

honestly and quietly in a Convent but I reckon he's 'appier even if we marry, and I can assure you (*To the Audience*) Ladies and Gentlemen, that I'm going to wed as soon as I can.

*End of the third and last Act.*