

CHRISTINE is just twenty, LEA, still an adolescent. LEA gazes vaguely into the distance. CHRISTINE looks straight ahead. They move apart. CHRISTINE begins polishing a brass candlestick. LEA looks out.)

LEA. Dear Christine. When Maman left me here on Friday, I thought I would die. They didn't want to take me at first, but Maman told Madame Crespelle I was fifteen. Christine, I wish you could see what they eat. You can't imagine the desserts. The cook told me Madame's favorite dish is duck with cherries and Monsieur's, chicken with champagne. I'm hungry all the time. But it isn't as bad as I expected. I even have my own room. Do you think you could ask Madame Roussel to change your day off to Wednesday, like mine? (She pauses.) Today Madame Crespelle smiled at me. She was pleased with how the silver looked. I had been polishing it all morning. It was worth every minute for Madame's smile. When she smiles she looks just like Sister Veronica. (A bell rings. LEA moves closer to CHRISTINE.) Three days ago Maman came and took me away. She said I could earn more money somewhere else. I was just getting used to the Crespelles, but I'm getting four more francs a month and Maman's promised to let me keep one of them. The Cottins have one daughter, Mademoiselle Sophie. Her birthday is next week. She's only two months older than me. She's so pretty. Her skin is like milk. And Christine, you should hear her play the piano. (She pauses.) Madame Cottin counts everything. Even the chocolates in the glass bowl. But I remember everything you taught me. And I think Madame will be pleased with me. (She pauses.) Every morning Madame Cottin examines my fingernails before I make the beds. Her things are so delicate. So many ruffles. So many buttons. You wouldn't believe how many buttons. It takes me two hours to iron one

dress. And even then Madame isn't satisfied. (She pauses.) In this house I'm always afraid I'll do something wrong. Not like you, Christine. You never make mistakes (She pauses. Longingly.) Oh Christine, if only Maman would place us together. (A bell rings, almost interrupting LEA's last sentence. LEA goes down on her hands and knees and begins polishing the floor. CHRISTINE looks out.)

CHRISTINE. (Tender.) Don't worry, Lea. You don't have to worry. It's only a matter of time. Just time before you get used to it. (She pauses.) Don't worry what they say to you. (She pauses.) I mean . . . don't take it to heart. I know that's hard in the beginning. But you'll learn. It's just time. (She pauses.) You'll see. Remember what Maman says—"When you've worked for them as long as I have—then you'll see." (She pauses.) Some are better than others, Lea. Believe me. You just never know. (She pauses.) Don't worry about writing every day. I know how tired you must be. But don't hide anything from me. And if—if they make you cry—I want you to let me know right away. (A bell rings. Light comes up on the interior of the DANZARD house in Le Mans, France. A combined dining room and sitting room is divided from the kitchen by a narrow staircase going up to a landing, and continuing to a maid's room. The house can also be created in a less realistic way. However, the staircase is an intrinsic element of the structure of the set.)

CHRISTINE and LEA pick up shabby suitcases. They smile at each other. They go upstairs to the maid's room. The room is shabby, small. There is a single bed, a night table, a sink and a mirror. There is a small skylight. LEA opens the door and rushes into the room. CHRISTINE follows her.

## SCENE 2

✓ *Early morning. CHRISTINE and LEA's room is almost dark. They are asleep. The alarm clock rings. CHRISTINE turns it off. She reaches out to touch LEA, curled up beside her. Gently she touches her shoulder, strokes her hair.*

LEA. (*Turning toward CHRISTINE.*) Is it time?

CHRISTINE. Sleep, turtle. Go back in your shell.

LEA. But—

CHRISTINE. Sleep. There's time. I'll wake you. (*LEA turns over again. She is holding the small blanket their Mother has made. CHRISTINE covers LEA's shoulder with the blanket. Shivering, she gets out of bed, stands on the cold floor. She puts on her shoes.*) Lea. . . it's almost six.

LEA. Mmmm. Another minute, Christine. Just one more.

CHRISTINE. Just one—all right. (*At the sink, she washes her face and hands. She shivers from the cold water, fixes her hair in the mirror. She removes her long*

*white nightgown and puts on her maid's uniform. She goes over to the bed. Tickling LEA's feet.*) Come on now. Come on. (*She pulls the blanket off LEA.*)

LEA. (*Sitting up.*) It's freezing here. Is it always like this?

CHRISTINE. (*Laying out LEA's uniform on the bed.*) Always.

LEA. Everywhere you've been?

CHRISTINE. Everywhere.

LEA. (*Putting on her shoes.*) I polished the banister yesterday. Did you notice how it shines?

CHRISTINE. I noticed. (*To herself.*) I thought it would be easier with two of us.

LEA. You're disappointed, aren't you? You're unhappy with me here. Tell me.

CHRISTINE. Don't be silly.

LEA. I can't seem to do anything right. I can't seem to please you.

CHRISTINE. You please me, turtle. You please me more than anything.

LEA. You're so quick. You get things done in a minute.

CHRISTINE. You're fine the way you are.

LEA. (*Struggling with her nightgown.*) Maybe this was a mistake. I slow you down.

CHRISTINE. Stop it, Lea.

LEA. (*Still struggling.*) Sister Veronica always said I was too slow. She said I'd never be as quick as you.

CHRISTINE. What did she know?

LEA. You used to think she knew everything.

CHRISTINE. (*Helping LEA take off her nightgown.*) That was a long time ago. I've gotten over all that now.

LEA. You were famous at the convent. Your sewing! They still have that dress you made for the Virgin Mary. She's still wearing it.

CHRISTINE. And yet I remember, when I was at Saint

Mary's, I could never go down the stairs like the others. One, two, one, two. I could never take a step with my left foot. It was always my right, my right, my right. I used to envy them running down the stairs when it took me forever.

LEA. Tell me a story, Christine. Just one—before we go down.

CHRISTINE. Which one?

LEA. When I was little.

CHRISTINE. You're still little.

LEA. No, I mean really little—you know—the story with the horse.

CHRISTINE. Again? Don't you ever get tired of it.

LEA. No—tell me.

CHRISTINE. (*Making the bed.*) When you were just a tiny thing, Maman sent me out one day to get bread. You came with me, the way you always did. And as we were walking, you let go of my hand and ran into the street to pick something up.

LEA. Tell it slower. You're telling it too fast.

CHRISTINE. It was a *long* narrow street—you remember—on a hill. At the top of the street a horse and carriage loaded with bottles was coming down and galloping right toward you. I ran into the street and pulled you across and pushed you down into the gutter with me. (*Falling down on the bed with LEA.*) What a noise when the horse galloped by! Everyone was screaming. Maman said the horse had gone mad. And when we stood up, we were both bleeding. But it was the same wound. It started on my arm and went down across your wrist. Look—(*She lines up her arm with LEA'S.*) We have it still.

LEA. And Maman—what did she say?

CHRISTINE. Oh Maman. Maman was terrified. You know how her face gets. She screamed at us.

LEA. And then—then what happened?

CHRISTINE. Then there was the gypsy—Mad Flower they used to call her.

LEA. And what did she say?

CHRISTINE. She said—oh you—you know it so well.

LEA. But tell me again, Christine. Tell me again.

CHRISTINE. They're bound for life, Mad Flower said.

✓ Bound in blood. (*A bell rings.*)

## SCENE 3

*In this scene the dining room and kitchen are seen simultaneously. MADAME DANZARD and ISABELLE are sitting at the dining room table, finishing the first course of lunch. CHRISTINE and LEA come into the kitchen. They are wearing their uniforms: CHRISTINE, the long severe cook's apron, LEA, the delicate serving apron.*

MADAME DANZARD. Don't toy with your food, Isabelle. It's so disagreeable. Always making those little piles.

ISABELLE. I'm not, Maman.

MADAME DANZARD. You mean to tell me I don't see what you're doing.

ISABELLE. I'm not toying, Maman.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Coldly.*) Very well, my dear, call it what you will. (*She rings a small round bell. LEA and CHRISTINE come into the dining room. MADAME DANZARD looks them over carefully. LEA is carrying a platter of veal on a tray. She presents the platter for MADAME DANZARD'S inspection, as CHRISTINE stands to the side. MADAME DANZARD smiles to herself. LEA puts the platter down and she and CHRISTINE go back into the kitchen. MADAME DANZARD and ISABELLE serve themselves and eat in silence for a few moments.*)

CHRISTINE. (*Following LEA into the kitchen.*) She liked it. Did you see? Did you see her face?

LEA. She likes everything you do.

CHRISTINE. She sees everything. (*She sits down at the kitchen table and begins to prepare string beans. Everything CHRISTINE does in the kitchen is neat, quick, impeccable. The bowls and plates seem to move like magic beneath her fingers. LEA is clearly a beginner. She sits down beside CHRISTINE and begins, clumsily, to help her with the beans.*)

MADAME DANZARD. (*Savouring the veal.*) This veal is delicious.

ISABELLE. Of course, you love veal. (*She looks at her mother.*)

MADAME DANZARD. Don't you?

ISABELLE. You know I don't. It's too heavy in the middle of the day.

MADAME DANZARD. Not the way she's prepared it. Light as a feather.

ISABELLE. I've heard it ruins the complexion.

MADAME DANZARD. Where did you hear that?

ISABELLE. I read it.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Scornfully.*) Really. Where?

ISABELLE. Somewhere. I don't remember.

MADAME DANZARD. Certain days of the month, my dear, you really are worse than others.

ISABELLE. That shouldn't surprise you.

MADAME DANZARD. Isabelle, if you continue in this vein you're going to ruin my meal. (*She eats with a certain relish.*) Wait till the Blanchards come to dinner. I'll have her make her rabbit paté. Won't that surprise them! The best cook we've had in years.

ISABELLE. Oh I don't know — Marie wasn't so bad.

MADAME DANZARD. Marie? Please. The way she

cooked a pot au feu — ahhh — It still makes me shudder.

ISABELLE. You exaggerate, Maman.

MADAME DANZARD. Exaggerate? I'm being kind. Marie would have murdered a veal like this. (*Wiping her mouth with her napkin.*) Done to perfection. I hope we never lose her. And she always buys the best.

ISABELLE. I don't know how she does it with the money you give her.

MADAME DANZARD. It's what I've always given them. You have no idea how lucky we are, Isabelle. The servants I've seen in my day. (*She watches ISABELLE stuff potatoes into her mouth.*) They eat like birds. (*Looking at ISABELLE.*) Always looking so neat, so perfect. You wouldn't think they were maids at all. Though I must admit the younger one gives me trouble — she's so young.

ISABELLE. I like the younger one.

MADAME DANZARD. Well she's quiet. I'll say that for her.

ISABELLE. (*Mercilessly chewing on the veal.*) Quiet? She never speaks. Neither of them do.

MADAME DANZARD. I suppose they must talk between themselves.

ISABELLE. I can't imagine about what.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Looking at ISABELLE.*) Well, maybe they pray. (*She laughs.*) That's how it is when you're brought up by the nuns. (*They both laugh. Abruptly stopping the laughter.*) Will you stop it,

✓ Isabelle. Look at that plate. (*She rings the small round bell.*)

✓ CHRISTINE. (*Softly.*) What is it, Lea? Another letter from Maman? (*LEA looks away. Gently.*) Well, go on. Read it. There's no reason to stop just because I came into the room. (*She takes off her long apron and folds it neatly.*)

LEA. I'll read it later.

CHRISTINE. You won't have time later. You're exhausted by ten. Read it now. (*LEA looks at her. Smiling.*) Why don't you read it out loud?

LEA. (*Nervously.*) Do you really want me to?

CHRISTINE. I wouldn't say it otherwise, would I?

LEA. (*Unfolding the letter, begins to read.*) "Lea, my pet, my little dove. I know I'll see you Sunday as usual, but I miss you. Little Lea. You'll always be little."

CHRISTINE. Go on.

LEA. (*Continuing.*) "Don't forget to bring me the money. You forgot last week."

CHRISTINE. Poor Maman.

LEA. Christine—Maman just—

CHRISTINE. Maman just what? (*Changing. Gentle.*) Go ahead. Keep reading.

LEA. (*Going on with the letter.*) "You can't wear your hair that way anymore, Lea. Like a child. All that long hair." (*She stops.*)

CHRISTINE. Well? Don't leave anything out.

LEA. (*Going on.*) "Next Sunday, when you come, I'll fix it for you. It'll be better that way. Like Christine's. Won't fall in the soup." (*LEA looks up, laughing. Christine doesn't smile.*) (*Going back to the letter. Quickly.*) "Or get Christine to fix it for you. But—" (*She stops.*)

CHRISTINE. But what?

LEA. "Tell her to be gentle."

CHRISTINE. (*Snatching the letter from LEA.*) I'm never going back.

LEA. Christine.

CHRISTINE. (*Folding the letter up very small.*) You can go if you want to.

LEA. You know I wouldn't without you.

CHRISTINE. But you still care for her. She loves you.

LEA. But Christine, Christine. Maman loves you too. She's just . . .

CHRISTINE. What?

LEA. . . . scared of you.

CHRISTINE. Scared of me? (*Giving the tiny folded up letter back to LEA.*) You never stick up for me. But that's right. Defend her. Take her part. Like you always do. (*Moving away.*) Once she said that just to look at me made her sick. She couldn't even keep me after the first year. She hated when I cried.

LEA. Christine.

CHRISTINE. At Saint Mary of the Fields, I used to escape. Once a month. No one in this town would have brought me back—you know what they call it here. But your Maman—our Maman—she brought me back every time. In the end all I wanted was to be a nun. A nun! (*She smiles.*) That's all I

wanted. But then of course she took me out. She hadn't expected that. That was against all her plans. I had to work. I had to make money. And she kept all of it. She placed me—and each time I got used to it, she took me out again. Sometimes I'd run away. I ran back to the Sisters. They wanted to keep me. It was Maman, our beloved precious Maman, who would come and drag me out again.

LEA. Don't be angry with me.

CHRISTINE. I'm not angry with you.

LEA. Your face. It looks so—

CHRISTINE. (*Cutting in.*) What? What's the matter with my face?

LEA. It just looked . . . Your face is beautiful. There's nothing wrong with your face.

CHRISTINE. No? (*She takes the hairbrush.*) I'll fix it for you. Just like she said. I'll fix it. (*Tenderly starting to brush LEA'S hair. Longingly.*) If we didn't go back we could have all our Sundays together, just to ourselves. We could walk, we could go to the station and watch the trains come in. We could sit in the square, we could—But no—you wouldn't want that, would you? You want to go back. Don't you? (*Pleading.*) Don't you, Lea? (*LEA is silent.* CHRISTINE changes, violently brushes LEA'S hair.) Of course you do. (*Roughly, she twists LEA'S hair into two buns on either side of her face.*) There. Like this. That's what she meant. (*Pulling LEA over to the mirror above the sink. Raging.*) Look. How do you like it?

LEA. (*Tearing out her hair and sobbing.*) I hate it. (*She grabs the brush from CHRISTINE and tries to fix her own hair, putting it back the way it was. She does this clumsily, jerkily—too upset to get it right.* CHRISTINE watches her in silence, suddenly overwhelmed at what she has done.)

CHRISTINE. I am a monster—aren't I? Just like she says.

LEA. You're not a monster. (*She stops fixing her hair.*)

CHRISTINE. Here. Let me. (*Cautiously, she reaches for the brush. LEA hesitates, turns away.*) I'll do it for you. (*LEA still hesitates.*) Let me do it—please. (*LEA is silent.*) Please. (*Tentatively, LEA holds out the brush. CHRISTINE takes it from her gently. Softly, slowly, she starts brushing LEA'S hair.*) What did you mean when you said my face was beautiful?

LEA. What I said.

CHRISTINE. What's beautiful about it? Tell me one thing.

LEA. (*Looking up at her.*) Your eyes. ✓

## SCENE 5

LEA and CHRISTINE come into their room, wearing their faded dresses and coats of the first scene.

CHRISTINE. I don't want to force you.

LEA. You're not forcing me. We can never go back.

CHRISTINE. She didn't mean you when she told us to get out. She only meant me. *(She takes off her coat.)*

LEA. She meant both of us.

CHRISTINE. Not you, Lea. Not ever you. She'll never stop loving you.

LEA. She'll never forgive me for the money. Never, Christine. You know she won't.

CHRISTINE. But why shouldn't you keep your own money—instead of giving it to her. *(LEA sits on the bed, upset.)* She'll forgive you. You'll see. She'll forgive you. She always has. *(Looking at LEA.)* And Lea, Lea, you know what we'll do with that money? *(LEA is silent.)* We'll save it. We'll save all of it from now on. We'll put it together—yours and mine—and save it. And someday, Lea, someday we'll—we'll—*(LEA looks at her.)*

LEA. Remember what you said—we could spend all our Sundays together.

CHRISTINE. I remember.

LEA. Promise?

CHRISTINE. Promise. *(LEA picks up the small blanket from their mother. She bites the wool with her teeth, loosening a strand. She pulls it, stops, pulls it again.)*

LEA. Here. Hold this. *(She hands CHRISTINE the blanket.)*

CHRISTINE. What are you doing? *(LEA keeps pulling.)* You've had that since you were four. *(As LEA pulls, the loosely crocheted blanket begins to unravel.)* Lea!

LEA. Just hold it. *(She pulls harder.)* Now pull from your end. *(CHRISTINE hesitates.)* Go ahead. Pull it!

CHRISTINE. But—

LEA. Go on. *(CHRISTINE cautiously begins to pull.)* That's it! That's right. Go ahead. Pull it. Pull it. Pull it harder. *(CHRISTINE looks at her.)* Harder. *(CHRISTINE really starts pulling in earnest.)* That's it. Harder. Oh harder. *(She pulls from her end.)* Harder. *(As the blanket unravels faster and faster, they run around the room. They are constricted by the confines of the narrow room. They wind the wool around the bed, the sink. They wind it around each other. LEA, laughing, falls on the bed. CHRISTINE falls beside her.)*

CHRISTINE. *(Laughing.)* No more, no more. *(LEA wraps CHRISTINE even closer to her with the wool.)* *(Breaking away suddenly.)* That's enough. I have to go downstairs.

LEA. It's not time yet. *(Playful.)* Don't you want to play anymore?

CHRISTINE. *(Putting on her apron. Abruptly.)* No. ✓



MADAME DANZARD. (*Calling.*) Isabelle! Isabelle. (*ISABELLE comes into the dining room. MADAME DANZARD holds out a particularly provincial hat.*) Charming, isn't it? (*ISABELLE is silent.*) Well, go ahead. There's no reason to be shy. (*She lunges toward ISABELLE with the hat.*)

ISABELLE. (*Drawing back.*) Oh. It's for me, Maman?

MADAME DANZARD. Of course it's for you. For whom else?

ISABELLE. And you want me to wear it now?

MADAME DANZARD. (*Very serious.*) I don't want you to wear anything else. You haven't forgotten how pretentious the Loupins looked last Sunday in their monstrosities.

ISABELLE. I remember.

MADAME DANZARD. Well, I can't wait to see their faces today. (*ISABELLE puts on the hat.*) Perfect. (*The bell rings.*)

ISABELLE. (*Anxious.*) It's them!

MADAME DANZARD. Early, as usual. Hoping to catch a glimpse of something. Well, they won't see anything today. They'll just have to wait. (*She stands still for a few moments, delightedly looking at her watch. She puts on another hat, if anything even more provincial than ISABELLE'S. Plunging in the stickpin of the hat.*) How do you like mine?

ISABELLE. (*After a pause.*) Adorable.

MADAME DANZARD. Well together—I must say—we make quite a pair. (*The bell rings again. They go out.*)

✓ LEA. I'll never sew like you. Look at this hem. (*She holds up the nightgown and laughs.*) Even my hems are crooked. All those years with the Sisters and I never learned.

CHRISTINE. The Sisters didn't know how to teach you.

Give it to me. I'll do it. (*LEA gives her the nightgown.*) Remember when I used to visit you at the convent? You waited for me at the gate. You were so little and so hungry all the time. (*She laughs.*) You're still hungry all the time.

LEA. Christine.

CHRISTINE. Hmm?

LEA. Can I . . .

CHRISTINE. (*Knowing what LEA wants.*) Can you what?

LEA. Can I look at them again?

CHRISTINE. Of course you can. They're yours. (*LEA jumps up and pulls an old trunk out from under the bed. CHRISTINE smiles. LEA pulls up the lid. The trunk is overflowing with beautiful white lingerie, undergarments trimmed with lace, nightgowns with fluttering ribbons, delicate ruffled chemises.*)

LEA. (*Gathering it all in her arms.*) All of it! All of it! No one sews like you. (*CHRISTINE stops sewing, watches LEA.*) Oh Christine. I can't believe how beautiful they are. (*She buries her face in the clothing.*)

CHRISTINE. (*Holding up the chemise she was sewing.*) Look, it's almost finished.

LEA. (*Raising her head.*) Already?

CHRISTINE. Yes. Come try it on.

LEA. Now?

CHRISTINE. Don't you want to?

LEA. I want to.

CHRISTINE. Well then. (*LEA comes forward.*) Go ahead. I'll close my eyes. (*She looks at LEA.*) I want to be surprised. (*She closes her eyes. LEA takes off her dress and slowly, carefully, puts on the chemise.*)

LEA. Christine . . . you can look now.

CHRISTINE. Can I?

LEA. Yes. (*CHRISTINE opens her eyes.*) It's beautiful.

CHRISTINE. It's you who are beautiful.

LEA. (*Tentatively reaching out her hand.*) I'm cold.

✓ CHRISTINE. (*Going toward her.*) I know.

✓ MADAME DANZARD. (*As she finishes laying out her cards, deftly, neatly, straightening them as she goes along.*) What did you wish for this time? If you don't tell, you won't get it.

ISABELLE. (*Sloppier as she finishes laying out her cards.*) That's not true. You don't have to tell what you wish for.

MADAME DANZARD. Well, I think I can guess. I'm not telling my wish either. Not even if I win.

ISABELLE. Ready Maman?

MADAME DANZARD. I'm ready. But you're not. Look at those cards.

ISABELLE. which cards?

MADAME DANZARD. Those over there. They're going to fall off the table. (*ISABELLE straightens the last cards.*) Good. Now we're ready. (*She and ISABELLE tap their remaining cards on the table three times.*)

ISABELLE. One, two, three . . . begin. Maman—that is not fair.

MADAME DANZARD. What's not fair?

ISABELLE. You started at two.

MADAME DANZARD. I did not. I absolutely did not. However, if you insist, we'll start again.

ISABELLE. One . . . two . . . three . . . start.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Inspecting her cards.*) I don't have anything to start with.

ISABELLE. You always do that. Start first.

MADAME DANZARD. Never. That's your imagination.

ISABELLE. (*Shrieking.*) I saw you.

MADAME DANZARD. Quiet, Isabelle. (*Looking at her cards.*) This is absurd. I can't move a thing. (*She looks over at ISABELLE'S cards. ISABELLE sits pondering.*) Look at you. You have a million things. Don't you see? (*Disgusted.*) Aah.

ISABELLE. Where Maman?

MADAME DANZARD. There. Right there. Right before your eyes. Oh, Isabelle, sometimes you're so slow.

ISABELLE. You think so, Maman?

MADAME DANZARD. Well I'm stuck. Wait a minute. Why didn't I see that seven. Just a minute now. (*She transfers a large block of cards.*) That certainly should make things a little easier. (*Looking at ISABELLE'S cards.*) What's happening over there? That six is still sitting there.

ISABELLE. I see it, Maman. (*She moves the six.*)

MADAME DANZARD. (*Directing as ISABELLE moves her cards.*) And now the nine. Go ahead.

ISABELLE. What nine?

MADAME DANZARD. The nine of diamonds onto the ten of clubs. What's the matter with you?

ISABELLE. Maman please. I can't concentrate.

MADAME DANZARD. What are you talking about? Of course you can concentrate. This is a game of concentration. You have to concentrate. You have to concentrate on every little detail. Otherwise all will be lost. (*Looking over her own cards like a hawk. Excited.*) Red eight on black nine on red ten on—Perfect! That frees my queen and now I can take all these with the jack—(*She lifts a huge block of cards.*)—put them on the queen and . . . let's see what's under here. What's been hiding from me. (*She turns up a card. Disappointed.*) Three of spades. Now what am I going to do with that? (*Suddenly.*) You got an ace, Isabelle. How did that happen? Clubs. My two is buried under that nine. I'll never get it out.

ISABELLE. I've got it, Maman. Look. And the three.

MADAME DANZARD. How did you get them so fast? (*ISABELLE laughs gleefully.*) You're not cheating, are you?

ISABELLE. Maman.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Checking the cards.*) Where is the ace of diamonds? Where is that ace?

ISABELLE. Not the ace of diamonds, Maman. But I've got the ace of spades. And the two, and the—

MADAME DANZARD. Three!

ISABELLE. (*Overlapping and getting there first.*) Three!

MADAME DANZARD. Isabelle! How could you. Blocked again. Incredible.

ISABELLE. What are we having for dinner tonight, Maman?

MADAME DANZARD. Blanquette of veal.

ISABELLE. Veal again?

MADAME DANZARD. (*Looking at her watch.*) They'll be down soon. Ah—there's the four. (*Slapping down the four of spades.*) They never speak anymore. Have you noticed? Not a word. The older one walks by me as if I'm not there. (*LEA comes into the upstairs room, lays a delicate, handmade white coverlet on their bed, places the photograph of herself and CHRISTINE taken at the PHOTOGRAPHER'S on the night table, and goes out again.*)

ISABELLE. I have the five. And the six! The older one was always that way.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Slapping down her cards.*) Seven, eight!

ISABELLE. (*Tapping her mother on the hand.*) One hand, Maman!

MADAME DANZARD. Every Sunday—up in that room alone—it's amazing.

ISABELLE. They've always stuck to themselves.

MADAME DANZARD. They haven't seen their mother in years.

ISABELLE. (*Looking at her mother. Quietly.*) That's just as well.

MADAME DANZARD. You know—I found the older one in the hallway trying to rub a stain off the door.

ISABELLE. I know that stain. It's been there for years. It'll never come off.

MADAME DANZARD. And she knows it. (*Smacking down three more cards as ISABELLE shrieks.*) And the nine, ten, jack! (*She takes a small tidbit from a dish on the table and pops it into her mouth. Making a face.*) What's wrong with her? She's put too much salt in these again.

ISABELLE. (*Laying down a card.*) The queen!

MADAME DANZARD. Have you turned up your three cards yet?

ISABELLE. Not yet. (*She sneaks a card into her lap.*)

MADAME DANZARD. Well, I absolutely refuse to turn—Isabelle! You cheated. I can't believe my eyes.

ISABELLE. I did not.

MADAME DANZARD. You did. You moved that jack of hearts onto the queen of diamonds.

ISABELLE. And—?

MADAME DANZARD. What do you mean—And? You know you can't move red onto red. Move it back.

ISABELLE. It was there before, Maman. I started the whole game that way.

MADAME DANZARD. Isabelle, please stop this lying at once. And just what was happening at the Blanchards the other night?

ISABELLE. Nothing was happening, Maman.

MADAME DANZARD. Nothing? Of course they're so blind—(*ISABELLE sneaks her ace of hearts onto the edge of the table.*) But with a marriage coming, you can't just smile at anyone.

ISABELLE. I wasn't smiling, Maman.

MADAME DANZARD. No? Wait! You put out the ace of hearts without even telling me. Where's my two?

Here it is. My two, my three. (*She slaps them down.*) Where's that four?

ISABELLE. Here Maman. I have it. (*She puts it down.*)

MADAME DANZARD. You don't? You do. Well, I'm turning over my three cards. It's finally come to that. (*She turns up one of the three cards.*) Jacks of hearts. What use is he? Looks just like Jacques Blanchard, doesn't he? Not a place for him here. (*Looking at her watch again.*) Where are they? Have they forgotten the Flintons are coming? What's wrong with them? Do you know that yesterday, coming back from the Loupins, I saw them sitting in the square. At eleven o'clock in the morning! Can you believe that?

ISABELLE. Unbelievable.

MADAME DANZARD. Eleven o'clock in the morning. I didn't say anything when they came back. But they knew. (*She turns over the second card.*) Four of diamonds. Too soon for that. Should I look at the third one? Yes or no?

ISABELLE. Go ahead Maman. Take a chance. (*MADAME turns over her last card. It is the ace of hearts. She smacks it down in the center.*)

MADAME DANZARD. (*Ecstatic.*) Hearts! Just what I was waiting for.

ISABELLE. (*Slapping down an ace of diamonds.*) Diamonds!

MADAME DANZARD. What?

ISABELLE. My ace, my two, my—

MADAME DANZARD. I can't do a thing till you move that queen.

ISABELLE. Queen? What queen?

MADAME DANZARD. Your queen, your queen. Use your eyes, Isabelle. (*She stands up and moves ISABELLE's queen into the center.*)

ISABELLE. (*Watching her mother.*) There. My queen.

MADAME DANZARD. And my king! That frees everything. Now we can really go ahead! (*The game builds to a frenzied finish with ISABELLE feverishly maneuvering her cards, and MADAME DANZARD laughing wildly and madly slapping down card after card with amazing speed. Reaching the end of the game, she triumphantly hugs the despairing ISABELLE.*)

MY SISTER IN THIS HOUSE

47

SCENE 10

✓ *It is night. Silence. LEA moans in the darkness.*

CHRISTINE. Lea.

LEA. I can't breathe.

CHRISTINE. Lea.

LEA. I can't breathe. I can't. (*Light comes up in their room.*) Someone behind me, pulling my coat. Even before I turn around I know. She grabs my hand and starts running. Her hand like iron around mine. I make myself heavy, but she holds me tight and I can feel all her little bones. She

snatches me into the house and I run from corner to corner but she gets everywhere first. She grows and grows till she's as big as the room. And then I hear the door open but I can't move, Christine. I can't breathe.

CHRISTINE. (*Rocking LEA.*) Hush. Hush now. It's over. Try and sleep. Go to sleep.

LEA. I can't.

CHRISTINE. (*Sings.*)

Sleep my little sister, sleep

Sleep through darkness

Sleep so deep

LEA. You won't ever leave me, will you, Christine?

CHRISTINE. (*Sings.*)

All the rivers find the sea

My little sister

Sleep for me.

LEA. (*Touching CHRISTINE'S face.*) You won't, will you?

CHRISTINE. (*Holding LEA close.*) Never.

LEA. I don't think I could bear it — being alone in this house. In any house. (*MADAME DANZARD appears at the top of the stairs. She is wearing a bathrobe and slippers and is carrying a kerosene lamp. She comes down the stairs on tiptoe and goes into the dining room.*)

CHRISTINE. (*Sings.*)

Dream my little sister, dream

Dream I'm here now

Dream your dreams

LEA. Do you hear me, Christine?

CHRISTINE. (*Sings.*)

All the things you want to be

My little sister

Dream for me.

LEA. I was so scared when Madame was waiting when we came back from the square. Weren't you scared, Christine?

CHRISTINE. Madame doesn't speak to us anymore. She hasn't said a word in months.

LEA. She never did, Christine. Oh Christine, she never did.

CHRISTINE. Shhh. Sleep now. Sleep my angel. (*Continues the song.*)

Somewhere there are meadows

Somewhere there are hills

Somewhere horses run

And sheep are still

(*MADAME DANZARD closes the box, lays the white glove carefully on top, returns the box to the cabinet, picks up the kerosene lamp, and quietly goes up the staircase.*) (*Sings.*)

Sleep my little sister, sleep

Cows will moo

And lambs will bleat

I will never leave your side

My little sister

Close your eyes.

✓ (*As the light dims, LEA'S eyes remain wide open, staring into the darkness.*)

## SCENE 13

*Sunday morning. Church bells are ringing. ISABELLE is downstairs, ready to go out.*

ISABELLE. (*Picking up a calling card.*) Maman. Look! Madame Castelneuve was here.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Coming down the stairs.*) No!

ISABELLE. (*Picking up another calling card.*) And Madame Richepin.

MADAME DANZARD. How did they get in? When? The new curtains aren't even here yet. What's the matter with those two? They didn't even tell me. (*Irritated, tapping ISABELLE on the back.*) Don't slump, Isabelle. You know how I hate that. She asked me for another blanket yesterday.

ISABELLE. Incredible. Why should they complain about the cold? They're hardly ever in their room.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Taking two heavy prayer books, one for her, one for ISABELLE.*) No one in this town has a radiator in the maid's room. It's unheard of. Have you ever heard of such a thing?

ISABELLE. Never.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Putting on her gloves.*) They're in the kitchen from six in the morning till ten at night. They have the stove to keep them warm.

ISABELLE. You worry too much, Maman.

MADAME DANZARD. As if I don't make life easy for them in every way.

ISABELLE. You do everything for them. You're too good to them. (*CHRISTINE and LEA come running into the house, laughing. They are dressed in their identical coats and hats, and wear white gloves. They stop when they see MADAME DANZARD and ISABELLE. Quietly they go up the stairs into their room.*) Did you see them? Coming back from church.

MADAME DANZARD. Spotless—with their white gloves. They don't even look like maids anymore. (*Softly LEA closes the door. She laughs and whirls CHRISTINE around. CHRISTINE puts her hand over LEA's mouth. LEA begins pulling off CHRISTINE's gloves.*) But they're losing their looks, my dear. Have you noticed? Have you seen how thin they've become? Especially the younger one. (*LEA takes off CHRISTINE's hat. CHRISTINE sits still, watching her. LEA smiles, takes a few steps back.*) And those circles under their eyes.

ISABELLE. They look like they never sleep. (*LEA takes off her gloves. She turns and looks at CHRISTINE.*) (*Suddenly touching the banister.*) Look at this, Maman.

MADAME DANZARD. At what?

ISABELLE. Don't you see? (*Pointing.*) There. Right there.

MADAME DANZARD. (*Turning back.*) What is it? (*ISABELLE points again. Looking carefully.*) Oh yes. I see. Yes. They're getting careless.

*The DANZARDS go out.*

## SCENE 15

*Light comes up on CHRISTINE and LEA, standing separately.*

✓ MEDICAL EXAMINER. (*Voice over. A flat anonymous voice.*) On the last step of the staircase, a single eye was found, intact, complete with the optic nerve. The eye had been torn out without the aid of an instrument. (*He pauses.*) The bodies of Madame and Mademoiselle Danzard were found on the landing. On the ground were fragments of bone and teeth, a yellow diamond earring, two eyes, hair pins, a pocketbook, a set of keys, a coat button. The walls and doors were covered with splashes of blood reaching a height of seven feet.

JUDGE. (*Voice over.*) Is this the pewter pitcher with which you struck them down? (*LEA looks up.*)

MEDICAL EXAMINER. (*Voice over.*) Madame Danzard's body lay face up, Mademoiselle Danzard's body face down, the coat pulled up, the skirt pulled up, the underpants pulled down, revealing deep wounds on the buttocks and multiple slashes on the calves. Madame Danzard's eyes had been torn out of their sockets.

JUDGE. (*Voice over.*) The carving knife with which you slashed them? (*CHRISTINE looks up. They are silent.*) What did you have against Madame and Mademoiselle Danzard? (*He pauses.*) Was Madame good to you? (*He pauses.*) Did anything abnormal happen between you and your sister? (*He pauses.*) You understand me, don't you? Was it simply sisterly love? (*He pauses.*) How did you tear out their eyes? With your fingers? (*CHRISTINE clasps herself and rocks back and forth.*) Speak! You are here to defend yourselves.

You will be judged.

CHRISTINE. Lea. I want Lea. Please. I beg you. Forgive me. I'll be good. I promise. I won't cry anymore. Give me Lea. Give me my sister. (*With a terrible, long drawn out cry.*) LEA! (*LEA moves to the center. Her face is pale, her eyes vacant.*)

JUDGE. (*Voice over.*) Lea Lutton. You will perform ten years of hard labor. You are refused the right to enter the town of Le Mans for twenty years. (*He pauses. CHRISTINE stands beside LEA.*) Christine Lutton. You will be taken barefoot, wearing a chemise, your head covered by a black veil, to a public place in the town of Le Mans. And there, before your fellow citizens, your head will be severed from your body.

LEA. (*Gazing straight out, sings brokenly.*)  
 Sleep my little sister, sleep  
 Sleep through darkness  
 Sleep so deep  
 All the rivers find the sea  
 My little sister  
 Sleep for me. ✓

(*CHRISTINE looks directly out. LEA gazes vaguely into the distance. They stand as if framed in a photograph.*)

THE END OF THE PLAY