

# Murder at the Château

a play in two acts<sup>1</sup>

by

Joe Laredo

- Time:** January 1856–December 1857<sup>2</sup>
- Place:** The Château de Jeufosse near Aubevoye, Normandy, France, and Court of Assizes, Évreux, Normandy, France
- Characters<sup>3</sup>:** **Elisabeth-Anansime de Beauvais**, Countess of Jeufosse (46), still beautiful  
**Blanche-Marie-Elisabeth de Jeufosse** (18), Elisabeth’s pretty daughter  
**Laurence Thouzery** (25), Blanche’s attractive governess  
**Jean-Baptiste Leuffroy-Crepel<sup>4</sup>** (42<sup>5</sup>), gamekeeper-cum-butler-cum-coachman  
– wears a moustache  
**Clémentine Luzurier**, housekeeper-cum-cook  
**Alfred-Léonce Odoard du Hazey** (50s), first cousin to Elisabeth – red-faced  
and wears a moustache  
**Joseph-Hyacinthe Tripet** (60s), retired diplomat – portly and wears a  
moustache  
**Émile Guillot** (29), a handsome local ‘businessman’ – has a Northern accent<sup>6</sup>  
and wears a moustache  
**Élie Vanier**, judge  
**Maître Berryer** (c. 70), defence lawyer  
**Maître Cresson** (37), public prosecutor  
**Benoît-Désiré Gros** (c. 20), Émile Guillot’s valet-cum-coachman-cum-  
confidant  
**Désiré-François Criquebœuf**, grocer
- Set Act I:** *Upstage:* The drawing room of the Château, gloomy and run-down, with a large fireplace. One wall has a window; on another hangs a portrait of a malicious-looking cavalry officer, on the third the stuffed heads of stags, boars, etc.  
*Downstage:* The grounds of the Château
- Act II:** A courtroom in a disused chapel

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the novel *La Bête noire du Château de Jeufosse*, with kind permission of the author, Michel de Decker. The novel is itself based on a mixture of fact and legend.

<sup>2</sup> The actual dates of the events dramatized in the play are indicated, where known, in brackets, but the audience need not be aware of them and any ‘gaps’ in time should not affect the continuity of the performance.

<sup>3</sup> Ages at first appearance, where known, in brackets.

<sup>4</sup> Also given as Crépel in some contemporary reports.

<sup>5</sup> Also given as 38.

<sup>6</sup> In the original French, a southern accent, which is ‘equivalent’ to a Northern accent in England.

# ACT I

## Scene 1 – morning (12th January 1856)

*It is cold outside*

*Inside, a fire blazes*

*Downstage, enter **Crepel**, wearing a gamekeeper's cap and with a double-barrelled shotgun at the ready*

*As if fearing imminent assault, he patrols back and forth*

**Elisabeth**      *(calling from offstage)* Crepel. Crepel. I need to see you at once.

*Crepel goes off and reappears, without his gun, in the drawing room*

*Enter **Elisabeth***

**Elisabeth**      Ah, Crepel.

**Crepel**          Madame la Comtesse.

**Elisabeth**      What with all this ... nonsense, I completely forgot. Blanche's new governess is arriving this morning from Paris. She will need collecting from Aubevoye station.

**Crepel**          Then you'll be needing the coachman, Madame.

*He turns back towards the door*

**Elisabeth**      Yes, Crepel, but—<sup>7</sup>

**Crepel**          He won't be a moment, Madame.

*Exit*

**Elisabeth**      *(to herself, in frustration)* Oh.

*Re-enter Crepel wearing a coachman's hat, with his gamekeeper's cap in his hand*

**Crepel**          You asked for me, Madame?

**Elisabeth**      Really, Crepel. Haven't we had enough of these games? Her name is Laurence. Laurence Thouzery. She's the daughter of one of the Count's cavalry officers.

**Crepel**          And how will I recognize her, Madame?

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<sup>7</sup> Indicates an interruption by another (or the same) character, as distinct from an ellipsis (...), which indicates a pause or trailing-off.

**Elisabeth** According to Ernest, she's tall and attractive.

**Crepel** Not as attractive as the last one, I hope?

**Elisabeth** What is that supposed to mean, Crepel?

**Crepel** Well, Madame, if you remember—

**Elisabeth** I don't need reminding, thank you, Crepel. Regardless of what Suzanne looked like, her behaviour was unacceptable and I had no alternative but to let her go.

**Crepel** And ever since then, we've been having these—

**Elisabeth** I don't think Suzanne's dismissal has anything to do with this ... nonsense. Now, will you please hurry. Mademoiselle Laurence is on the ten fifteen train.

**Crepel** Yes, Madame. Only ...

**Elisabeth** Only what?

*Crepel exchanges his coachman's hat for his gamekeeper's cap*

**Crepel** Last night, Madame. I saw it again.

**Elisabeth** You mean—

**Crepel** The Beast, Madame. In the grounds. It must have got in through one of the gaps in the wall.

**Elisabeth** Then you must have them filled.

**Crepel** But there are so many of them, Madame.

**Elisabeth** Well, what do you want me to do about it?

**Crepel** With your permission, Madame, the next time I see it, I shall feed the Beast a generous helping of lead, if you understand what I mean.

**Elisabeth** You have my permission, Crepel. Shoot this evil thing. Shoot every werewolf and Black Beast you see.

**Crepel** With respect, Madame, it's eighteen fifty-six. You know as well as I do, there are no longer werewolves in Normandy. And that there's only one Black Beast.

**Elisabeth** So you tell me, Crepel, but I shall not sleep easily until you bring it to me, with its stomach full of lead, and these nocturnal visitations come to an end.

**Crepel**           *(looking at the portrait on the wall)* On his deathbed, the Count – God rest his soul<sup>8</sup> – made me promise I would look after both the Château and the women inside it. I intend to keep that promise, Madame.

**Elisabeth**       Yes, yes, Crepel. Now will you please go and fetch Mademoiselle Laurence?

*Crepel swaps hats*

**Crepel**           Yes, Madame.

*Exit Crepel*

*Elisabeth looks up at the portrait of her late husband*

**Elisabeth**       *(to the portrait)* Oh, Albert, if only you were still here. There wouldn't be all this ... nonsense. And we'd be able to afford a coachman as well as a gamekeeper – and to have the walls mended.

*Enter Blanche*

**Blanche**       Is she here yet, Mama?

**Elisabeth**       I told you, she'll be here at ten thirty.

**Blanche**       Oh, I can't wait. What's she like? Will she be strict? Will she teach me English?

**Elisabeth**       Calm down, Blanche. I haven't met her yet. I have only your brother's recommendation – for what that's worth.

**Blanche**       Then she's sure to be absolutely gorgeous.

**Elisabeth**       What makes you think that?

**Blanche**       Oh, Mama. Do you think Ernest wants to come here every Sunday just to hunt?

**Elisabeth**       Ha. He's not coming here on any day of the week until he mends his ways. Ernest and his brother are nothing but idle spendthrifts. If your father could see them now – God rest his soul. Squandering all our money in Paris while we have barely enough to keep us alive.

**Blanche**       Oh, Mama. It's not as bad as all that. I'm sure Ernest and Albert will soon get themselves good positions and then they'll be able to keep us in the style to which we ... used to be accustomed.

**Elisabeth**       If you believe that, my darling, you believe there are fairies at the bottom of the garden. Now, is Laurence's room ready?

**Blanche**       Yes, Mama. I've been helping Clémentine. Oh, I'm so excited. We're going to have such fun.

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<sup>8</sup> The characters might cross themselves whenever they say this.

**Elisabeth** Laurence is here to teach you, Blanche, not to play with you. Now run along. I want to speak to her before she meets you. If Laurence is going to live and work at the Château de Jeufosse, there are a few things she needs to understand.

**Blanche** Yes, Mama.

*Exit Blanche*

**Elisabeth** *(to the portrait)* If your sons don't drive me to distraction, your daughter certainly will.

*Exit*

*Blackout*

## Scene 2 – later the same morning

*Enter Crepel (in his coachman's hat) downstage carrying a suitcase*

*Behind him, looking around her apprehensively, enter Laurence, plainly dressed and with her hair in ringlets*

**Crepel** Welcome to the Château de Jeufosse, Mademoiselle Laurence.

**Laurence** It's so gloomy.

**Crepel** Don't worry, Mademoiselle. It's more cheerful when the sun's out. *(to himself)* Well, a little less gloomy, anyway.

*Laurence shudders*

**Crepel** And the Countess is very kind – provided you do as she says. You see, the Count – God rest his soul – was a very particular man. Everything had to be just so. And Madame la Comtesse has kept to the same routine as when he was alive. She's even kept his room exactly as it was, with his Major's uniform and his swords and everything. Has them cleaned and polished twice a year, she does. 'The Sanctuary', she calls it, and woe betide anyone who disturbs so much as an epaulette.

*Exeunt ...*

*... and Crepel shows Laurence into the drawing room*

**Crepel** I'll tell the Countess you're here, Mademoiselle.

*Exit Crepel*

*Laurence looks around and shudders again, then goes to the portrait of the Count*

*Elisabeth enters silently behind her and Laurence is taken by surprise when she speaks*

**Elisabeth** Yes, it is thanks to him that you're here, Laurence Thouzery.

**Laurence** Oh, Madame la Comtesse.

*She curtsies*

**Laurence** I didn't hear you—

**Elisabeth** Please, call me Elisabeth. You're to be one of the family, not one of the servants. Come, let me look at you.

*Laurence approaches*

**Elisabeth** Well, my son was right. You're quite delightful.

**Laurence** I am most obliged to you, Mada— Elisabeth, for engaging me.

**Elisabeth** Of course, we shall have to see how we all get on. As I'm sure Monsieur Crepel has told you on the way here, life at the Château de Jeufosse follows a strict routine. And my daughter can be rather a handful. But I'm sure everything will work out well, and Blanche is so looking forward to having a—

*Enter Blanche*

**Blanche** She's here, she's here.

**Elisabeth** Blanche, I told you to—

*Blanche rushes to Laurence and kisses her*

**Blanche** Oh, Mama. She's so lovely. I just know we're going to get on like ... like sisters. *(to Laurence)* Come, let me show you your room. You'll absolutely love it.

**Elisabeth** No, Blanche, I've changed my mind. There's no need for us to heat another bedroom. Laurence will share yours – for the time being, at least.

**Blanche** But there's only one bed, Mama.

**Elisabeth** That way you'll keep each other warm at night.

**Blanche** And she'll have to pass through your room.

**Elisabeth** When the winter's over, we'll see about some other arrangement.

**Blanche** Very well, Mama. *(to Laurence)* Come on. Oh, leave that *(her suitcase)*. Clémentine will bring it up.

**Elisabeth** Remember that we have guests this evening, Blanche.

**Blanche** You can have the window side. I'll empty one of the wardrobes for your things and we'll ...

*As they go out ...*

**Elisabeth** I want you both ready by six ...

*Elisabeth sighs and exits*

*Blackout*

### **Scene 3 – the same evening**

*Crepel, now in a butler's uniform, is putting wood on the fire*

*Enter Clémentine*

*During the following, the two of them tidy the room, dust and polish the furniture, etc.*

**Clémentine** As if there wasn't enough for us to do already, without having to run around on that young Blanche as well.

**Crepel** She's all right. It's the way she's been brought up. She doesn't know what it's like to have to work for a living. Probably never will, either.

**Clémentine** And we're expected to do the work of five people.

**Crepel** When the Count was alive – God rest his soul – we all knew where we stood. Now we don't know whether we're coming or going.

**Clémentine** I know where I'll be going if it carries on like this – out that front door. What with another mouth to feed and now half of Normandy coming to dinner for no good reason.

**Crepel** Four guests isn't exactly half of–

**Clémentine** It's all right for you, Jean-Baptiste. You only have to serve the food. I have to prepare it and cook it all as well.

**Crepel** I think the Countess wants to show her off – the new young governess. Make everyone think we're still well off.

**Clémentine** It's all a charade. We wouldn't be in such a state if she had any control over those good-for-nothing sons of hers. I tell you, if they were mine, I'd–

**Crepel** Now, now, Clémentine. If you had children of your own, you'd know how hard it is to bring them up right. I can't wait for my Élise to get engaged so I can stop worrying about her getting ... into trouble.

**Clémentine** Kids, they're nothing but trouble as far as I can see. I'm better off without them.

**Crepel** I wouldn't have it any other way. I love my wife and I love my children and that's that.

**Clémentine** You're lucky. There's plenty as got married but wishes they'd stayed single.

**Crepel** Talking of which, I tell you, Clémentine, if 'The Aubevoye Cock' turns up, I'm keeping a close eye on him.

**Clémentine** You mean Monsieur Guillot?

**Crepel** I don't trust that fellow further than I can throw him.

**Clémentine** He probably won't even come. You know what he's like.

**Crepel** A nasty piece of work if you ask me.

**Clémentine** It wouldn't surprise me, Jean-Baptiste, if he's the—

*Enter Blanche, followed by Laurence. Both are in beautiful dresses, and Laurence has her hair in a net and tied with a ribbon behind her neck*

**Blanche** *(to Laurence)* ... there's Uncle Odoard, he's Mama's cousin really, and Monsieur Tripet, he was some kind of diplomat, so pompous, and both of them as bad as each other when it comes to—

**Clémentine** Why, Mademoiselle Laurence, I hardly recognized you. You're quite transformed, with your hair up and all.

**Laurence** Thank you, Clémentine. Elisa— Madame la Comtesse said ringlets didn't suit my face. She even lent me a hair net. Look.

**Crepel** *(to Blanche)* You'll need to keep her well away from old Tripet. And Uncle Odoard. As for that Monsieur Guillot, as soon as he sets eyes on her—

**Blanche** What about me? Don't I look pretty, too?

**Clémentine** Of course you do, Mademoiselle Blanche. You always look lovely — like a spring morning. Now, if you'll excuse us, we have a dinner to prepare.

*Exeunt Clémentine and Crepel*

**Laurence** I was hoping to see Ernest again. Isn't he coming?

**Blanche** Oh, no. He and Mama aren't talking to each other at the moment. Apparently, he lost on the Stock Exchange again and they had a big argument.

**Laurence** I do hope they make up soon.

**Blanche** Oh, I'm sure they will. Ernest is like a pan of milk: all calm and quiet one minute, boiling over the next.

**Laurence** He's so terribly sweet.

*Enter Elisabeth, also elegantly attired, with a plunging neckline*

**Elisabeth** Ah, there you are, girls. And how beautiful you both look.

*She goes to Laurence and strokes her hair*

**Elisabeth** I was right. It suits you so much better. Everyone will just adore you.

*Enter Crepel*

**Crepel** Monsieur Alfred-Léonce Odoard du Hazy.

**Blanche** *(to Laurence)* Uncle Odoard.

*Enter Odoard, in a frock coat*

**Odoard** *(to Crepel)* Bring me a calvados, would you, Crepel.

**Elisabeth** Léonce, you know what the doctors say.

*Exit Crepel*

**Odoard** *(to Elisabeth)* I need one to revive me. Why you insist on staying in this godforsaken place, Elisabeth, is quite beyond me. Now that you're ... independent, I'd have thought you'd want to be nearer to civilization. Why, it took me over an hour from Saint-Aubin and I'm frozen to the—

*He catches sight of Blanche and Laurence*

**Odoard** Well, what have we here? Blanche, my dear, you've become quite a young woman since I last saw you. How old are you now?

**Blanche** I'm eighteen, Uncle.

**Odoard** Indeed? And this must be your new governess.

*Laurence curtsies demurely*

**Laurence** Laurence Touzery, Sir. Delighted to meet you, Sir.

**Odoard** Likewise.

*He kisses her hand*

**Odoard** Please, call me 'Uncle'.

*Enter Crepel, with a glass of calvados*

**Odoard** *(to Elisabeth)* Well, you didn't tell me she was quite so delicious, Elisabeth. *(to Crepel as he takes the glass)* For some reason, I feel warmer already.

*Exit Crepel*

**Elisabeth** *(to Laurence)* Cousin Odoard is still a bachelor, Laurence ... and he thinks he's still twenty-five.

**Odoard** *(to Elisabeth)* You never know. Young women have been known to marry men twice their age – especially men of standing.

*Enter Crepel*

**Crepel** Monsieur Joseph-Hyacinthe Tripet.

*Enter Tripet, in a flowery jacket, plus-fours and white stockings, with silver buckles on his shoes*

*During the following, Crepel takes 'orders' and is in and out with drinks (he is out of the room when the knocking starts)*

**Elisabeth** Monsieur Tripet, how good of you to come – and on such a night.

**Tripet** I would not have missed it for the world, my dear Comtesse. Why, ever since this morning, the whole of Gaillon is talking of nothing but the new arrival at the Château de Jeufosse. They even say that you have recovered your smile, my dear. Ah, this must be she.

*Laurence curtsies demurely as Tripet bears down on her*

**Tripet** I wonder if you've heard of the Fountain of Saint-Vulfranc? It is not far from my château. Its waters have miraculous powers and are said to cure blindness. But your eyes, my dear Laurence – you don't mind if I call you Laurence, do you? – your eyes are so lustrous that you have no need to drink from such a fountain. Indeed, if Saint-Vulfranc himself could see you, he would almost certainly ... convert to ... some other ... religion.

**Laurence** You flatter me, Sir.

**Tripet** I may look ancient to you, my dear, but I can assure you I used to be exceptionally good in the saddle.

**Laurence** Really?

**Tripet** Oh, yes, the Count and I – God rest his soul – we had some jolly gallops together in our time.

*Tripet goes to join Odoard*

**Blanche** (*aside to Laurence*) Now all he gets is the trots.

**Tripet** I'm hoping the Guillots are coming, Elisabeth? Émile is such fun.

**Elisabeth** They're late, as ever.

**Odoard** Émile Guillot is an incorrigible scoundrel. I can't think why you'd even invite him. The man has no manners whatsoever.

**Tripet** What do you expect? He's from Marseille.

**Elisabeth** I invited them, Cousin Odoard, because I am very fond of Renée.

**Odoard** Or because Émile is subsidising the annual fête?

**Elisabeth** Monsieur Guillot has kindly persuaded the proprietor of Paris Produce in Gaillon to supply–

*A sudden LOUD KNOCKING ON THE WINDOW (sound effect) downstage (facing the audience) startles everyone*

*Odoard goes to the 'window' and peers out into the darkness*

**Odoard** It's pitch black. I can't see a thing.

*Just as he turns back towards the others, more LOUD KNOCKING is heard, at the other window*

**Elisabeth** This is too much. What on earth is going on? (*calling off*) Crepel. Crepel.

*The door bursts open and in rushes Émile, grinning from ear to ear, followed by Crepel*

**Émile** No need for a ghost hunt, Elisabeth, my dear. Here he is in the flesh. Ha. I frightened you all, didn't I? Admit it, Tripet, you were shaking in your winkle-pickers. And you, too, eh, Captain?

*He slaps Odoard on the shoulder*

**Odoard** Major.

**Elisabeth** That was not funny, Émile. You know how on edge we all are with this ... nonsense going on.

**Émile** Ah, the notorious Black Beast of Jeufosse. I'm surprised old Crepel hasn't added its head to your collection by now.

*Crepel glares at him*

**Émile** How are you, old man? Still guarding the gate from your little hut?

*Seething, Crepel heads for the door*

**Émile** Bring me a glass of port, will you, old man. I don't like to be left out.

*Exit Crepel*

**Elisabeth** I was hoping you would bring your wife, Émile.

**Émile** Sadly, she couldn't make it.

**Elisabeth** She isn't unwell, I hope?

**Émile** No, but our son Paul has a cough and a temperature, and Renée didn't want to leave him with the nurse – after what happened to poor Adeline ...

**Tripet** Dreadful business. Your wife is a wise woman, Monsieur Guillot.

*Émile has gone over to Blanche ...*

**Émile** Ah, my little Blanche. Every time I see you, you're more beautiful than ever. Don't you think so, Tripet? (*to Odoard*) A pretty little package, eh, Captain?

**Odoard** Major. (*aside to Tripet*) The man's like a wild boar.

... and then to Laurence ...

... as Crepel re-enters with Émile's port

**Émile** Well, well, my dear Elisabeth, the rumours are right. You *have* found yourself a splendid little creature. One that does not disgrace the stable of Jeufosse. My compliments.

*He clicks his tongue as if admiring a horse*

*Crepel almost throws the glass of port at him (he then remains in the room)*

**Émile** Thank you, old man.

**Elisabeth** Please, Émile. Look how you've made the poor girl blush.

**Émile** Nonsense. When a star streaks across the sky, what are we supposed to do? Look at our boots? This young lady knows very well the effect she has on men. I can see it in her eyes.

*There is an embarrassed silence, during which Émile sidles up to Elisabeth and addresses her 'privately', while the others talk silently among themselves*

**Émile** You're not looking so dreadful yourself, Elisabeth.

**Elisabeth** I'm surprised you even noticed.

**Émile** A rose bud may well excite the imagination, but it's the flower in full bloom that has the sweetest scent.

**Elisabeth** But when you reach for it, you should mind you don't get pricked.

**Tripet** *(to Elisabeth)* Tell me, my dear, will Father Forcinal not be joining us this evening?

**Elisabeth** I regret not, Monsieur Tripet. He's busy training young Edmond Pitte for the priesthood.

**Tripet** He has his work cut out there. I hear the boy has some rather 'progressive' ideas about the role of women ...

**Émile** *(imitating a priest)* Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in the sight of the Black Beast of Jeufosse to celebrate the arrival of Mistress Laurence Thouzery, who has come to our tranquil corner of Normandy from the fleshpots of Paris. Innocent of the ways of the wicked world, she blesses us with her charm and humility, and we wish her happiness and good fortune in her new post as governess to the delightful Blanche.

**Tripet** Hear, hear.

**Elisabeth** To Laurence.

**All** Laurence.

*All toast*

**Tripet** (to Odoard) You have to admit, he does enliven the proceedings. It's like a night at the theatre – and there's no charge for admission.

**Odoard** The man's nothing but a charlatan. A southern charlatan to boot.

**Elisabeth** Gentlemen, ladies, shall we take our places at table? Émile, since you're unattached?

*She offers her arm but, to her displeasure, Émile takes Blanche's*

*Crepel opens the door and stands holding the handle*

*On his way out, Odoard puts his arm around Laurence's waist*

**Odoard** (to Laurence) Did Blanche tell you that my family has been in Saint-Aubin since the fourteenth century? Oh, yes. And one of my ancestors married a La Fontaine, you know. I assure you, it's not a fable.

*He laughs raucously*

*Last to leave the room are Blanche and Émile, who takes the opportunity to pinch her bottom as she goes out through the door in front of him*

*Before Émile can follow her out, Crepel shuts the door in his face and grabs him by the lapel, marching him back into the room*

**Crepel** Now, look here, Guillot ...

**Émile** I say, old man ...

**Crepel** ... I'm warning you. If you so much as lay a finger on any of the women in this house, I'll ...

**Émile** Oh, yes, and what will you do?

**Crepel** You'll be picking shot out of your backside for the next month.

**Émile** Are you threatening me, Crepel?

**Crepel** I told you, I'm warning you.

**Émile** And since when did butlers tell their mistress's guests how to behave?

**Crepel** As you well know, Monsieur Guillot, I'm also the Countess's gamekeeper, and it's my job to keep poachers out of the grounds.

**Émile** But I've been invited – which is more than I ever was when the Count was alive–

**Crepel** God rest his soul, he knew better than to invite the likes of you.

**Émile** ... so if I wish to do some 'hunting', I certainly don't need your permission.

*He removes Crepel's hand from his lapel and goes to the door*

**Émile**            After all, the girls are both adults and unattached. So they're both 'fair game'. Aren't they, old man?

**Crepel**            That's enough of the 'old man', Guillot. I've got my eyes on you, so you'd better watch out.

**Émile**            And you'd better keep your eyes on the Black Beast, Crepel. You never know when it might rear its ugly head.

*Exit, leaving Crepel fuming*

*Blackout*

## **Scene 4 – the same night**

*The drawing room is lit only faintly by the moon*

*The door is opened quietly and Laurence enters*

*She walks around the room uneasily, looking at the animal heads and the portrait*

*The door opens again*

*Laurence is startled*

*Enter Elisabeth*

**Laurence**        Who's that? Oh. It's you. I thought it–

*Elisabeth lights a lamp*

**Elisabeth**        I didn't mean to startle you, Laurence. I couldn't sleep and I went to check that you and Blanche were in bed. When I saw that you weren't there ...

**Laurence**        I couldn't sleep either. It's that Monsieur Guillot. He unsettles me. He spent the whole evening staring at me, and when he thought no one was looking, he kissed my ear.

**Elisabeth**        Did he now? How typical of Émile.

**Laurence**        It's a wonder his wife lets him out without her.

**Elisabeth**        Renée has long since resigned herself to his ... weakness. The only thing she's afraid of is that something will happen to him – if he ever runs into a jealous husband.

**Laurence**        She must be very forgiving – or very foolish.

**Elisabeth** She's a wonderful wife and mother. But I sense there's something else that's bothering you, my dear.

**Laurence** You're right, Elisabeth.

**Elisabeth** Well?

**Laurence** It's just that ...

**Elisabeth** You can tell me.

**Laurence** After dinner, when everyone had gone, I couldn't help noticing ... someone ... in the hall ... a man ... with a moustache ...

**Elisabeth** Oh, that was just Crepel. He reports to me every evening before he goes home. You probably saw his little house by the gate when you arrived. He'd had another run-in with some passers-by. There's nothing for you to worry about, my dear.

*Laurence looks at the portrait of the Count*

**Laurence** Elisabeth?

**Elisabeth** Yes, my dear?

**Laurence** Was the Count good to you?

**Elisabeth** What a strange thing to ask.

**Laurence** I'm sorry, I'm just curious.

**Elisabeth** The Count – God rest his soul – was a man. I suspect you do not yet know what that means, Laurence. Let me just say that it is rare to find a man who understands a woman's needs. But it's cold down here. Why don't we continue our conversation in my room, Laurence? We can get to know each other better, and it'll help you to sleep.

*Exeunt*

*Blackout*