

"QUILLS"

by

Doug Wright

IN THE BLACKNESS

The hypnotic voice of a master story-teller:

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)

Dear Reader... I've a naughty tale to tell, plucked from the pages of history. Tarted up, true, but guaranteed to stimulate the senses...

FADE UP ON:

A STORM-TOSSED SKY

Rising into the frame, a YOUNG WOMAN's FACE. Her hair whips about in the wind; her face is brittle... beautiful... and as enigmatic as St. Theresa. Is she in ecstasy, or in pain?

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)

The story of Mademoiselle Renard, a ravishing young aristocrat, whose sexual proclivities ran the gamut from winsome to bestial. Who doesn't dream of indulging every spasm of lust, feeding each depraved hunger?

MALE FINGERS appear at MADEMOISELLE RENARD's collarbone; they start to trace the delicate curve of her neck; her décolletage... MADEMOISELLE seems to writhe, to twist...

THE MARQUIS

Owing to her noble birth, Mademoiselle Renard was granted full immunity to do just that, inflicting pain and pleasure with equal zest, until one day –

Suddenly, ANOTHER FACE enters the frame; a BRITISH FIGURE WITH A NEANDERTHAL FACE in a roughly sewn leather hood.

THE MARQUIS

Mademoiselle found herself at the mercy of a man whose skill in the Art of Pain exceeded her own.

The WOMAN's eyes flare with fear. There's no question as to her emotion now; she is terrified. The DARK FIGURE forcefully pulls down her dress, revealing the pale skin of her shoulders.

ANGLE ON: THE WOMAN'S HANDS. The MAN secures them behind her back, and tightens leather bindings around her arms; they cut into her flesh. He gathers her hair gently in his gloved hands, then – viciously – he yanks her head back.

ECU: THE WOMAN'S FACE. She gasps, her eyes thrust upward.

She's in a courtyard of some kind. And – in an enormous tower, standing behind a barred window, the SHADOWY FIGURE OF A PRISONER, his hands in irons.

TITLE CARD: "Picpus Prison outside Paris. 1794."

TIGHT SHOT: The eyes of the PRISONER, watching the grisly proceedings below.

THE MARQUIS

How easily, dear Reader, one changes from predator to prey! And how swiftly pleasure is taken from some and given to others!

ANGLE ON: THE WOMAN as the MASKED MAN – her executioner – lowers her head into the grooved block of the guillotine.

WOMAN's POV: Rows and rows of faces are stare up at her, the jaunty red caps of the JACOBINS interspersed throughout. The CROWD is eerily silent. They seem to be waiting like vultures, ready to descend once blood is shed.

Near-by, the BODIES OF FRESHLY KILLED ARISTOCRATS are tossed – like refuse – into a cart. MEN stand among the dead, foraging for stray riches. An OLD HAG wrestles to pull a gold ring off a wayward, stiff hand.

CLOSE UP: THE WOMAN'S FACE in shock. A DROP OF BLOOD lands on her cheek from above.

The CAMERA sweeps UP, UP, UP, past the looming EXECUTIONER, all the way to the GLINTING BLADE OF THE GUILLOTINE, blood from the previous victim dripping from its edge.

TOP SHOT OF THE WOMAN, HER HEAD POISED FOR DECAPITATION

The basket waits below; blood seeps through the wicker onto the cobblestones and beneath the FEET of the THRONG.

THE PRISON TOWER

The PRISONER turns away from the grisly proceedings below.

MASTER SHOT: THE GUILLOTINE LOOMS ABOVE THE CROWD

ANGLE ON: QUILLS, RIPPLING IN THE BREEZE

Through a tiny window, THE PRISONER sits with his back to us, hunched over his desk in a silk dressing gown. A lush wig trails in ringlets down his back. He writes, furiously.

ANGLE ON: THE BLADE, TREMBLING, READY TO FALL

THE EXECUTIONER jiggles the rope, and – with a terrible, rumbling gravity – the blade breaks free – wobbling wildly – accelerating in speed –

ANGLE ON: THE PRISONER'S QUILL

as he dips it into a crimson ink-well. Issuing from the depths of his soul, an odd sound indeed; a little tune with the sing-song cadences of a children's nursery rhyme:

Claire de la Lune. Outside his window, the BLOODTHIRSTY ROAR OF THE MASSES.

ANGLE ON: THE GUILLOTINE

The blade falls – down, down, down – aiming right for the woman – the tender flesh of her exposed neck – faster – faster – until: THE SCREEN SPLASHES BLOOD RED. A SICKENING CRUNCH, followed by a dull THUD.

INT. CORRIDOR - CHARENTON

A diagonal patch of red slides open, and we see the EYES OF A YOUNG GIRL, staring straight at us:

MADELEINE
Your linens, please.

CARD: "The Charenton Asylum for the Insane; Years Later."

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUED

MADELEINE, on tip toe, stares through the peephole of a cell door, her laundry basket on her hip. She's a sweet faced naif with a dirt-smudged face and plenty of spirit.

A trap in the lower half of the door opens, and through it an unseen hand pushes a bundle of dirty bedsheets.

MADELEINE gathers them in her basket and moves to the next cell.

MADELEINE
Your linens.

VALCOUR, the asylum's prefect, leads a bald, effeminate lunatic named PITOU from his cell for a morning "constitutional." MADELEINE skirts past them both.

VALCOUR
(to MADELEINE)
Morning.

MADELEINE
G'morning.

She reaches the last door, and glances anxiously up and down the hallway before sliding open the peephole.

MADELEINE'S POV: The PRISONER – over a decade older – is still hunched over his desk, composing to his heart's content. His silk robe is tattered, and his wig is thin with age.

MADELEINE
Pss. 'S me.

A bundle of sheets tumbles out the trap. MADELEINE kneels.

There's something bulky hidden in the cloth: a manuscript, written in an ornate hand.

VOICE OF THE MARQUIS (O.S.)
(mellifluous and low)
Careful. The ink's still wet.

The peephole slides open from inside; a single eye stares out, bloodshot and reptilian.

VOICE (O.S.)
Now hurry.

MADELEINE smiles a mischievous smile, then moves on her way.

INT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She empties the dirty sheets into an enormous pile, then plucks the manuscript from the bottom of the basket, and conceals it under her shawl. Her MOTHER – an older woman with milky white eyes – stands over a steaming vat of boiling lye. She stirs a twisted mass of linens with her long, forked laundry pole. Blindness prevents her from seeing MADELEINE, but she hears her nonetheless:

MADAME LECLERC
That you, Maddy?

MADELEINE hoists up a basket of clean, wet laundry. She says with feigned innocence:

MADELEINE
Yes, Mother. Just taking the bleached ones out to dry.

EXT. CHARENTON COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Hanging sheets, two chambermaids: MICHETTE and CHARLOTTE, the first as comely as the second is dour. Hastily, MADELEINE drops off her basket of wet linens.

CHARLOTTE
Aren't you going to lend us a hand, then?

But MADELEINE's already disappeared.

EXT. CHARENTON–THE TERRACE AND GROUNDS

MADELEINE dodges past PATIENTS, basking in the morning light, clutching the hidden manuscript tightly to her breast. PITOU combs imaginary locks with a silver hairbrush; OTHER LUNATICS toss a leather ball in a game of catch.

As MADELEINE careens around an enormous hedge, she practically runs into THE EXECUTIONER from the opening sequence: BOUCHON. His grim duties during the Terror have since landed him in the madhouse. MADELEINE can feel the manuscript slipping under her shawl and scrambles to catch it before it drops. When she tries to dodge BOUCHON, he blocks her way.

VOICE (O.S.)

Bouchon!

MADELEINE looks up to see – sure enough – the ABBE de COULMIER, the asylum's administrator. He's surprisingly young with lustrous eyes and a handsome face.

He calls to the LUNATIC, sternly:

COULMIER

Remember your manners.

BOUCHON offers a shy smile, sans most of his teeth. Then – with great solemnity – he bows low for MADELEINE to pass.

She mouths "thank-you" to COULMIER, then scurries on.

ANGLE ON: THE ABBE DE COULMIER, watching MADELEINE go. HE gazes out at the Elysium spread before him. He can't disguise his satisfaction; Charenton is a good place, a happy place.

EXT. A PAVILION ON THE EDGE OF THE GROUNDS - MORNING

Out-of-breath, MADELEINE reaches the front gate. She glances nervously to and fro, then slips the manuscript through the bars to a waiting HORSEMAN.

MADELEINE

Here it is; the last chapter.

HORSEMAN

Monsieur Masse says he'd like another manuscript, quick as you please.

He's got himself three presses, and
he can't print 'em fast enough.

MADELEINE
I'll pass the word on, then.

HORSEMAN
I'll pay you another visit, with a
share of the profits, once its sold.

MADELEINE
I'll be waiting.

HORSEMAN
(grinning flirtatiously)
Maybe someday you'll tell me your
name.

MADELEINE coquettishly arches an eyebrow. The HORSEMAN rears
his steed, then charges away in a cloud of dust.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

CU: A HUGE WOODEN CRATE.

A BLACK MARKETEEER pries the lid off with a crowbar. Inside,
stacks of newly-bound volumes embossed with the title Justine.

BLACK MARKETEEER
This just in; the very latest from
the Marquis de Sade!

WELL-DRESSED CUSTOMERS snake their way down the grimy street.
The MEN hide their faces behind high collars; the WOMEN wear
veiled hats. Money changes hands; books fly from the box.
Trade is brisk.

EXT. FOP STREET - CONTINUOUS

A CROWD has secretly gathered: a MILLINER, a BLACKSMITH, a
BUTCHER, and a SOCIETY FOP, to name a few. A STREET URCHIN
keeps an eye out for passing police. The FOP reads from the
book in a loud whisper:

FOP
"Our story concerns a nymph named
Justine, as pretty a maid as ever

entered a nunnery, with a body so firm and ripe, it seemed a shame to commit it to God..."

INT. THE EMPEROR'S PALACE - DAY

CLOSE UP: THE BOOK as THE FOP'S VOICE bleeds into another, more stentorian ONE:

VOICE (O.S.)

"One morning, the Bishop placed his hand upon her thigh. 'Holy Father!', cried she, 'I've come to confess my sins, not commit them anew!'"

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

A CABINET MINISTER – MONSIEUR DELBEN, – reads aloud.

NAPOLEON listens, surrounded by his retinue: MINISTERS, GUARDS, a PAINTER, a SCULPTOR and TWO GAUNT TAILORS – mouths rimmed with pins – who trim his ermine cape.

DELBEN,

"heedless, the old priest turned her over on his knee and lifted her skirts high above her hips, exposing the pink flesh of her backside. There – between the orbs of her dimpled ass – lay a blushing rosebud, begging to be... plucked."

DELBEN clears his throat.

DELBEN,

"Before Justine could wrestle from his grasp, this most ungodly man took a communion wafer – the body of our Lord Jesus Christ – and placed it on the girl's twitching orifice –"

(beat)

Must I, Your Majesty?

The PAINTER, THE SCULPTOR and THE TAILORS are on tenterhooks; NAPOLEON merely arches an eyebrow.

DELBEN,
"As he loosened his manhood from
beneath his robes, The Bishop muttered
a Latin prayer. And then – with a
mighty thrust – drove it into her
very entrails –"

NAPOLEON
(interrupting at last)
Enough!

THE EMPEROR grabs the book from DELBEN,.

NAPOLEON
Seize every copy; we'll torch them
all on the palace lawn, in full public
view.

NAPOLEON tosses it into the fireplace. For a blistering
moment, we see the book's title: Justine, by Anonymous. It
explodes into a ball of flame.

NAPOLEON
As for the author... shoot him.

DELBEN,
A word of caution, Sire: we all
remember what happened to Robespierre,
Danton and Marat. Put the Marquis to
death, and history might even regard
you as a despot.

NAPOLEON
But I am history.

DELBEN,
Of course, Your Highness.
Nevertheless... cure the Marquis de
Sade... succeed, where countless
physicians and priests have failed...

NAPOLEON
Yes?

DELBEN,
(sly)

No one can fault Napoleon for merely bringing a man to his senses.

NAPOLEON gets it; he smiles. This DELBEN, is clever; very clever indeed. DELBEN smiles back; it's a plan.

DELBEN,

Might I suggest that we order an appraisal of the Charenton Asylum, and the rather notorious inmate in her care. I've the perfect candidate for the job: Doctor Royer-Collard, the distinguished alienist. He's a staunchly moral man of impeccable character and iron resolve –

INT. TREATMENT ROOM AT THE HOTEL DIEU

CLOSE UP: A BLITHERING MADMAN with wild eyes and a drooling lower-lip. With a LURCH, he tips backwards. His head is submerged in a pool of icy blue water. He puckers and gasps for air.

Reflected in the pool, the face of DR. ROYER-COLLARD, an immaculately groomed gentleman, in his fifties with a square jaw. He looks down at the waterlogged LUNATIC with chilling satisfaction.

ROYER-COLLARD

My colleagues have called me old fashioned; even barbaric.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

The LUNATIC is strapped into a chair with a collapsible back. When ROYER-COLLARD gives the signal – an imperious nod – a POCKMARKED ATTENDANT – the DOCTOR'S footman, GAILLON – cranks the lever, and the LUNATIC flips backward into a "calming pool." The effect is anything but. As the MADMAN flounders, ROYER-COLLARD explains to DELBEN:

ROYER-COLLARD

But here at the Hotel Dieu we favor an... aggressive... course of treatment.

DELBEN,

Quite.

ROYER-COLLARD

I don't seek popularity or renown,
Monsieur Delben, Mine is a higher
mission.

ROYER-COLLARD gives the signal again. GAILLON raises the lever, and the GOON surges upright, his ribcage heaving.

ROYER-COLLARD strides up to the PATIENT and regards him with sanctimony. The MADMAN quivers under his gaze.

ROYER-COLLARD

To take God's tiny blunders... those
He has forsaken... and condition
them with the same force... the same
rigor... you would employ to train a
feral dog or wild stallion.

Another nod, another crank, and – with a scream of protest – the LUNATIC is again lowered into the pool.

ROYER-COLLARD

It may not be pretty, but it is mercy
just the same.

Splashing and gurgling; DELBEN, shouts above the tumult:

DELBEN,

It's the Emperor's dearest hope that
you might bring your expertise –
your proficiency – to the Charenton
asylum –

ROYER-COLLARD tastes the idea for a moment.

ROYER-COLLARD

Charenton? The administrator there
is quite well-loved, is he not?

DELBEN,

I'm afraid so; he's an idealist.
You'll have to be politic.

ROYER-COLLARD

Do you know how I define "idealism,"

Monsieur Delben, ?

Delben waits for an answer; the DOCTOR's eyes twinkle.

ROYER-COLLARD

Youth's final luxury.

ROYER-COLLARD emits a knowing laugh. Delben, joins him.

EXT. THE SINISTER GATES OF THE HOTEL DIEU - LATER

They swing open with a deafening clang, and a DARK CARRIAGE bursts forth. Riding atop it, a pock-marked footman named GAILLON. Its curtains are drawn and it moves at a hell-bent pitch. Strapped to the back, the "calming" chair.

INT. CHARENTON CHAPEL - DAY

ONE HAND, GENTLY GUIDING ANOTHER over script written on parchment. COULMIER teaches MADELEINE penmanship; together, they copy a page from St. Augustine's City of God.

MADELEINE can't help glancing at COULMIER from the corner of her eye: such a virile man dressed in the chaste robes of a monk. An intriguing contradiction.

COULMIER

Of course, we mustn't just copy the words; it's important that we know what they mean. St. Augustine tells us that angels and demons walk among us on the earth; that sometimes, they jointly inhabit the soul of a single man...

MADELEINE can feel his breath on her neck. She turns to him and asks with innocent eyes wide:

MADELEINE

Then how can we know who is truly good, and who is evil?

COULMIER

We can't. All we can do is guard against our own corruption.

Self-conscious now, COULMIER draws back.

COULMIER

You'll practice reading tonight on your own? For me?

MADELEINE nods. Indeed she will.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - CHARENTON - NIGHT

Lollygagging in straw, FOUR RIPE ADOLESCENTS: GUERIN, the stable boy, his shirt open in the heat from the near-by laundry vats; MICHETTE, the scullery maid, tumbling out of her corset; LOUISON, the groundkeeper's son, in his nightshirt; CHARLOTTE, primly buttoned to the neck; and MADELEINE. As she "practices reading" from a few stray sheets of parchment, the OTHERS listen enrapt:

MADELEINE

"And so the Professor lifted Colombe's skirt high, above her waist. 'Let me be your Tutor,' said he, 'in the ways of love.' With that, he slid her pantalettes down, down, down over her knees, and there – nestled between her legs – as pink as a tulip, as slick as an eel –"

CHARLOTTE

(interrupting)

We oughtn't be reading his nasty stories –

MADELEINE

No one's forcing you to listen.

The TWO GIRLS lock eyes; CHARLOTTE burns with humiliation.

Slowly, she sinks back to her place on the ground. Even she can't resist THE MARQUIS' prose.

MADELEINE

(with satisfaction)

Very well then.

MADELEINE re-settles, resuming her story:

MADELEINE

"...he gazed upon her Venus mound;
her flaxen quim; the winking eye of
God."

GUERIN nuzzles MICHETTE's neck; CHARLOTTE glances at LOUISON hopefully; he ignores her. She pouts, then interrupts again:

CHARLOTTE
You've been to his quarters, haven't
you?

MADELEINE
Once or twice.

CHARLOTTE
I hear he's got a whetstone and
chisel, and he uses them to sharpen
his teeth.

MADELEINE
He's a writer, not a madman.

CHARLOTTE
Then what's he doing here?

LOUISON
Murder.

MADELEINE
That's not so!

LOUISON
He writes books so wicked – so black
with evil – that one man killed his
wife, after reading 'em...

GUERIN
And two young mothers miscarried
their babies!

LOUISON
I'd say that's murder enough.

MADELEINE
If you're going to slander him, then
you don't deserve to hear his stories –

CHARLOTTE

(an accusation)

I think she's sweet on him, that's
what I think.

GUERIN – meanwhile – has groped beneath MICHETTE's blouse
and now fondles her breast. She purrs and glances at MADELEINE
with a little half-smile:

MICHETTE

It's not the Marquis she's sweet on;
Is it, Madeleine?

MADELEINE gives MICHETTE a playful slap, and the TWO GIRLS
burst into giggles.

ANGLE ON: THE LINEN PANTRY, A FEW FEET AWAY

In the wall, the discernible shape of an old wooden door
with wrought-iron hinges. Clearly, it was once a portal, but
it was plastered shut long ago. In its knotty, rotting wood –
where the hinge meets the stone – a tiny gap. Peeping through
it – spying on the FOURSOME – BOUCHON. A low GRUNT as he
pleasures himself in the dark.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The HORSES' HOOVES of the DOCTOR's carriage cut into the
dirt; mud flies as it barrels on its way.

INT. A CORRIDOR IN CHARENTON - THE NEXT MORNING

MADELEINE is slipping fresh linen through the traps in each
cell door. She reaches the last one.

MADELEINE

Fresh linens.

A HAND reaches out to grab hers. It's heavily powdered, and
wears an amber ring with an arachnid trapped in stone.

THE MARQUIS (O.S.)

I'm hungry for a proper visit.

MADELEINE

(holding her own)

Don't start –

THE MARQUIS (O.S.)
Go ahead; you've a key. Slip it
through my tiny hole...

The HAND lets her go. MADELEINE rises, cautiously looking about. She reaches into her apron pocket and pulls out a key. She inserts it in the lock; it turns.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE enters. Upon first glance, it's less like a hospital room than the apartment of a faded aristocrat. On the walls, sketches of courtesans in erotic poses, culled from Justine and Juliette. On the bookshelf, medical volumes: The History of Madness, Lateau's Illustrated Anatomy, and Diseases of the Bowel. In the corner, a foot-stool carved from human bone. And – atop an ornate wooden desk, mottled with ink-stains – an explosion of quills. But no sign of the MARQUIS.

MADELEINE
Marquis? Where'd you get to, then?

Tentatively, MADELEINE proceeds toward the bedroom.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT/BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A large canopied bed – its velvet drapes closed – beckons to MADELEINE with the ominous allure of an open casket. She extends a trembling hand to part the curtains.

ANGLE ON: THE BED. It's empty. But – rearing up behind MADELEINE – a SHADOW.

VOICE
Well....?

MADELEINE whirls around to face the MARQUIS. He steps into a halo of light. Given his years of incarceration, he's still dressed in the finery of Louis XIV, though it's become frayed and off-color. His wig is immaculately coifed but thin with age. Still, there's something sensual about him; perhaps it's the odor of decadence, which lingers over him like perfume.

THE MARQUIS
Did I frighten you?

MADELEINE

You? Frighten me? That's a good one!
I'm twice as fast as you are. Who'd
have thought such a spent body can
still boast such a fertile mind?

THE MARQUIS

It's the only frontier I have left,
plumcake.

MADELEINE

I suppose you want to know about
that silly book of yours.

MADELEINE can't restrain herself any longer; she smiles, and
pulls a small bag – heavy with coins – from her apron
pocket.

MADELEINE

It sold like the devil, 'fore they
started burning it.

She tosses the bag to THE MARQUIS, who catches it and grins:

THE MARQUIS

The peril of composing such incendiary
prose...

MADELEINE

I put myself at life and limb. Surely
that's worth a few louis.

The MARQUIS rummages in the pouch for some money.

THE MARQUIS

If only these coins purchased your
other talents, too.

MADELEINE

There's something else I want from
you.

THE MARQUIS

You've already stolen my heart, as
well as another more prominent organ,
south of the Equator...

MADELEINE

Your publisher says I'm not to leave
without a new manuscript.

THE MARQUIS

I've just the story... inspired by
these very surroundings....

The MARQUIS dislodges a stone from the wall, and pulls out a
scroll of pages, then blows on them. Dust fills the air.

THE MARQUIS

The unhappy tale of a virginal laundry
lass, the darling of the lower wards,
where they entomb the criminally
insane.

MADELEINE

Is it awfully violent?

THE MARQUIS

Most assuredly.

MADELEINE

Is it terribly erotic?

THE MARQUIS

Fiendishly so.

MADELEINE squeals with delight.

THE MARQUIS

But it comes with a price.

MADELEINE's face pales a bit. What might that be?

THE MARQUIS

A kiss for each page.

MADELEINE

Must I administer them directly, or
might I blow them?

THE MARQUIS

(cooing low in her
ear)

The price, my coquette, is every bit
as firm as I am...

MADELEINE
(with a nervous giggle)
Oh, you. You talk same as you write.

She blows a wayward curl from her face, and leans in to kiss THE MARQUIS. A quick peck. He passes her a single page. She takes it, shuts her eyes, and puckers her lips again. This time, THE MARQUIS traces her lower lip with his forefinger. MADELEINE trembles, partly in fear, partly with pleasure. Then he plants a kiss on her lips. He inserts his tongue – forcefully – and her eyes pop open in surprise.

INT. CORRIDOR - CHARENTON - MEANWHILE

As COULMIER makes his rounds, he encounters CLEANTE, "the bird man." CLEANTE carries a tiny cage, complete with a warbling BIRD. CLEANTE gives a little trill. COULMIER smiles.

COULMIER
What are we today, Cleante? A
bullfinch, or a nightengale?

CLEANTE
There's but one kind of bird in a
madhouse, Abbe.

COULMIER notices – at the end of the hall – the door to the MARQUIS's cell is ajar. Concern flashes across his face.

COULMIER
Don't tell me: a loon. Sorry. I've
heard that one before –

And with that, he heads down the hall to investigate.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT/BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

AN EVER-GROWING PILE OF PAPERS

MADELEINE draws back from the MARQUIS; her breasts rise and fall under her blouse. THE MARQUIS' eyes flare with hunger.

MADELEINE
It's a long story, this one.

THE MARQUIS

The climax comes at a higher cost;
you must sit on my lap.

MADELEINE

You demand a lot from your readers,
you do.

She gathers her skirts, and crawls into his lap. As she fidgets to get comfortable, the MARQUIS gives a low, pleasurable moan. He passes her another page.

THE MARQUIS

The story's thrilling conclusion
comes at a premium.

MADELEINE

What's that then?

He grabs her breasts, tight as a vice, and hisses:

THE MARQUIS

(low and hypnotic:)

Your maidenhead. And then you must
sew it up as tightly as the day you
were born, and come back to me renewed
so I can deflower it a second time.

MADELEINE wriggles out of his grasp, and SLAPS him, hard.

The MARQUIS is stunned, but impressed by her gumption.

MADELEINE

Some things belong on paper, others
in life. It's a blessed fool who
can't tell the difference.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mademoiselle LeClerc.

COULMIER stands in the doorway, looking none too pleased.

Quickly, MADELEINE shoves the manuscript under her blouse.

MADELEINE

You're in the nick of time. This old

lech forgot himself. He thought I was a character in one of his nasty stories!

She heads out the door, clutching the manuscript against her bosom. COULMIER ducks out after her.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT/DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He steals a moment alone with her:

COULMIER
Madeleine –

MADELEINE
Yes, Abbe?

COULMIER
The next time you feel the urge to visit the Marquis, I hope you'll come to confession instead.

MADELEINE nods, contrite, and slips out. COULMIER turns to find THE MARQUIS standing right behind him.

THE MARQUIS
Care for a splash of wine, Abbe?

COULMIER
It's not even noon –

THE MARQUIS
Conversation, like certain portions of the anatomy, always runs more smoothly when it's lubricated.

Glug, glug, glug as the MARQUIS pours two glasses of wine.

THE MARQUIS
It's a rare vintage from an obscure village in Bordeaux. Rather than crush the grape underfoot, they place the fruit on the belly of a bride and reap its juices when the young husband steers his vessel into port.

He sniffs his glass rapturously, then passes one to COULMIER:

THE MARQUIS

A full-bodied flavor with just a
hint of wantonness? Bottom's up!

COULMIER takes the glass. THE MARQUIS watches; will he gag?
Will he spit it out? COULMIER sips. He swallows. Finally:

COULMIER

It's from our own cellar. I recognize
the taste.

THE MARQUIS' face falls.

THE MARQUIS

I should've told you it was the blood
of Christ; you'd believe that,
wouldn't you?

COULMIER

We treat you well enough here, don't
we Marquis? Your very own featherbed,
in lieu of a straw mat. Your antique
writing desk, all the way from
LaCoste. Enough quills to feather an
ostrich –

THE MARQUIS

(grumbling)

It's true, dear-heart, you've spoiled
me pink.

COULMIER

In exchange, we ask only that you
follow the rules. Now you know as
well as I do... you're not to
entertain visitors in your quarters.

THE MARQUIS

I'm entertaining you now, aren't I?

COULMIER

I'm not a beautiful young prospect,
ripe for corruption.

THE MARQUIS

Don't be so sure.

COULMIER's amused in spite of himself. THE MARQUIS laughs, too, only with a slightly sinister edge.

COULMIER

Take your pen in hand, Marquis. Purge these wicked thoughts of yours on paper; maybe they'll govern you less in life.

THE MARQUIS

(with a smile)

I'll fill page after page, I promise.

COULMIER raises his glass in a friendly toast:

COULMIER

Cheers.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MEANWHILE

The swiftness of the COACH makes the ground quake.

INT. CHARENTON - THE ART STUDIO - LATER

COULMIER reads from a large parchment scroll with a Royal wax Seal, newly-broken. VALCOUR stands by, anxious.

VALCOUR

They've got no right, sending someone to sit on your shoulder. I work for you; I won't take orders from a stranger.

COULMIER

(brightly; hiding concern)

You needn't worry, Valcour. It's administrative, nothing more.

VALCOUR watches COULMIER, unconvinced, as the ABBE rolls up the scroll, tucks it under his arm, and strolls among the PATIENTS, dressed in smocks and painting at easels. He gently chastises one LUNATIC who's chewing on his brush:

COULMIER

Please don't eat the paint, Pascal.

Next, he steps forward to inspect a painting by DAUPHIN, a cheery fellow with severe burns on much of his face. The canvas depicts a grisly scene; a desperate father shepherds his children out of a burning house, his robes ablaze.

COULMIER

Bravo, Dauphin. It's far better to paint fires than to set them, isn't it?

DAUPHIN grins, happy for COULMIER's approval. A joyous burst of the Papae Marcelli mass.

INT. CHARENTON - CHAPEL

A ROW OF HAUNTED, RUINED FACES. But – from deep in their souls – AN ASTONISHINGLY BEAUTIFUL SOUND, like a choir of angels. COULMIER conducts, jubilant. As the music soars, it seems to transform – even redeem – the singers. MADELEINE watches – admiringly – from the corner.

EXT. CHARENTON TERRACE AND GROUNDS - MEANWHILE

The RUMBLE of HOOVES. The DOCTOR's COACH – with its Gothic accoutrement – lurches into the drive. GAILLON hops off, and opens the door. ROYER-COLLARD disembarks. Emanating from within, the EXHILARATING MUSIC. The DOCTOR and GAILLON exchange a look; have they come to the right place?

INT. CHARENTON - CHAPEL - MINUTES LATER

As COULMIER conducts, he notices several SINGERS are distracted; they're staring past him, all the way down the nave. He turns to see ROYER-COLLARD, flanked by GAILLON and VALCOUR, in the doorway. VALCOUR shoots COULMIER a look that says "He's here." COULMIER turns, and silences the choir with a smile.

COULMIER

That's all for today, thank-you.

The CHOIR disperses. COULMIER bounds down the aisle, his arm outstretched in welcome. MADELEINE lingers, listening.

COULMIER

Dr. Royer-Collard? May I be the first

to welcome you to Charenton –

ROYER-COLLARD

This may feel a tad awkward, my friend, but it needn't be. I've merely come to oversee your work here; understood?

COULMIER

Of course.

ROYER-COLLARD

It's a formality; truly.

COULMIER

You're a man of Science; I'm a man of God. Charenton stands to profit from us both, I'm certain.

ROYER-COLLARD

I'll need an office on the grounds; someplace to store my things.

COULMIER

(a hint of anxiety)

If you don't mind my asking... why has the Emperor taken such sudden interest in my... our... affairs?

ROYER-COLLARD

It seems a particular patient of yours has captured his fancy.

THE MARQUIS, VIEWED THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE OF HIS CELL DOOR

HE RAILS AGAINST THE WORLD:

THE MARQUIS

Why, why, WHY should this be happening to me?!

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

A TRIO OF LUNATICS, REHEARSING A PLAY IN THE MARQUIS' COMPANY

THE MARQUIS

Once again, gentleman!

FRANVAL kneels before PITOU, holding a lady's satin shoe.

PITOU – meanwhile – is preoccupied with his wig; a flowing cascade of golden curls. Behind them, a tawdry back-drop of the French countryside. FRANVAL wreaks havoc with his lines, reciting them in painfully sing-song fashion:

FRANVAL

"I'm just a lowly cobbler, and I have been all my life. But with this shoe, I'm asking you to be a cobbler's wife –

THE MARQUIS

(interrupting)

It's a dreadful play, true! A festering pustule on the face of literature. Why the parchment it's written upon isn't worthy to wipe my ass! BUT YOU NEED NOT MAKE IT WORSE! Say your lines with conviction, ma cherie! Like a true actor!

FRANVAL

But I'm not an actor; I'm a dyspeptic.

THE MARQUIS

Seduce her, you goon!

INT. THE CORRIDOR - MEANWHILE

COULMIER and ROYER-COLLARD confer, en route to THE MARQUIS' CELL.

ROYER-COLLARD

I understand he practices the very crimes he preaches in his fiction.

COULMIER

A few indiscretions in his youth.

ROYER-COLLARD cocks an eyebrow:

ROYER-COLLARD

Indiscretions, Abbe? Please. I've read his case history. At sixteen,

he violated a serving girl with a crucifix. After six months in the dungeon at Vincennes, he mutilated a prostitute, cutting her flesh with a razor, then cauterizing the wounds with wax –

COULMIER

I hope you'll judge him by his progress here, and not his past reputation.

THEY reach the cell door. ROYER-COLLARD gazes in at THE MARQUIS as he would a creature at the zoo.

COULMIER

He's made a great success of our Little Theater; there's seldom an empty seat. Not to mention its therapeutic value.

ROYER-COLLARD

Playing dress-up with cretins? That sounds like a symptom of madness; not its cure.

Suddenly, THE MARQUIS rears up in the peephole to confront ROYER-COLLARD face-to-face.

THE MARQUIS

Homo perversio, Doctor. A species that thrives in captivity.

Their eyes meet; flicker of recognition passes between them. Doppelgangers, meeting for the first time. COULMIER interjects:

COULMIER

This is Dr. Royer-Collard; he's joining us here in an...

He looks to the DOCTOR for help:

COULMIER

...advisory capacity.

The DOCTOR considers the word "advisory", then nods. THE

MARQUIS' eyebrow arches in surprise.

THE MARQUIS

Welcome to our humble madhouse,
Doctor. I trust you'll find yourself
at home.

And with that, he slams the peephole shut.

INT. THE ATRIUM - MOMENTS LATER

COULMIER and ROYER-COLLARD make their way through the asylum.
High above – along the railing of the grand staircase –
MADELEINE appears, flanked by MICHETTE and CHARLOTTE. They've
come to size up the new DOCTOR.

ROYER-COLLARD

Why is he in your care, and not a
proper prison?

COULMIER

His wife's influence.

ROYER-COLLARD

His wife's?

COULMIER

Better to have an insane spouse than
a criminal one.

Whispers from the GIRLS above; COULMIER shoots MADELEINE a
look that says "behave yourself." She watches the TWO MEN
turn the corner.

ROYER-COLLARD

And he's never once attempted escape?

COULMIER

A man of his notoriety? He wouldn't
last a day on the streets without
capture.

INT. THE INFIRMARY - CONTINUOUS

NUNS tend PATIENTS with various maladies; others mash herbs.
A PHRENOLOGIST uses pincers to measure a PATIENT's scalp.

COULMIER

Besides, every wholesome thing he might desire, he has at Charenton. A library, filled with the world's great books, music lessons, watercolor exercises –

ROYER-COLLARD

What is the impact of all these amenities upon his psyche?

COULMIER

He no longer roars or spits. He no longer taunts the guards or molests his fellow wards –

ROYER-COLLARD

And his writing?

COULMIER suppresses a tiny smile.

COULMIER

Oh. That.

ROYER-COLLARD

Well...?

COULMIER

It's essential to his recovery; a purgative for the toxins in his mind.

ROYER-COLLARD

Do you favor its publication?

COULMIER

For sale? To the general public? Certainly not; it's unprintable.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD reaches inside his jacket, and pulls out a copy of Justine. He hands it to the ABBE, who's dumbfounded. COULMIER starts to scan the pages; the unmistakable prose of you-know-who.

COULMIER

Dear God...

He looks up to see that the DOCTOR has moved on, strolling

down the hall with authority. He races to catch up.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER

You have to believe me, I had no idea –

ROYER-COLLARD

All France is aghast at this book, yet you've not heard of it?

COULMIER

I've taken vows to live my life within these walls; not outside them.

ROYER-COLLARD

Abbe, I admire you; I do. You've a conviction... an idealism... peculiar to the very young. And so I'll be candid. The Ministry has sent me here with the most explicit... the most severe instructions.

COULMIER

(nervous now)

Yes?

INT. CHARENTON - R.C'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

GAILLON, VALCOUR and ORVOLLE appear, bringing in paraphernalia from the DOCTOR's carriage. A few items are particularly menacing; a helmet for trephining; a wire sarcophagus, and the nefarious calming chair. COULMIER stares at these instruments of torture with a mixture of wonder and foreboding.

ROYER-COLLARD

Unless we set Charenton on a straight and narrow course, she'll be shut down forever by order of the Emperor.

COULMIER

(disbelieving)

Shut down?

ROYER-COLLARD

In their eyes, the Marquis is the surest barometer of your progress here.

COULMIER

(his voice rising in protest)

But he's one among some two hundred wards –

ROYER-COLLARD

Have you tried bleeding him with leeches? The calming chair? Maybe you should flog him at the stake?

COULMIER

Why? So he'll learn to fear punishment, rather than pursue virtue for its own reward?

ROYER-COLLARD

You're a sentimental man.

COULMIER

A practical man, sir. Given the Marquis' unusual tastes, a sound thrashing on bare flesh may not qualify as a deterrent.

ROYER-COLLARD

You find this amusing, do you?

COULMIER rallies passionately on his own behalf:

COULMIER

On the contrary. Let me take up this matter with the Marquis myself –

ROYER-COLLARD

And place my reputation at stake?

COULMIER

Charenton is my life's work. To have her wrested from beneath me now –

ROYER-COLLARD pauses. His face softens, and he sighs:

ROYER-COLLARD

I've stringent standards, true, but
I've something else the Ministry
failed to take into account; a heart.

COULMIER almost collapses with relief and gratitude.

COULMIER

Thank-you, Doctor. I'll effect his
contrition; you have my word.

INT. A CORRIDOR AT CHARENTON - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

COULMIER barrels down the hall, fuming. His head is deep in
the pages of the book; he almost bumps headlong into MADELEINE
on her morning rounds. She drops her laundry basket and
flattens herself against the wall:

MADELEINE

What is it, Abbe?

She starts dogging COULMIER down the hall.

COULMIER

The Marquis. He's embarrassed us...
(with incredulity)
...before Napoleon himself.

COULMIER stops. He turns to MADELEINE, disheartened, and
confides the full force of THE MARQUIS' betrayal:

COULMIER

He's been slipping manuscripts to
his publisher.

MADELEINE feigns surprise and says in a guilty voice:

MADELEINE

He has?

COULMIER nods – tersely – and marches toward THE MARQUIS'
door. He reaches for the key-chain on his belt.

COULMIER

I place my trust too carelessly,
Madeleine.

Unbeknownst to COULMIER, this stings her. He turns the key in the lock and enters, closing the door behind him.

MADELEINE opens the peephole to spy on the scene which follows:

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT/DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER storms in to find THE MARQUIS in a cloud of white powder; he's dusting some fresh pages to set the ink.

COULMIER slams the book down.

COULMIER

This is a complete... an utter...
(his voice falls)
...disappointment.

THE MARQUIS fingers the book, disapprovingly:

THE MARQUIS

Yes! It is! The paper's cheap, the type's too small –

COULMIER

What did you do? Bribe one of the guards?

THE MARQUIS

But you implored me to write! For curative purposes, to stave off my madness –

COULMIER

But you've no right to publish! Behind my back, without my sanction!

THE MARQUIS

Have you truly read the book in question? Or did you run – straightaway – to the dog-eared pages?

COULMIER

Enough to discern its tenor.

THE MARQUIS

And –?

COULMIER

It's not even a proper novel! It's nothing but an encyclopedia of perversions! Frankly, it even fails as an exercise in craft. The characters are wooden; the dialogue is inane. Not to mention the endless repetition of words like "nipple" and "pikestaff" –

THE MARQUIS

There I was taxed; it's true.

COULMIER

And such puny scope! Nothing but the very worst in man's nature!

THE MARQUIS

I write of the great, eternal truths that bind together all mankind! The whole world over, we eat, we shit, we fuck, we kill and we die.

COULMIER

But we also fall in love; we build cities, we compose symphonies, and we endure. Why not put that in your books as well?

THE MARQUIS

It's a fiction, not a moral treatise.

COULMIER

But isn't that the duty of art? To elevate us above the beast?

THE MARQUIS

I thought that was your duty, Abbe, not mine.

COULMIER

One more trick like this, and I'll be forced to revoke all your liberties!

THE MARQUIS

It's that Doctor fellow, isn't it?
He's come to usurp your place here,
hasn't he?

COULMIER

(blurting the truth)

More than your writing's at stake.
The Ministry has threatened us with
closure.

THE MARQUIS

They can't be serious.

COULMIER

Our future lies in the stroke of
your pen.

THE MARQUIS

(impressed, even
flattered)

Mightier than the sword indeed.

COULMIER

Put yourself in my place. I've your
fellow patients to consider. If
Charenton falls, they've no place to
go. No manner in which to clothe or
feed themselves –

THE MARQUIS

Fuck 'em! They're half-wits and
pinheads. Let 'em die on the streets,
as Nature intended.

COULMIER

You among them?

This gives THE MARQUIS pause; COULMIER has a point.

COULMIER

(his most passionate
plea yet)

If ever I showed you a kind hand,
Marquis.... If ever I granted you
walking privileges on a Spring day,
or slipped an extra pillow beneath

your door... if ever I shared your wine, laughed at your vulgarities, or humored you with argument... then you will oblige me now. For your sake, and for all Charenton.

THE MARQUIS – seemingly touched – says quietly:

THE MARQUIS

You've a touch of the poet, too; perhaps you should take up the quill.

COULMIER

(undaunted)

Do I have your word?

THE MARQUIS catches MADELEINE's reflection in his mirror.

In her face, the question: "What on earth are you going to do?" He winks at her.

THE MARQUIS

Have no fear, Abbe.

He turns back to COULMIER. He has the open, honest eyes of a Spaniel, but his words are double-edged:

THE MARQUIS

I swear; all that Charenton has given me, I'll repay a hundred-fold.

MADELEINE's eyes grow wide with wonder at the prospect.

COULMIER

If you only mean to dupe me again –

THE MARQUIS

(indignant now)

Honestly! You cut me to the core! What's the point of all your valiant attempts at rehabilitation if – when I finally succumb – when at long last, I pledge myself to righteous conduct – you regard me with nothing but suspicion? Have you no faith in your own medicine?

COULMIER smiles; THE MARQUIS has a point.

COULMIER
(reassured)
Thank-you.

INT. THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE MARQUIS' CELL - MEANWHILE

MADELEINE slides the peephole shut. She hears a sound; staring at her intensely from the opposite end of the hall, ROYER-COLLARD.

ROYER-COLLARD
My, my. At Charenton, even the walls
have eyes.

MADELEINE
(under her breath)
Mmmm... don't they?

She scoops up her laundry and barrels on her way. COULMIER leaves the MARQUIS and steps into the hall. He's surprised to see the DOCTOR.

ROYER-COLLARD
Well?

COULMIER
I spoke to him with reason and
compassion; the tools which serve us
best here.

ROYER-COLLARD
And -?

COULMIER
He's sworn to obedience.

The DOCTOR – ever doubtful – mutters "tsk, tsk, tsk," and turns to leave; COULMIER calls after him, insistent:

COULMIER
He's more than a patient, Doctor;
the Marquis is my friend –

ROYER-COLLARD
You keep strange company, Abbe. But

if you truly have matters in hand
here –

COULMIER

I have.

ROYER-COLLARD

– then I've friends of my own to
visit.

ANGLE ON: THE MARQUIS, watching, ever-watching, from the
hole in his door.

EXT. THE COUNTRYSIDE

The THUNDER of HOOVES. The DOCTOR's COACH takes a hair-pin
turn at a furious pace.

EXT. THE PANTHEMONT CONVENT - MOMENTS LATER

ROYER-COLLARD stands beneath the convent's trellis, and pounds
on the door. It opens, revealing the MOTHER SUPERIOR – SISTER
NOIRCEUIL – a severe-looking nun in a wimple.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL

Yes?

ROYER-COLLARD

I've come for my bride.

INT. PANTHEMONT CONVENT/CLOISTERS - CONTINUOUS

SISTER NOIRCEUIL leads ROYER-COLLARD down the corridor; a
heavy set of keys dangles from the belt around her waist.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL

We'd not expected you for some time.
Simone has not yet come of age.

ROYER-COLLARD

I've taken a new post at Charenton;
I need the succor only a wife can
provide.

They arrive at the room of the convent's ward, SIMONE.

INT. PANTHEMONT CONVENT - SIMONE'S QUARTERS -

CONTINUOUS

They interrupt the GIRL in prayer before a porcelain figure of the MADONNA; she rises. With her doe-like eyes and cherubic skin, SIMONE could be the DOCTOR's daughter as readily as his wife.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL

You remember Dr. Royer-Collard.

SIMONE blushes, and casts her eyes downward.

SIMONE

I'd not forget the man to whom I was promised.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL

He's come to collect you.

SIMONE

(with alarm:)

Today? This minute?

ROYER-COLLARD

My apologies, Mademoiselle; I'd no time to write.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE PANTHEMONT CONVENT - MINUTES LATER

SIMONE stands in her traveling cape, clutching her MADONNA, ROYER-COLLARD beside her. A CLUSTER of NUNS has gathered to bid SIMONE adieu; among them, the twins SISTER FLAVIE and SISTER ROSE FATIMA. The MOTHER SUPERIOR hands SIMONE a small valise:

SISTER NOIRCEUIL

Be grateful, child. It's my experience that most poor girls who are orphaned never wed; They wind up spinsters, or worse still... nuns.

She takes SIMONE by the chin; her fingers are talons.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL

Thank God that Fortune has spared you from such a Fate.

SISTER NOIRCEUIL bows her head toward ROYER-COLLARD, giving him permission to go. He extends his arm to SIMONE.

Hesitantly, she takes it. He guides her toward the waiting carriage. SISTER NOIRCEUIL is grimly pleased. SISTER FLAVIE and SISTER ROSE FATIMA exchange a look of grave concern.

SISTER ROSE FATIMA
Good-bye, Simone.

SISTER FLAVIE
God bless, Simone.

EXT. THE COUNTRYSIDE - A SHORT TIME LATER

The DOCTOR's carriage lurches down the cobblestone road.

INT. THE DOCTOR'S CARRIAGE

ROYER-COLLARD sits stiffly by his new bride; she stares out the window. Looming on the horizon, a towering chateau.

SIMONE's eyes grow wide with wonder. TWO MEN stand outside, waiting to greet them, with their own carriage and driver standing by.

DELBEN, (O.S.)
The Emperor wishes to ensure your
comfort while at Charenton.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CHATEAU - CONTINUOUS

Delben, accompanies ROYER-COLLARD and SIMONE across the drive toward the chateau.

DELBEN,
Consider the chateau a gift, provided
you're willing to finance the
necessary repairs.

The DOCTOR assesses his new home up-close; it's fallen into grave disuse. Practically a ruin. Delben, gestures to MONSIEUR PROUX, a dimpled young fellow, nattily dressed.

DELBEN,
Monsieur Prouix is the court's most
promising young architect; he's at

your disposal.

MONSIEUR PROUX offers a friendly grin; the DOCTOR gives him the cursory once-over.

INT. THE CHATEAU - ATRIUM

The THREE MEN enter, SIMONE a few paces behind. An opulent space, fallen into desuetude: a marble floor with matching columns, a domed ceiling, and an expansive staircase.

ROYER-COLLARD

(dryly)

It has possibilities, yes. Simone?

SIMONE flinches, surprised the DOCTOR is addressing her so publicly. She says in a voice hushed with awe:

SIMONE

I'm to live here?

ROYER-COLLARD moves toward the stairs; something catches his attention. Underfoot, a huge, crimson stain, rimmed in yellow. The DOCTOR gets down on his haunches and runs a hands over it. He glances up at Delben, his face a question mark.

DELBEN,

(coldly)

The place hasn't been occupied since the Terror; it belonged to the Duc de Blangis, an avowed monarchist. The Jacobins were most... unforgiving.

Lying askance, a moldy old shoe with a cracked heel.

Delben, sidles up to ROYER-COLLARD and says confidentially:

DELBEN,

His wife was trying to escape; they caught her on the stair, and set upon her with bayonets.

(shuddering)

"There but for the grace of God" ...
eh, Doctor?

ROYER-COLLARD

I don't shed tears over the past,

Monsieur Delben; I look to the future.

ROYER-COLLARD stands and turns to PROUX:

ROYER-COLLARD

We'd best quarry fresh marble, don't you think?

PROUX dutifully makes a note.

INT. THE CHATEAU - UPPER ATRIUM

ROYER-COLLARD coaxes PROUX aside for a confidential conversation:

ROYER-COLLARD

You're to humor my wife in all things. If she wants Venetian glass, she's to have it. Italian tile, Dutch velvet; spare no expense.

(lowering his voice to a whisper)

But in her bedchamber, see to it that the door locks from the outside. And on her windows... an iron grate.

PROUX

Bars, sir?

ROYER-COLLARD

In the convent, Simone was spared the world's temptations. I won't have her falling prey to them now.

ROYER-COLLARD glances over the railing, down below; SIMONE stands, overwhelmed, in the enormous atrium. Over her head, the beating of wings.

ROYER-COLLARD

She's a rare bird; I intend to keep her caged.

SIMONE'S POV: TRAPPED WHITE DOVES flap their feathers madly, trying to get through the glass above.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE PANTHEMONT CONVENT - AFTERNOON

LOUISON and GUERIN have come to exchange alms for candles from the nuns who make them, SISTER ROSE FATIMA and SISTER FLAVIE. The BOYS load boxes onto the asylum cart. They gossip:

GUERIN

No!

SISTER ROSE FATIMA

It's a scandal, truly. Him, pretending to be a God-fearing man!

SISTER FLAVIE

And that's not all; he's far too old to marry, and she's far too young –

LOUISON and GUERIN exchange a grin.

INT. LAUNDRY - LATER

GUERIN whispers the tale to a gloriously naked MICHETTE, as he makes love to her in the straw. His words are interspersed with gasps and moans.

MICHETTE

No!

GUERIN

– I say – the comely little thing – is barely sixteen –

MICHETTE giggles, and turns to her left. There – surprise – lies LOUISON, pleasuring her from the other side.

LOUISON

– I say – ah! – she's even younger –

INT. THE SERVANT'S QUARTERS - LATER

MICHETTE – in her knickers – now relays the story to MADELEINE. CHARLOTTE glowers, always the odd one out.

MADELEINE

No!

MICHETTE

– from a convent, no less; she was
meant to be a nun –

INT. THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE MARQUIS' CELL - THAT NIGHT

MADELEINE stands on her overturned basket, whispering to THE MARQUIS through the peephole. Her lips are luscious rubies in his ear:

MADELEINE

– he's old enough to have fathered
her twice over –

THE MARQUIS' eyes spark with inspiration.

THE MARQUIS

Why, the hypocrite. It has all the makings of a farce, hasn't it? Run straightaway, and tell Franval to cancel rehearsal...

CLOSE UP: A MAGNIFICENT WHITE QUILL PEN.

As he blithely hums "Claire de la Lune," THE MARQUIS dips the quill into his ink well; the liquid shoots up the feather's shaft, turning it a deep purple color.

On his PARCHMENT, in calligraphic script, the words "The Crimes of Love: A Play in Several Lascivious Acts..."

THE MARQUIS' little tune rises all the way to symphonic tones, and we fade up to...

EXT. CHARENTON TERRACE - EVENING

Tonight the place looks less like a madhouse and more like the Comédie Française. Mingling on the steps, bejeweled DOWAGERS and GENTLEMEN in frock-coats. Flanking COULMIER, two GRAND DAMES: MADAME BOUGIVAL and MADEMOISELLE CLAIRWIL, who's never without her small LAPDOG, even at the theater.

They bill and coo around the comely priest like magpies.

MADMOISELLE CLAIRWIL

Abbe de Coulmier! You rascal! Your comedies have become quite the rage;

I had to claw my way to a ticket.

COULMIER

I can hardly take credit –

MADAME BOUGIVAL

(interrupting the
ABBE)

And so expertly acted! That charming
young man in last week's comedy...

(sotto voce)

...I'd no idea he was an imbecile!

COULMIER

Everyone has talents, if we look for
them.

MADAME BOUGIVAL

(appraising the ABBE)

Mmm. Yes. I'm sure.

COULMIER notices ROYER-
COLLARD mounting the steps with SIMONE.

In her finery, SIMONE looks less like a society bride, and
more like a child playing dress-up. COULMIER gives the DOCTOR
a cordial wave. ROYER-COLLARD nods, curtly.

MADAME BOUGIVAL

Is that the new Doctor? You must be
thrilled. Such a renowned expert,
right here, at Charenton!

COULMIER

(evasively)

Ah! Curtain time.

MADemoiselle CLAIRWIL

I'll say one thing for him; he has a
beautiful daughter.

ANGLE ON: A CARRIAGE, PULLING UP TO THE STEPS. A MYSTERIOUS
WOMAN disembarks. She's in her middle years, with a dark
bonnet to disguise her identity. She ascends the steps to
CHARENTON.

CLOSE UP: A PLACARD FOR "THE HAPPY SHOEMAKER"

A hand crumples it; tears it up.

FRAME WIDENS

and we see it's THE MARQUIS. He's in the linen pantry, which has been jerry-rigged as a BACKSTAGE AREA for the evening's Little Theater Performance, which will take place in the laundry. Poised near him, the Stage Manager for the evening, MADELEINE. They exchange a conspiratorial glance; tonight's performance is going to go splendidly! THE MARQUIS surveys the LUNATIC CAST spread out before him, readying their night of glory.

THE MARQUIS

Remember, gentlemen! Inside each of your delicate minds... your distinctive bodies... ART is waiting to be born. So let's give the Doctor a performance I hope he'll remember forever...

The CAST gives a rallying cry; THE MARQUIS turns and peers out the tattered velvet curtains.

MARQUIS' POV: The catacombs have been converted into a makeshift theater-in-the-round. The place has a slightly sinister feel; one of Dante's lower circles. A primitive platform stage has been erected in the spot customarily held by MADAME LECLERC's vat.

The SOCIETY FOLK sit on benches alongside the FEEBLE and the DAMNED. THE LUNATIC QUARTET plays its bizarre instruments: 18th century curled horns, and home-made strings. A grinning DAUPHIN lights the torches that will illuminate the stage. From the AUDIENCE, excited twitters.

A grand night for slumming among the loons! A bacchanal!

He sees RENEE PELAGIE take her seat, and lower her hood, craning her neck for a sight of the man she loves. Next, he marks ROYER-COLLARD, sitting on a newly-erected dais next to his lovely wife SIMONE. COULMIER sits at the DOCTOR's shoulder, pointing out various notables in the crowd:

COULMIER

Madame Bougival; Mademoiselle Clairwil –
and of course – the Marquis' wife –

ROYER-COLLARD
(evincing interest)
Oh indeed?

Meanwhile – backstage – FRANVAL nervously taps the MARQUIS on the shoulder:

FRANVAL
Begging your pardon; it's time to begin.

THE MARQUIS drops the curtain, and reminds FRANVAL:

THE MARQUIS
The dedication, word for word; it's every bit as crucial as the play which follows –

FRANVAL nods and takes a deep breath. He bounds onto the stage.

FRANVAL
(his voice quavering)
Madames and Messieurs, there's been a change in tonight's program.

ANGLE ON: COULMIER, who stiffens with apprehension. This is an unexpected development.

FRANVAL
We will not be performing The Happy Shoemaker.

From the AUDIENCE, stirs and murmurs. Perhaps a few disappointed sighs. From the wings, THE MARQUIS gestures for FRANVAL to take a few significant steps forward, toward the DOCTOR.

FRANVAL
Instead, we'd like to premiere a new play in honor of the newly-appointed Dr. Royer-Collard and his lovely bride, married nary a week today –

ANGLE ON: ROYER-COLLARD AND HIS WIFE. The DOCTOR smiles at SIMONE, and touches her hand, fondly. A polite smattering of

applause.

ANGLE ON: FRANVAL

FRANVAL
– a comedy entitled...

He dries up. From backstage, THE MARQUIS hisses:

THE MARQUIS
The Crimes of Love!

FRANVAL
...The Crimes of Love, written by
one of Charenton's very own wards!

FRANVAL glances back at THE MARQUIS. THE AUDIENCE follows suit. The moment they see SADE, they break into even louder applause than they gave ROYER-COLLARD. The asylum's most notorious inmate! Right here, before their very eyes!

In a show of false modesty, THE MARQUIS blushes, steps out from behind the curtain, and gives a cursory little bow.

ROYER-COLLARD glances back at COULMIER as if to say "What's this?" COULMIER starts fingering his rosary in nervous anticipation. RENEE PELAGIE just closes her eyes.

ANGLE ON: THE STAGE AS THE BAND PLAYS

A LUNATIC dressed as an ANGEL sits high atop one ladder, and a DEVIL on another. Together, the TWO start pummeling the stage with artificial snow. BOUCHON stands in the wings, heaving a giant set of bellows, creating the North Wind.

INT. BACKSTAGE

MADELEINE rushes to ready the cast; DAUPHIN is dressed as a MOTHER SUPERIOR; he looks markedly like Sister Noirceuil of the Panthemont Convent. Behind him, PITOU is the FEMALE INGENUE; a veritable Simone. He cries out for his bonnet:

PITOU
My hat, my hat!

MADELEINE afixes his hat, hands PITOU and DAUPHIN each a hobby horse, and pushes them toward the STAGE.

ANGLE: ONSTAGE

DAUPHIN and PITOU ride down the ramp which leads from the linen pantry onto the wooden stage...

INGENUE

Oh Sister Saint-Fond, whither do we go? Passing o'er rivers, canyons and snow?

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Hurry, Eugenie, for we must not tarry; I deliver you now to the man you shall marry!

ANGLE ON: SIMONE

Her girlish face alive with pleasure, charmed by the spectacle before her.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Once you have rested, at your leisure – he'll coach you in the ways of pleasure.

A RIPPLE through the AUDIENCE; tonight's performance is saucier than usual. As DAUPHIN and PITOU move offstage, BOUCHON collects their hobby horses.

TWO LUNATICS enter, covered in ornate vines. They form an ARCHWAY. With a drum roll and a thunder-clap, CLEANTE rises from the AUDIENCE – just a few seats away from ROYER-COLLARD – and hops onstage to assume the role of THE LIBERTINE. GASPS of SURPRISE from the crowd. He wears a coat and hat that match the DOCTOR's.

PITOU and DAUPHIN re-enter from the wings.

LIBERTINE

At last she arrives, my hard-won bride! Hurry, my child, and scurry inside. There you'll find such treasures await you; Marzipan and meringue to sate you!

INGENUE

Such gallantry in men is – sadly –
a rarity; How lucky I am to receive
his charity!

The INGENUE ducks through the HUMAN ARCHWAY into the imagined CHATEAU. The LIBERTINE passes the MOTHER SUPERIOR a comically large purse.

LIBERTINE

Thank you, dear Sister, for abetting
me so; Bringing her here to this
secluded Chateau! Little does she
know the terrors in store; when I
tutor her in –

He leans into ROYER-COLLARD for this last bit:

LIBERTINE

...les crimes de l'amour!

ANGLE ON: ROYER-COLLARD. He glances all the way past the play, through the AUDIENCE seated in the opposite bank.

There – looming in the back row against the wall – THE MARQUIS, who grins; the poison arrow has hit his mark. The DOCTOR – ever composed, grins back. An even-handed challenge that says "I know what you're up to; you're only dooming yourself." Slyly, THE MARQUIS slips behind a column, disappearing from view.

ROYER-COLLARD whispers to SIMONE:

ROYER-COLLARD

Leave at once –

SIMONE

But it's just begun –

ROYER-COLLARD

Do as I say.

A forlorn SIMONE exits; GAILLON escorts her toward the door.

ANGLE ON: THE DOOR

As SIMONE and GAILLON slip toward the exit, THE MARQUIS stands waiting for them. He casts a knowing glance at SIMONE, then

wisecracks to GAILLON:

THE MARQUIS

Leaving so soon? Oh, but of course!
You've seen it before.

GAILLON just glares and hurries SIMONE up the stairs.

ANGLE: ONSTAGE

The play continues, full-throttle: BOUCHON pushes a bed onstage. The INGENUUE cowers on the mattress; the LIBERTINE leaps upon her.

LIBERTINE

Quickly, my suckling, out of your
clothes! My scepter awaits; how solid
it grows!

INGENUUE

Stop, I beg you! Have pity, I say!
You're not my lover; you're a
monstrous rou,!

The LIBERTINE yanks up the INGENUUE's legs and dives beneath her skirts. From beneath the fabric, a host of VULGAR SOUNDS.

LIBERTINE

Do as I say! Stick your legs in the
air! It's true, I'm a pig and you've
truffles down there –

This is all COULMIER can bear; he rises from his seat, in pursuit of THE MARQUIS. He aims for the door, but THE MARQUIS has already disappeared. COULMIER starts scanning the crowd, hoping to find him in the sea of faces.

ANGLE ON: RENEE PELAGIE

She turns, aware of her husband's presence somewhere behind her. MADAME BOUGIVAL says loudly to MADEMOISELLE CLAIRWIL:

MADAME BOUGIVAL

Who do you suppose is to blame? The
author... or his Muse?

RENEE's face falls, stricken. MADAME BOUGIVAL and MADEMOISELLE

CLAIRWIL titter behind their fans.

ANGLE: ONSTAGE

THE LIBERTINE continues to pleasure THE INGENUUE with his mouth:

INGENUUE

(her tone changing)

Good heavens, what's this? Such a wicked sensation! A feeling somewhere between shame and elation! Yes! That's the way; use your tongue like a wand in much the same manner as Sister Saint-Fond!

INT. BACKSTAGE

MADELEINE scurries about, readying the LUNATIC CAST for the Second Act: A FAUX NAPOLEON, A MALE NUN, FRANVAL, DAUPHIN and a LOON DRESSED AS JESUS CHRIST.

MADELEINE

Quickly; the second act!

They exit onto the stage. MADELEINE is alone now backstage. Or so it seems, until BOUCHON looms up behind her in the darkness.

BOUCHON's POV: MADELEINE peer through the curtains at the performance. He admires the nape of her neck; her soft shoulders. Meanwhile – onstage – the play moves apace:

THE LIBERTINE

I had a suspicion the Sister was Sapphic!

THE INGENUUE

I'd tell you more, but it's simply too graphic. Suffice it to say, she's a preference for lasses! Even at Vespers, she always made passes –

ANGLE ON: MADELEINE

Suddenly, BOUCHON's hands appears around the base of her neck; his finger flicker across her cheek. Her face fills

with shock, and she disappears behind the curtain.

LIBERTINE

My darling, Eugenie, dainty morsel!
Get on your back! Let's try it dorsal!

INGENUE

Was ever a man more risqu,? He wants
to take me every way!

ANGLE: BACKSTAGE

BOUCHON yanks MADELEINE behind a curtain, and pushes her – hard – against a stone wall. With a visceral grunt, he gropes her beneath her petticoat. She gives a sharp yelp, and reaches for an iron, still red-hot from the day's work.

She presses it – hard – against BOUCHON's cheek. His flesh sizzles.

BOUCHON

Ahhhhhggggg...

ANGLE: ONSTAGE

The obscene pantomime gets wilder by the minute:

ANGLE ON: THE AUDIENCE

COULMIER hears BOUCHON's tortured cry, and lurches from the dais, marching directly across the stage. VALCOUR leaps up from his own aisle seat, and follows the PRIEST. The rollicking play continues onstage:

LIBERTINE

I'll plunder every lovely pore until
you're weak and cry "no more!"

INGENUE

I tremble with fear! You're bound to
pound the quivering lips of my Venus
mound!

LIBERTINE

And then – to prove your truly mine –
I'll plunder you, darling, from
behind!

INGENUUE

What of my lips, will you soil them
too? When you've broken every other
taboo?

LIBERTINE

I'll fill every slippery hollow; if
you're obliging, then you'll swallow!

COULMIER rips aside the backstage curtain, revealing MADELEINE – still out of breath – and BOUCHON, grabbing his face in pain. The AUDIENCE – giddy and oblivious – starts to peal with pleasure; they're certainly getting their money's worth tonight!

VALCOUR seizes BOUCHON roughly.

COULMIER

Take him to the infirmary for a
plaster, and an ice bath. That'll
cool him.

VALCOUR drags a quivering BOUCHON away.

COULMIER

Has he hurt you?

MADELEINE

(bravely)

His stinking breath caused my eyes
to run, that's all.

COULMIER kisses her on the forehead. She clutches him in a hug, and dissolves into tears. COULMIER looks up to see THE MARQUIS standing nearby. The TWO MEN lock eyes for an instant; a flicker of jealousy passes between them.

COULMIER

You mean to take us all down with
you?

THE MARQUIS

(with mock innocence)

Don't be absurd; it's only a play.

COULMIER glances past THE MARQUIS to see ROYER-COLLARD rise

from his seat, and – imperiously – gather his hat and coat.

Their eyes meet for an instant; ROYER-COLLARD shoots daggers.

THE MARQUIS
(to the audience now,
expansively)
It's only a play!

The AUDIENCE is on its feet now; some cry "Bravo!" Others hurl insults at the stage. Frantic, FRANVAL gestures to the STAGE HANDS to bring the curtain down.

EXT. CHARENTON - TERRACE - MINUTES LATER

The DOCTOR flings open the door of his carriage, where SIMONE waits for him.

COULMIER
It was fiction, of course.

ROYER-COLLARD
(brusquely)
Of course.

COULMIER
It was not inspired by circumstance.

ROYER-COLLARD
No. It most certainly was not.

He boards, slamming the door shut with finality:

ROYER-COLLARD
You ought to be ashamed, Abbe.
Exploiting those drooling, pathetic
cretins for financial gain –

COULMIER
That's not our intent –

ROYER-COLLARD
– a veritable freak show for tourists
and curiosity seekers. Charenton is
a sanatorium; she is not a circus.
The theater is henceforth closed. As
for your avowed friend – playwright

emeritus of the madhouse –

COULMIER swallows; he knows what's coming.

COULMIER

I'll do everything in my power –

ROYER-COLLARD

(cutting him off
abruptly)

Do more. Otherwise, I'll be forced
to report to the Ministry that the
inmates are indeed running the asylum.

The carriage screeches away, leaving Coulmier alone in the
night air.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

COULMIER bursts into the MARQUIS's quarters to find him
enjoying a late-night snack of fricandeau, a napkin tied
around his neck.

COULMIER

I hope you're satisfied; he's shut
down the theater.

THE MARQUIS plucks the napkin from around his neck, and tosses
it haughtily onto his plate.

THE MARQUIS

He can't do that to me.

COULMIER

How can one man possibly be so
selfish?

THE MARQUIS

We held a mirror up to the Doctor,
and – apparently – he didn't like
what he saw.

COULMIER charges to THE MARQUIS' desk and plucks a handful
of quills from the ink stand.

THE MARQUIS
(dropping his fork)
What the devil –

COULMIER
If you won't be true to your word,
then you've left me no choice.

COULMIER grabs quills off the window-sill, the side-board and the secretary. THE MARQUIS realizes COULMIER means business; he lunges for the ink stand. It spills, sending ink all over his desk.

THE MARQUIS
But I kept my promise! I didn't
publish –

COULMIER shoots a glare that says "Oh, please."

COULMIER
Perhaps – in time – you'll earn
them back through good behavior –

THE MARQUIS
You can't –! You mustn't –! I've
all the demons of hell in my head;
my only salvation is to vent them on
paper –

COULMIER
Try reading, for a change. The writer
who produces more than he reads? The
sure mark of an amateur.

He snares a Bible off the shelf, tossing it to THE MARQUIS.

COULMIER
Start with the Bible; it's cheerier,
and more artfully written.

THE MARQUIS
(spitting on its cover)
That monstrous God of yours? He strung
up his very own son like a side of
veal; I shudder to think what He'd
do to me.

COULMIER

You know what sacrilege is, don't you? The last refuge of the failed provocateur.

COULMIER yanks open the desk drawer. In it, bottles of ink. He starts to fill his pockets.

THE MARQUIS

(truly frightened now)

I'll die of loneliness! I've no company but the characters I create –

COULMIER

Whores and pederasts? You're better off without them.

The MARQUIS abruptly switches gears; he has a new idea.

THE MARQUIS

I have a proposition.

COULMIER

You always do.

THE MARQUIS

Madeleine. She's besotted with me; she'd do anything I ask. She could pay you a midnight visit –

COULMIER

I don't know who you insult more; her or me.

THE MARQUIS

"Part the gates of heaven," as it were –

COULMIER

(sharply)

That's enough.

THE MARQUIS

You're tense, darling. You could use a long, slow screw.

COULMIER

Good day, Marquis.

THE MARQUIS
THEN BUGGER ME!

COULMIER exits, locking the door behind him.

THE MARQUIS
GOD DAMN YOU, ABBE! HAVE YOU NO TRUE
SENSE OF MY CONDITION? OF ITS GRAVITY?
My writing is involuntary, like the
beating of my heart! My constant
erection! I can't help it!

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

From inside his cell, the MARQUIS pounds on the door.

THE MARQUIS (O.S.)
MAGGOT!

COULMIER pauses. He hears the sliding of the peep-hole in the door. He turns back to see the MARQUIS staring at him through the tiny slit.

THE MARQUIS
Where there's a will, there's a way.
And a maniac is matchless for
invention.

The peephole slams shut.

FADE TO:

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT - SOMETIME LATER

VALCOUR admits the MYSTERIOUS WOMAN from the theater, THE MARQUIS' WIFE, RENEE PELAGIE. The MARQUIS stares out his cell window without acknowledging her.

RENEE PELAGIE
I've done just as you bade me; I've
paid a visit to the woodcarver. He
laughed and called me a whore, but
took my money just the same.

She sets a satchel down on his desk, and unwraps it.

Inside, two wooden prods, each about nine inches long. One is ebony; the other rosewood.

RENEE PELAGIE

I don't know which gives you greater pleasure; the objects themselves, or the humiliation I endure procuring them on your behalf.

Next, she proffers a small box tied with a gold bow:

RENEE PELAGIE

And – last but not least – I've brought you aniseed drops and some chocolate pastilles.

This gets his attention; he turns.

THE MARQUIS

Did you now, Madame?

His face softens, and he says with a suggestive lilt:

THE MARQUIS

They're filled with cream, yes? You know I shan't touch them, unless they're positively bursting – erupting – with cream.

RENEE PELAGIE blushes happily, delighted that she's pleased him. THE MARQUIS crosses to her; en route, he notices VALCOUR, spying through the peephole. He snaps it shut.

THE MARQUIS

What else have you brought that I might nibble upon?

He presses her against the wall, cupping her breast, and kissing the tip of her nose. She offers faint protest:

RENEE PELAGIE

Oh, Donatien... you mustn't...

He licks the rim of her ear as he whispers:

THE MARQUIS

Hm? Tell me. What other treats?

RENEE PELAGIE
(helpless with giggles)
...shame on you, truly...

Suddenly – savagely – he slaps her; she reels, stunned.

THE MARQUIS
For fuck's sake, woman! BONBONS? I'm
to sit here, gorging myself on useless
trifles, sucking down your little
sweetmeats, when what I truly need –
what I truly require – are a few
quill pens? Perhaps a pot of ink?

RENEE PELAGIE
Forgive me, I beg you –

He pulls the drawers from his desk, and hurls them to the
ground; they splinter.

THE MARQUIS
Don't you see? I've been raped! Far
more egregiously than any of my
wretched characters –

RENEE PELAGIE breaks away from him, and says in a voice
cracked with emotion:

RENEE PELAGIE
How was I to know, my darling?

THE MARQUIS
How was I to tell you? By writing a
letter? WITH WHAT, MY ASININE BRIDE?

RENEE PELAGIE backs herself into a corner, a safe distance
from her husband, and implores:

RENEE PELAGIE
I beg you, Donatien... as your wife...
your only ally... you must stop making
such a monstrous spectacle of
yourself.

THE MARQUIS

(incredulous)
You've come to lecture me?

RENEE PELAGIE
To flaunt your deviance in public?
Upon a stage?

THE MARQUIS
They've put you up to this, haven't
they?

RENEE PELAGIE
You ought to court the Doctor's favor,
not his contempt.

THE MARQUIS tears open the box of candy, and pops one into
his mouth. He chews:

THE MARQUIS
I ought to carve my name into his
backside, and fill the wounds with
salt –

RENEE PELAGIE's eyes well; she dabs them with a handkerchief.

RENEE PELAGIE
You're here – safe – surrounded by
brick and mortar; but my prison is
far crueler. It has no walls.

She starts speaking in a mad rush, tripping over her own
words, frantic to spill it all out before he cuts her off:

RENEE PELAGIE
Everywhere I go, they point and
whisper! At the opera, they hiss at
me when I take my box. When I went
to church... the priest refused to
even hear my confession; he said I
was already damned! Why must I suffer
for your sins?

THE MARQUIS
It's the way of all martyrs, isn't
it?

RENEE PELAGIE

Give me back my anonymity, that's
all I ask! Let me be invisible again!

THE MARQUIS explodes now, his eyes spinning with rage.

THE MARQUIS

Tell me; have you done anything to
secure my release? NO! Have you
petitioned the court? NEVER! Sought
audience with the Emperor –

RENEE PELAGIE

He refuses to be seen in my company!
He blanches at the mention of your
name –

THE MARQUIS

It's a convenience, isn't it, having
your husband locked away! You no
longer have to hold your tongue, or
hoist your skirts! Or crack your
mouth, so I can put it to its one
pleasurable use! YOU'RE NOT MY WIFE,
NO! YOU'RE ONE AMONG MY MANY JAILERS,
AREN'T YOU?

RENEE PELAGIE starts to sob, convulsively. VALCOUR – hearing
the commotion – re-enters the cell.

VALCOUR

What in the name a' God –

THE MARQUIS

Take this cow away; I can't look at
her.

VALCOUR escorts a fragile RENEE PELAGIE from the room.

THE MARQUIS

Perhaps you'll find a place for her
in the West Wing, eh? AMONG THE
HYSTERICIS?

As they lumber out, THE MARQUIS bellows after them:

THE MARQUIS

LOCK HER UP AS WELL, SO SHE KNOWS

HOW IT FEELS! THE GORGON! THE SOW!

INT. ROYER-COLLARD'S CHATEAU - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

In the rear of her carriage, RENEE PELAGIE. She's dried her tears, and now bears a look of fierce resolve: a woman imbued with a mission.

INT. CHATEAU - THE ATRIUM - CONTINUOUS

CRAFTSMEN buzz about the place like flies, carrying gilded mirrors, uncrating sculpture, fitting wall sconces, etc.

GAILLON stands by at the door. ROYER-COLLARD AND MONSIEUR PROUX are at one end of the room, in rapt consultation.

Swatches, marble samples, and blueprints litter their table.

MONSIEUR PROUX

For a woman of humble origin, your wife certainly has refined tastes!
When I suggest granite for the foyer, she's quick to counter with Peruvian marble. Peruvian marble! It costs a fortune to import!

SIMONE wafts past on the balcony above; she glances down at them, smiles. ROYER-COLLARD assumes the smile is meant for him; he offers a tiny wave.

ROYER-COLLARD

(beaming)

Whatever her heart desires, Monsieur Proux.

MONSIEUR PROUX assumes the smile is his; he offer his own toothsome grin.

MONSIEUR PROUX

I'd like nothing better, sir, than to grant her every wish.

(sotto voce, to the DOCTOR)

But on the modest sum you've accorded me – I'm an architect, not a magician –

RENEE PELAGIE brushes past GAILLON with gale force:

RENEE PELAGIE

I must see the Doctor at once. It's
a matter of dire urgency...

ROYER-COLLARD spies her instantly; their eyes lock.

ROYER-COLLARD

It is customary to write first, and
request an appointment –

RENEE PELAGIE

Desperation has driven me past
etiquette, all the way to frenzy.

ROYER-COLLARD

My schedule is not subject to the
whims of lunatics.

RENEE PELAGIE removes her hat, indicating her intention to
stay.

RENEE PELAGIE

I beg to differ, Doctor. You work in
a madhouse. Your every waking moment
is governed by the insane.

ROYER-COLLARD

(with a sigh)

I pray you: be succinct.

RENEE PELAGIE

You're new to Charenton, yes? Perhaps
you're not yet familiar with my
husband, and his unusual case.

ROYER-COLLARD

With all due respect, Madame, all
France is familiar with your husband.

(to MONSIEUR PROUX)

Grant us a moment alone, won't you,
Monsieur Prouix?

MONSIEUR PROUX

Happily, sir. Your servant, sir.

He gestures for the CRAFTSMEN to follow him out. The room –

a veritable hive of activity – is now silent. DR. ROYER-COLLARD offers RENEE PELAGIE a seat.

ROYER-COLLARD
Madame, please.

RENEE sits.

ROYER-COLLARD
I assume you've come to plead for clemency on your husband's behalf.

RENEE PELAGIE
Oh you do, do you? It is my dearest hope, Doctor, that he remain entombed forever, and that when at last he perishes in the dank bowels of your institution, he be left as carrion for the rodents and the worms.

The DOCTOR's somewhat taken aback:

ROYER-COLLARD
I stand corrected, Madame.

Now that she's alone in the DOCTOR's company, the full force of RENEE PELAGIE's despair issues forth:

RENEE PELAGIE
If you can't cure him – truly cure him – then – at least – I beg you – harness the beast that rages in his soul.

The wheels in ROYER-COLLARD'S brain begin to turn; he idly fingers a swatch of fabric.

ROYER-COLLARD
It's not so easily done, Madame.

He rises, circling RENEE PELAGIE.

ROYER-COLLARD
You're aware, are you not, that it costs a great deal to house your husband at Charenton...

RENEE PELAGIE

I pay his stipend every month, far more dutifully than I should.

ROYER-COLLARD

That barely covers the cost of his room. There's nary a penny left over for appropriate treatments. Opiates to quell his temper. Restraints to chasten him when he misbehaves.

RENEE PELAGIE can sense the direction of the conversation; she blushes, and stares at her hands in her lap.

ROYER-COLLARD

Perhaps if you were to buttress your entreaties with the means to oblige them...

RENEE PELAGIE

I am not a wealthy woman.

ROYER-COLLARD

But you've a pension, haven't you, from the sale of his books?

RENEE PELAGIE

It's tainted money, Doctor.

ROYER-COLLARD

What a beautiful thought, Marquise.

RENEE PELAGIE

What thought is that?

ROYER-COLLARD

That ill-gotten funds, borne of his degeneracy, might now effect his salvation.

RENEE ponders the thought; it has a certain righteous symmetry.

ROYER-COLLARD

If you're truly determined to step out of the shadow of your husband's celebrity –

RENEE PELAGIE
Oh, but I am!

ROYER-COLLARD
– words alone are insufficient.

RENEE PELAGIE
It's beyond perversity. That honor
should carry a price tag...

The DOCTOR rises and crosses to her:

ROYER-COLLARD
Imagine; old friends once again
deigning to kiss your hand.
(kissing her hand,
seductively)
"Why, Marquise. Enchanted to see
you.

Welcome back from your long, dark descent into the abyss of
infamy."

RENEE's flustered; it's been a long time, and the DOCTOR
does have his charms.

RENEE PELAGIE
Don't toy with me, Doctor.

ROYER-COLLARD
Now is the time to secure your
epitaph. The benevolent Marquise,
Charenton's most revered
philanthropist... or Satan's Bride.

A torturous moment of indecision for RENEE PELAGIE.

EXT. CHATEAU - MINUTES LATER

The DOCTOR and RENEE PELAGIE step into the sun.

ROYER-COLLARD
Rest assured that your generosity
speeds your husband ever faster toward
a cure.

MONSIEUR PROUX bolts up from the front steps of the CHATEAU.
ROYER-COLLARD whispers through his teeth:

ROYER-COLLARD

The Peruvian marble; without question.

MONSIEUR PROUX stares after the DOCTOR, baffled. The DOCTOR escorts RENEE PELAGIE into her carriage. She gazes soulfully into his eyes:

RENEE PELAGIE

I am eternally in your debt.

ROYER-COLLARD

And I in yours.

RENEE PELAGIE

Doctor... Can I impart to you his
cruellest trick?

ROYER-COLLARD

Of course.

RENEE PELAGIE

Once... long ago... in the folly of
youth... he made me love him.

INT. THE MARQUIS' BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

THE MARQUIS lies against his pillow, his eyes flickering malevolently in the candlelight. He hears the tinkling of dinner china outside his door.

INT. A CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE carries a dinner tray for THE MARQUIS. She reaches his cell. He slides open his peep-hole. His voice has the desperate rasp of a man in withdrawal:

THE MARQUIS

Madeleine, my sweet... can you smuggle
a paper and quill to me?

MADELEINE shoves the tray under his door; she glances down the hall to see VALCOUR stationed there.

MADELEINE

I don't dare. The Doctor's got his eye on you, sharper than ever now.

She gives him an apologetic look, and ambles on her way.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT/DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The MARQUIS plops his tray down on his desk. Wine from the carafe sloshes out; a few drops land on his napkin. He stares at the pattern of the burgundy drops against the white of the linen. He traces a finger along the splotch.

His face lights up; an idea. He grabs the carafe in one hand.

INT. THE MARQUIS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

He steps into the room. In front of him, his bed. The sheets are stretched against it immaculately: not so much as a wrinkle. Inch after inch of white; a beautiful blank page.

CLOSE UP: A ROAST CHICKEN

The MARQUIS rips into the meat with his hands; he ferrets out a bone. Next, he takes a tiny carving knife, and whittles away at it, sharpening its point and hollowing its marrow. Voila. A make-shift quill. He dips it into the carafe. Next, he tries a few strokes on the pillow-case over his desk. It makes a clean, bold line. His eyes fill with grateful tears, and he hugs himself in the night air.

EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - NIGHT

One lamp burns in the darkness in the MARQUIS' chamber; the sound of a quill scraping across linen.

THE MARQUIS

"Dr. Montalivet was – politely put – a diminutive man. When flaccid, his member was little more than a bobbin, and – when enflamed – it towered a mere four inches. To compensate, he strove to impress his lady love with a host of other endowments; fine-wine, fresh game, and a house as large as his other fortunes were small..."

FADE TO:

INT. ROYER-COLLARD'S CHATEAU - THE DINING ROOM -
CONTINUOUS

An enormous table separates ROYER-COLLARD from SIMONE.

Even the dining room is in the midst of renovation; half the walls are covered in silk damask; the other half are bare. SIMONE reads from a thin book. ROYER-COLLARD has had more than his share from the carafe of wine; he's feeling "expansive" tonight.

ROYER-COLLARD

We've ceiling beams en route from Provence, and – next week – a muralist arrives from Paris, to paint a trompel'oeil in the ballroom.

SIMONE doesn't look up from her reading.

ROYER-COLLARD

Doesn't that please you?

SIMONE

(unconvincingly)

Very much.

ROYER-COLLARD

I'd prefer to have our brandy in the salon. There we can sit... side-by-side... before the fire.

SIMONE

I'd rather read, thank-you.

ROYER-COLLARD

You prefer a book to your husband's company?

SIMONE glances down at her hands, trembling in her lap. She can't bring herself to answer.

ROYER-COLLARD

Well, no wonder; I'm only flesh and blood. That's no match – is it? – for the printed page.

He stands, sullen, and tosses his napkin onto his plate.

ROYER-COLLARD

Good evening, then. I hope you enjoy your solitude.

INT. CHATEAU - BEDROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

The canopy around the bed is closed. Behind it, a comely silhouette; SIMONE is awake, reading.

NEW ANGLE: INSIDE THE CANOPIED BED - CONTINUOUS

Dressed only in a night-shift, SIMONE holds a book in one hand and a candle in the other. She hears footsteps; the door opens. SIMONE blows out her candle. Through the curtain, she sees the looming shadow of her husband, carrying a taper of his own. ROYER-COLLARD parts the drapes.

ROYER-COLLARD

I apologize if I took a severe tone.

He plucks the book from her hands, and regards its title for a moment: A Lady's Garden of Verse. He smiles, bemused.

ROYER-COLLARD

You can't be blamed for your naiveté,
not when it's chief among your charms.

He climbs into bed next to her; she rolls on her side, facing away from him. He presses himself hard against her back and whispers hoarsely in her ear:

ROYER-COLLARD

Perhaps the Sisters failed to instruct you in the ways of marriage; the nightly duty of a wife to her husband.

He takes the hem of her night-shift in hand, and with a wrenching rrrriiippp starts to tear it up the rear.

SIMONE – terrified at what's to come – seeks solace from the room's only comfort: the porcelain MADONNA from the Panthemont Convent sitting on her nightstand. The VIRGIN exudes a holy light that illuminates SIMONE, even as she's violated by her husband.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

Sunlight falls in a crisscross pattern through the grate on the MARQUIS' window. He snores, asleep at his desk. A KNOCK.

MADELEINE (V.O.)
Your linens!

His eyes snap open.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE pounds again, glancing nervously at the everpresent VALCOUR.

MADELEINE
Now or never!

The trap opens, and sheets pour out. MADELEINE gathers them, and notices something odd. Her face lights up with amazement. She unfurls the top sheet. It's covered in script. She stuffs it down in her basket, and scurries past VALCOUR.

INT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM - THAT NIGHT

MADELEINE sits by the fire. She unfolds THE MARQUIS' bedsheet with loving care; like his pillowcase, its covered in words. She starts to transcribe it. MADAME LECLERC sits near-by in her rocking chair, knitting, her hands nimble in spite of her blindness. She hears the "scratch, scratch" of a quill tip across parchment.

MADAME LECLERC
If you won't read it to your own
Mama, then perhaps you ought not to
be reading it at all.

MADELEINE
It's not your cup of tea, Mama.

MADAME LECLERC
Come now, darling, give it a read.

She clears her throat, and begins to read:

MADELEINE

"Monsieur Bouloir was a man whose erotic tastes might discreetly be described as 'post-mortem.'"

MADAME LECLERC can't help it; she smiles a naughty smile.

Emboldened, MADELEINE starts to read in proud, clear tones:

MADELEINE

"A habitu_e of cemeteries, his proudest conquest was a maid six decades his senior, deceased a dozen years."

MADAME LECLERC

(interrupting)

Oh, it's terrible! It's too, too terrible!

(a pause, and then)

Well. Go on.

MADELEINE

"The vigor with which he made love caused her bones to dislodge. Still, he granted her the highest compliment he accorded any woman..."

MADAME LECLERC

(on tenterhooks)

Yes?

MADELEINE

"Well worth the dig!"

MOTHER and DAUGHTER shriek with delight and revulsion.

ANGLE ON: BOUCHON'S CELL

He – too – issues a low giggle, amused by the story, aroused by its reader...

EXT. THE PAVILION AT CHARENTON - DAWN

MADELEINE slips the manuscript to the HORSEMAN.

MADELEINE

You asked my name once; it's Madeleine.

HORSEMAN
Sweet, then? Like the pastry?

He grins and cracks the reins; his horse canters away.

MADELEINE calls after him.

MADELEINE
Haven't you a name yourself?

He calls back, ever the flirt:

HORSEMAN
Ride away with me someday, and perhaps
I'll tell you.

INT. THE LAUNDRY - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

MADAME LECLERC sinks the scribbled sheets into a steaming vat of boiling water. She shoves it down with a large stirring stick. The water turns red.

EXT. CHARENTON - COURTYARD - LATER

CHARLOTTE and MICHETTE are pulling the sodden sheets from their baskets in order to hang them. They exchange a look; something's askance. The sheets have an odd crimson hue.

"Off-color" indeed.

INT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Steam rises thick as soup from the laundry vats. With a flourish, ROYER-COLLARD unrolls a ruddy bedsheet for MADELEINE's inspection. COULMIER stands by. MADAME LECLERC creaks back and forth in her chair, anxiously.

ROYER-COLLARD
Your mother may be blind as a bat,
but you've a keen pair of eyes,
haven't you?

MADELEINE flares defensively on her mother's behalf.

MADELEINE
Mama's blind on account of the lye

in the laundry kettles; soaking sheets for lunatics cost the poor woman her sight.

ROYER-COLLARD

This could cost her far more –

COULMIER

(intervening)

You'll get more from her with kindness than you will with force.

ROYER-COLLARD

What could cause a tincture like this?

MADELEINE

I'm only a laundress; not a detective.

MADAME LECLERC

(panicked)

Now's not the time to be cheeky, Maddy.

ROYER-COLLARD

Perhaps your kettles are stained with rust. Maybe the lye's turned rancid. Or maybe... just maybe...

He plucks a candle from the wall sconce, and holds it behind the sheet; bleeding through the fabric, traces of cursive.

ROYER-COLLARD

...these sheets once belonged to our friend, The Marquis.

MADELEINE

We've over two hundred beds. They could've been anybody's.

ROYER-COLLARD

Such a fine thread-count? Decorated in his very own script?

ROYER-COLLARD turns to COULMIER and says decisively:

ROYER-COLLARD

She's lying. It shows in her face.

COULMIER looks at MADELEINE, imploringly. Now is the time to tell the truth. But MADELEINE – though her cheeks are blushing with guilt – doesn't budge.

INT. CORRIDOR - OUTSIDE THE MARQUIS' CELL

Stacked in the hallway, THE MARQUIS' furnishings; his chaise longue, his wardrobe, his bed. Paintings tilted against the wall; sculptures sitting upside down. And trundling from his cell, GUARDS. ONE carries drawers, newly pulled from chests. ANOTHER, a candelabra and a crate of nicknacks. From inside, we hear THE MARQUIS crying in protest:

THE MARQUIS (O.S.)

No! Don't you dare! Touch that, and
I'll have your testicles on toast!
MORONS! THIEVES! Help! That's
fifteenth century, you goon! PUT
THOSE IVORIES DOWN –

LOUISON comes teetering forth with a wheelbarrow, stacked high with books, and – marching down the hall in supervisory mode – COULMIER.

LOUISON

Almost done, sir.

COULMIER

Remember – anything – ANYTHING he
might fashion as a quill. His entire
room, stripped bare.

INT. THE MARQUIS' DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER bursts in; THE MARQUIS rails. COULMIER goes right to work, casing the bedroom, orchestrating the further removal of items from the room.

THE MARQUIS

So! The Doctor cracks the whip, and
you dance!

He gestures toward the barren space in the center of the room, incredulous:

THE MARQUIS

My bed, gone! Am I to freeze to death?

COULMIER

(gesturing to GUERIN)

His rug.

THE MARQUIS

And my chaise – am I being denied
the privilege of sitting – of
plopping down my ass –

GUERIN gathers the rug, and heads for the door. LOUISON
returns with the wheelbarrow, now empty.

THE MARQUIS

That's a Turkish weave, you numbskull;
it costs more than you'll earn in
your lifetime –

COULMIER

Valcour. His chair.

VALCOUR and LOUISON cart out the MARQUIS' arm-chair, orange
peels and all. COULMIER starts emptying books from the shelves
into the wheelbarrow; pages scatter and bindings break. The
MARQUIS decides to "pitch in" with rueful glee.

THE MARQUIS

Fine! Take it! Take it all! Here –

He tosses a candlestick into the wheelbarrow:

THE MARQUIS

Careful, it's slippery, you've no
idea where it's been. A box of Kama
Sutra powder, ready to dust whomever
you please...

He plucks a small statue of the Virgin Mary from his shelf.

THE MARQUIS

And we mustn't forget Mary, sweet
Mary, the Jewish Whore; God's little
harlot!

He hurls it into the wheelbarrow, too.

THE MARQUIS
Virgin birth – ha! An entire
religion, built on an oxymoron!

COULMIER
Orvolle. His wine.
(back to THE MARQUIS)
From now on, nothing but water at
every meal –

THE MARQUIS
– water! –

COULMIER
– and your meat shall be de-boned.

The MARQUIS attempts to pirate away a pair of wine bottles,
but VALCOUR intercepts them.

THE MARQUIS
WHY THIS SUDDEN TORTURE?

COULMIER
Because your writing continues,
unchecked.

COULMIER starts plucking THE MARQUIS' pornographic etchings
off the wall. Panicked now, THE MARQUIS rails:

THE MARQUIS
I DIDN'T CREATE THIS WORLD OF OURS!
I ONLY RECORD IT!

COULMIER
Its horrors, perhaps! Its darkest
nightmares! And to what end? Nothing
but your own morbid gratification –

THE MARQUIS
Morbid gratification? NO! I write
what I've seen; the endless procession
to the chopping block. We're all
lined up at the guillotine, waiting
for the crunch of the blade. Rivers
of blood are flowing beneath our
feet, Abbe.

THE MARQUIS turns back to COULMIER with the eyes of a man who has seen too much.

THE MARQUIS
I've been to hell, young man. You've only read about it.

COULMIER realizes – for the first time – the full depth of THE MARQUIS's misanthropy. There's no point in arguing further.

COULMIER
I am sorry, Marquis. Truly.

He turns and heads into the corridor. THE MARQUIS follows him out the door.

INT. THE CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

THE MARQUIS pulls him up short.

THE MARQUIS
Tell me, Priest. These chastity vows of yours. How strict are they?

COULMIER pauses, stiffening. THE MARQUIS turns unctious:

THE MARQUIS
Suppose you only put it in her mouth –

Suddenly, COULMIER lunges at the MARQUIS, pinning him to the wall by his neck. VALCOUR, ORVOLLE, GUERIN and LOUISON all freeze, ready to pounce. PITOU and DAUPHIN have emerged from their cells, curious about the clammer. CLEANTE watches from his peephole.

THE MARQUIS gives a sly grin; he's hit a nerve. COULMIER lets THE MARQUIS go with a shove. His face stone, he heads back down the long hall.

THE MARQUIS
PIOUS LITTLE WORM –

ORVOLLE and VALCOUR grab him by each arm; he glares at COULMIER; his eyes are wild.

THE MARQUIS

In conditions of adversity, the artist flourishes.

They drag him back to his cell and slam the door.

FADE TO:

C.U. THE MARQUIS' REFLECTION

Suddenly, it shatters, splintering like ice. THE MARQUIS has slammed his own fist into a lone mirror. He picks up a shard of glass and braces himself. With a grimace, he slashes his finger. He winces, a sound lodged somewhere between pleasure and pain. Next, he holds his finger over the ink well, and squeezes. Blood starts to dribble – one drop at a time – into the tiny bottle.

LONG SHOT: THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - MORNING

Fall at the asylum; the topiary has shed its leaves; tangled branches claw at the air like giant, hungry birds.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE collects bedding on her routine run. She steps over VALCOUR, who's snoring loudly outside THE MARQUIS' door. The trap opens, and THE MARQUIS grabs her by the ankle.

THE MARQUIS

(choking back sobs)

Psst. Madeleine. I beg you...

MADELEINE looks down. On all ten of THE MARQUIS' fingertips, bandages torn from cloth and soaked with bloodstains.

MADELEINE

What have they done to you now?

THE MARQUIS

Tortures so arcane, so medieval, even I haven't the words to describe them. If you've an ounce of pity in your heart, you'll throw caution aside, and unlock my door...

MADELEINE glances at VALCOUR, who shifts in his sleep.

MADELEINE

God help me; I don't dare.

THE MARQUIS abruptly shifts his tone; no tears now.

THE MARQUIS

Don't be a dunce, child. I've a surprise for you. Now open the frigging door.

MADELEINE screws up her courage, and slips the key in the lock. She twists the handle, leaving the door ajar.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

THE MARQUIS stands before MADELEINE, looking absolutely resplendent, in a suit covered in words, all written in his own blood. Quite a feat indeed. She gasps; her eyes fill with tears.

THE MARQUIS

(proudly)

My newest book begins at my right cuff, continues across my back, and completes itself at the base of my left shoe...

MADELEINE

I don't believe it!

He turns in a slow circle, like a fashion model on parade.

A few tell-tale words are visible: "pikestaff," perhaps.

Maybe "nipple." MADELEINE can't help it; she blurts a giggle. THE MARQUIS joins her. Soon, they're both helpless with laughter. Suddenly, THE MARQUIS remembers VALCOUR, just outside the door. He presses a finger to his lips; MADELEINE goes silent.

THE MARQUIS

Take your leave, quickly, so you won't be blamed for my misbehavior.

Suddenly – impulsively – she kisses him, hard, upon the lips.

MADELEINE

You can't be a proper writer without
a touch of madness, can you?

She slips out. THE MARQUIS stands for a moment, stunned by
her unexpected display of feeling.

INT. THE CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE almost runs into CHARLOTTE, whose been spying on
her in the hall. CHARLOTTE scowls:

CHARLOTTE

Traffic with the Devil, Maddy, and
you'll pay the Devil's price.

Just then, THE MARQUIS slips from his cell and scurries past,
a vision in his hand-tailored novel. CHARLOTTE's eyes bulge
with astonishment. MADELEINE grins. With a tremor in her
voice, CHARLOTTE cries out:

CHARLOTTE

Valcour! Valcour!

MADELEINE breaks into a run, disappearing around the corner.

INT. CHARENTON - DINING ROOM - DAY

THE FACES OF THE LUNATICS, AGAPE WITH WONDER. One mouths a
few words, aloud. Another stomps his feet with reckless
enthusiasm.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

Dancing down the center of the longest table, THE MARQUIS.

He skips over loaves of bread, and overturned goblets.

PITOU is reading his waistcoat; BOUCHON paws at his leggings.

THE MARQUIS

Feast your eyes!

He thrusts out his ass:

THE MARQUIS

Two chapters, one for each cheek! MY
WRITING LIVES!

Giddy from the loss of blood, THE MARQUIS collapses on the table. THE LUNATICS pounce upon him to read every word; he laughs with victorious delight.

CLEANTE
(overlapping)
"Sister Mary Quesnet had the most
dextrous vulva in all France –"

DAUPHIN
(overlapping)
"– so he set about removing her
teeth –"

BOUCHON
(overlapping)
"She'd never been with another woman,
never mind her own mother –"

FRANVAL
"– twin orbs of delight – with her
puckered mouth, she swallowed him
whole –"

PITOU
"She wore her ass proudly –"

ANGLE ON: THE DINING HALL DOORS, BANGING OPEN

ROYER-COLLARD enters, VALCOUR, GAILLON and CHARLOTTE – the stool pigeon – flank him on either side; he spies the MARQUIS instantly.

ROYER-COLLARD
(to VALCOUR)
Take this beast back to his cage.

All the PATIENTS stare dumbly at the DOCTOR.

THE MARQUIS
Don't tell me. You've come to read
my trousers.

On ROYER-COLLARD's face, the utmost contempt; the MARQUIS

grins, ear-to-ear.

THE MARQUIS

Don't keep me in suspense. What'll it be? Fifty lashes? A night on the rack?

ROYER-COLLARD

I won't sully my hands with him.

THE MARQUIS

Nor should you. That's the first rule of politics, isn't it?

(a sly insinuation)

The man who orders the execution never drops the blade.

INT. THE MARQUIS APARTMENT - SHORT TIME LATER

CLOSE UP: COULMIER, whose face bears all the frustration of a new parent, saddled with an incorrigible child.

COULMIER

You're lucky it falls to me to punish you.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

COULMIER paces, to and fro. The MARQUIS, still dressed in his "novel," sits on the floor.

COULMIER

If it were up to the Doctor, you'd be flayed alive.

THE MARQUIS

A man after my own heart...

COULMIER

What in God's name am I to do with you? The more I forbid, the more you're provoked!

THE MARQUIS

I could be convinced to abandon my writing, quite voluntarily.

COULMIER

What on earth would that require?

THE MARQUIS

A night spent with the partner of my choice.

COULMIER

You expect me to pimp Madeleine?

THE MARQUIS

I wasn't talking about Madeleine.

The MARQUIS blows a kiss in COULMIER's direction; COULMIER turns a fiery red.

COULMIER

OFF WITH YOUR CLOTHES!

THE MARQUIS

Coulmier, you animal!

COULMIER

I DO NOT MEAN TO FLIRT, MARQUIS!

THE MARQUIS

Oh, but you must, my pumpkin! Sex without flirtation is merely rape!

COULMIER

NOW STRIP.

The MARQUIS begins to undress, hurriedly. First his tailcoat, then his waistcoat.

THE MARQUIS

My shoes; they're naught but punctuation.

COULMIER just glares. THE MARQUIS kicks them off, too. He twists the amber ring off his finger.

THE MARQUIS

My jewels, family or otherwise?

Once again, COULMIER refuses to be roped into THE MARQUIS' little game. THE MARQUIS seizes the ring in his teeth, and

proffers COULMIER a gritted, ugly smile. COULMIER plucks the ring out of his maw. THE MARQUIS now stands in nothing but his stockings and trousers.

COULMIER

Your breeches as well.

THE MARQUIS unhooks the first button on his breeches, then waits, expectantly, for COULMIER to do the rest.

THE MARQUIS

You started this little game; you finish it. Or haven't you the courage?

COULMIER falters; he wasn't expecting this.

THE MARQUIS

(snorting derisively)

I thought not.

He lets his trousers drop. In the dim shadows, the MARQUIS is naked now, except for his hair. He sidles up, close, to COULMIER, his breath in the priest's ear:

THE MARQUIS

It's a potent aphrodisiac, isn't it?
Power over another man.

COULMIER

Your wig. Remove your wig.

The MARQUIS slides off his wig, and places it over his privates, swinging it, like the tail of a horse. COULMIER reaches out and grabs it away.

COULMIER

You'll no longer spread your insidious gospel, where art's magnitude is the breadth of its depravity! FROM NOW ON, YOU WILL NOT EVEN WRITE YOUR OWN IGNOMINIOUS NAME!

So much anger seethes between them, it's electric.

THE MARQUIS

Are your convictions so fragile that mine cannot stand in opposition to

them? Is your God so flimsy? So weak?
For shame!

The thinnest trace of a smile dances on COULMIER's lips;
he's won this round, and he knows it.

COULMIER

Don't flatter yourself, Marquis.
You're not the Anti-Christ. You're
nothing but a malcontent who knows
how to spell.

With that, COULMIER exits with THE MARQUIS' clothing in his
arms. THE MARQUIS is left alone, naked and pathetic, in an
empty cell.

INT. CORRIDOR - MEANWHILE

ROYER-COLLARD storms down the hall toward MADELEINE's
quarters, with VALCOUR, GAILLON and CHARLOTTE on his heels.

CHARLOTTE

I saw her with my own eyes. She put
the key in the latch, just as proud
as you please –

EXT. CHARENTON - COURTYARD

MADELEINE'S HEAD, FRAMED AGAINST THE SKY

Reminiscent of the GUILLOTINE VICTIM in the film's opening
sequence. A SECOND HEAD looms into frame. Only – instead of
belonging to an EXECUTIONER – this one belongs to VALCOUR.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

VALCOUR ties MADELEINE's wrists to the posts of the well in
the center of the yard. With scissors, he slowly cuts the
laces up the back of her corset, exposing her back. Next, he
raises a steel-tipped martinet, poised to whip.

MADELEINE's POV: She singles out faces: ROYER-COLLARD, who
watches imperiously from a window above, GAILLON at his side.
CHARLOTTE, who watches the proceedings with smug satisfaction.
MADAME LECLERC, whose foggy eyes are filled with tears.
MICHETTE, LOUISON, GUERIN and ORVOLLE, all faces ripe with
sympathy. And – separated by a fence – the LUNATICS –

FRANVAL, PITOU, CLEANTE, and DAUPHIN among them.

BOUCHON, a hideous scar on his cheek from the iron, all but drools in anticipation.

VALCOUR looks to ROYER-COLLARD for permission to strike; coolly ROYER-COLLARD grants it. MADELEINE flinches in anticipation of the blow. It comes down, hard.

ANGLE ON: ROYER-COLLARD

As MADELEINE shudders in pain, the DOCTOR can't help himself; he quivers – ever so slightly – with pleasure.

An angry welt appears on MADELEINE's skin. Then another.

She chokes back tears, enduring her punishment with dignity. COULMIER bursts forth from the CROWD.

COULMIER
FREE HER. NOW.

VALCOUR stops short; he turns to ROYER-COLLARD. THE DOCTOR stands, menacingly.

ROYER-COLLARD
He'll do no such thing.

COULMIER
It's a weak man who tests his mettle
on the backs of children –

ROYER-COLLARD
This child let loose the beast from
its cage –

COULMIER
Madeleine's not wicked. It's the
Marquis who's corrupted her. That's
not her fault; it's mine.

COULMIER turns to VALCOUR, and whispers urgently:

COULMIER
Your dagger. Give me your dagger.

VALCOUR looks to the DOCTOR; which superior should he honor?

ROYER-COLLARD
LEAVE HER DULY STRUNG.

COULMIER reaches out and slides the dagger from VALCOUR's belt. He slices through the rope that binds MADELEINE; she grabs him for support, and whispers urgently:

MADELEINE
I was wrong to free him, but so are
you – for taking all his treasures –
his quills and his ink –

COULMIER
Not now, or we're both done for.

COULMIER turns back to ROYER-COLLARD and shouts:

COULMIER
If only blood will appease you, then
shed mine.

ROYER-COLLARD
You'd suffer in her stead?

MADELEINE
Abbe, no –

COULMIER proffers both fists to VALCOUR.

COULMIER
Go ahead. Bind them. Bind them.

Reluctantly, VALCOUR ties Coulmier's hands together. Next, he hikes them over the whipping post. He loosens COULMIER's vestments, stripping them to the waist. Next, he raises his martinet and turns to ROYER-COLLARD for permission to strike.

ROYER-COLLARD
That won't be necessary.

A sigh of relief from the CROWD. As VALCOUR frees him, COULMIER rubs his wrists. ROYER-COLLARD stares at him with steel eyes.

ROYER-COLLARD
If you want to martyr yourself, Abbe,

do it for God. Not a chambermaid.
Now put your clothes back on.

COULMIER – chastened – turns a blazing red.

INT. CHARENTON - INFIRMARY - LATER THAT DAY

MADELEINE sits on the examining table, her bodice pulled down around her waist. A severe-looking NUN prepares salve for the lashes on her back. COULMIER sits behind a small folding screen – for modesty – and talks to MADELEINE; it takes considerable strength of will to keep from peeking at her.

COULMIER

Had I known your taste in novels, I
never would've taught you to read.

MADELEINE

Don't say that; reading's my
salvation.

COULMIER

But why must you indulge in his
pornography?

MADELEINE

It's a hard day's wages, slaving
away for madmen. What I've seen in
life, it takes a lot to hold my
interest.

The NUN presses a sponge against a particularly nasty gash;

MADELEINE

Ow!

COULMIER

But why heap such ghastly fantasies
atop an already ghastly existence?

MADELEINE

I put myself in his stories. I play
the parts. Each strumpet, each
murderess.

COULMIER

Why not act the role of heroines instead? Queen Esther from the Bible, or St. Joan?

MADELEINE

(simply:)

If I wasn't such a bad woman on the page, Abbe, I'll hazard I couldn't be such a good woman in life.

The NUN has finished dressing her wounds; MADELEINE stands.

COULMIER'S POV: Through the partition in the screen, COULMIER catches a glimpse of MADELEINE's body: the upturn of her breasts, the soft slope of her back. He turns away, ashamed.

COULMIER

This is no place for a child like you.

INT. ROYER-COLLARD'S CHATEAU - ATRIUM - LATER

ROYER-COLLARD sits at a table, ledger before him, MONSIEUR PROUX on one side, GAILLON on the other. Lining up for payment, various CRAFTSMEN: a BRICKLAYER, perhaps, A CARPENTER, A GARDENER. The DOCTOR hands a small sheath of bills to a particularly large STONE-MASON. When the STONE MASON steps out of the frame, the DOCTOR is confronted by a surprising sight: an incensed RENEE PELAGIE.

ROYER-COLLARD

Good God, Marquise –

RENEE PELAGIE

I'm on the brink of bankruptcy; my husband's resources are all but exhausted. And to what end, I ask you?

ROYER-COLLARD glances behind her; more MEN await payment.

ROYER-COLLARD

This is neither the time nor the place –

RENEE PELAGIE

If only you'd remained true to our

contract! Opiates, for his nerves!
Restraints! The man warrants a bed
of nails –

ROYER-COLLARD

(sotto voce)

I can say, with the utmost sincerity,
that every franc you've given me has
been put to sterling use.

RENEE PELAGIE glances about the room, taking inventory of
its contents.

RENEE PELAGIE

That much is painfully clear.

He stands and announces:

ROYER-COLLARD

Gentleman, if you'll excuse us...
only a moment... thank you, thank
you...

Amidst grumbles, GAILLON clears the room, closing the door
behind him. MONSIEUR PROUX hovers behind it, listening.

ROYER-COLLARD

You've no right to assault me in
this fashion; I'll call for my
footman. I'll have you removed –

RENEE PELAGIE

Am I a cursed woman, Doctor? Must I
be betrayed by every man I meet –

SIMONE appears on the balcony above. She's overheard the
commotion, and senses something is amiss. The DOCTOR shifts
his gaze, staring up at her; RENEE PELAGIE notices that the
DOCTOR's attention has been diverted, and whirls around to
face SIMONE.

RENEE PELAGIE

Ah! This must be the little Madame.

SIMONE offers a faint, uncertain smile.

SIMONE

How do you do?

RENEE PELAGIE
I must confess, I envy you.

SIMONE
Envy me? But why?

RENEE PELAGIE
Your husband's name brings you honor,
doesn't it? You can walk down the
street without insult; without falling
debris.

RENEE PELAGIE's brow darkens with sinister pleasure; she
gestures at the riches in the room:

RENEE PELAGIE
But suppose the whole world knew
that all this splendor was the result
of fraudulence? Of extortion?

SIMONE stares at her husband, alarmed.

SIMONE
Why has she come here?

RENEE PELAGIE continues to address SIMONE, even as she fixes
her stare upon the DOCTOR.

RENEE PELAGIE
Public scorn carries a terrible sting.
Trust me. I'm a woman who knows.

ROYER-COLLARD
It's libelous; you wouldn't dare.

RENEE PELAGIE
And why not? My fortune, siphoned
away. My reputation, past repair.
I've nothing left to lose.
(her eyes narrowing)
Silence my husband, or you'll come
to know an infamy to rival his own.

RENEE PELAGIE glances at SIMONE, who glances at her husband,
who glowers back at RENEE PELAGIE.

EXT. A SEEDY BACKSTREET - PARIS

A YOUNG WOMAN navigates the winding streets. In her elegant attire – notably the broad-brimmed hat which conceals her face – she's clearly out of place in this neighborhood.

VENDORS in cramped shanties and make-shift stalls cry out to THE WOMAN as she passes. Their VOICES fade in and out of one-another, like a demented chorus. The FIRST is a hairy, toothless bag o' bones:

FIRST VENDOR

Psst... Mademoiselle.... I've only a few doses of Spanish fly left...

The WOMAN continues on her way, without glancing back. Her cape billows behind her. The SECOND VENDOR is a scurvy little jackal indeed.

SECOND VENDOR

Cat-o'-nine-tails here, guaranteed to raise a welt...

The THIRD – a feisty little DWARF – has nothing but herself to sell. She coos to the WOMAN:

THIRD VENDOR

Curious, aren't you? If I can pleasure me-self, I can pleasure you, too...

At the end of the line, the WOMAN reaches the most decrepit booth of all. She reaches to ring the tiny bell, and the knocker falls off in her hand. She pounds on the door with her fist instead. From WITHIN, scurrying sounds. The DOOR cracks open a sliver, and an EYE peers out:

VOICE

(with an insinuating
lilt)

Yes?

INT. PAWNBROKER'S - CONTINUOUS

The PAWNBOKER's a sinister fellow with shifty eyes. His CUSTOMER is none other than SIMONE, the DOCTOR's wife. She glances about to ensure that the coast is clear.

SIMONE

(covertly)

I'm in search of a book; perhaps you know it.

She slips the PAWNBROKER a scrap of paper; he reads it, then regards her warily.

PAWNBROKER

I've only got one copy left; rescued it meself from the bonfire.

SIMONE bats her eyes, hopefully. The PAWNBROKER sighs, reaches under the counter, and pulls up a STRONG BOX, with a chain yoking it to the floor. The PAWNBROKER reaches high on a shelf for the hidden key.

SIMONE

Please hurry. My husband locks the door at dusk.

THE PAWNBROKER opens the lock, and lifts the lid; in the box, Justine. SIMONE scrounges in her purse for the requisite francs.

PAWNBROKER

Sweet little thing like you shouldn't be reading such filth anyway.

SIMONE

I grew up in a convent, sir.
Everything I know in the world, I owe to books.

And the book itself almost seems to speak...

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)

"To the young maidens of the world..."

INT. RC CHATEAU - BEDROOM - LATER

SIMONE is at her vanity, with a letter-opener and a glue pot. Gently, she loosens the cover off A Lady's Garden of Verse.

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)

"Wrest yourselves free from the tyranny of virtue, and taste without shame the pleasures of the flesh..."

She slathers it with glue, and starts affixing it to her newly-purchased copy of the Marquis de Sade.

THE MARQUIS

"Male power lies in the clench of a fist. But a woman's power lies elsewhere..."

FADE TO:

INT. ROYER-COLLARD'S CHATEAU - BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

ROYER-COLLARD snoozes in his nightcap. SIMONE has her head deep in a book: A Lady's Garden of Verse.

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)

"...in the velvet cavity betwixt her thighs..."

The light from her oil lamp irritates THE DOCTOR; he opens one eye.

ROYER-COLLARD

It's late, Simone, darling. Put your poems aside.

SIMONE just licks her forefinger, and turns the page.

INT. CHATEAU - DINING ROOM/ATRIUM - THE NEXT DAY

PROUX holds a swatch against the dining room wall for SIMONE's approval: the Napoleonic crest, in royal blue

PROUX

Or – if you prefer – a Florentine tapestry?

SIMONE glances at ROYER-COLLARD, who's preoccupied with the FOREMAN in the atrium. She turns to PROUX and smiles:

SIMONE

Are you a literary man?

PROUX
Excuse me?

From the folds of her skirt, SIMONE pulls her book.

SIMONE
I so admire men with an appetite
for... books.

Intrigued, PROUX takes the parcel. He opens the book and
peers under the false cover. His face turns bright red.

PROUX
Madame, how could you... have you
actually read this volume?

SIMONE
I've memorized it. Would you like me
to recite?

She giggles. PROUX joins in, knowingly.

PROUX
There comes a time in a young lady's
life when she has to cast book's
aside, and learn from experience.

SIMONE cocks her head at a coy angle:

SIMONE
(a challenge:)
That, Monsieur, requires a teacher.

INT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

COULMIER is paying a visit to MADELEINE and MADAME LECLERC.

The OLD WOMAN sips tea; MADELEINE folds laundry.

COULMIER
I've good news; I hope you'll agree.

THE TWO WOMEN look to him, expectantly.

COULMIER
I've found employment for you both
with the Widow Rougemont in town.

MADELEINE's alarmed; she doesn't want to leave Charenton.

COULMIER does his best to keep the news upbeat:

COULMIER

You'll have your own cottage on the grounds, and ten francs a month to use as you please.

MADAME LECLERC nearly drops her teacup in delight.

MADAME LECLERC

You're more than a priest; you're an angel! Ain't he, Maddy?

MADELEINE

It's because of the Marquis, isn't it?

COULMIER

In part, yes.

MADELEINE

(quietly)

He's not the man who's cast a shadow here.

COULMIER knows what she says is true, but can't admit it.

COULMIER

The Doctor's a respected man, a friend of the court –

MADELEINE

I haven't been to see the Marquis for ages. And I won't – ever again – I swear it. I won't speak to him, I won't even utter his name –

COULMIER

Is that a promise you can truly keep?

She can't answer. COULMIER glances at MADAME LECLERC; her blindness gives him license to touch MADELEINE. He strokes her cheek; she presses his hand tightly against her face.

COULMIER

Charenton has changed; it's not safe
for you here.

MADELEINE

I've you to look after me, haven't
I?

EXT. ROYER-COLLARD'S RENOVATED CHATEAU

The place looks immaculate down to the last detail.

MONSIEUR PROUX

"Most Esteemed Dr. Royer-Collard. At
long last, your Chateau is complete."

CLOSE ON: THE WINDOW OF THE CHATEAU

Through it, we see PROUX, sitting in an open dressing gown
at a small cherry-wood secretary, proof-reading a note.

MONSIEUR PROUX

"You'll find everything in its
assigned place."

INT. CHATEAU - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

MONSIEUR PROUX

"The chintz draperies, the English
bell pulls, even the ivory door stops.
Only one detail is missing..."

He emits a series of staccato moans followed by a long sigh.
SIMONE rises from between the ARCHITECT's legs. Her camisole
is askew, and her face is aglow.

MONSIEUR PROUX

"...your wife."

SIMONE

Tell him I'm no fool. A prison's
still a prison, even with Chinese
silk and chandeliers.

MONSIEUR PROUX

"By the time you read this, we'll be
long gone; bound for England or points

beyond..."

SIMONE

Tell him – if he uncovers our whereabouts – you'll slit your wrists with a razor, and I'll plunge a hat-pin through my heart.

MONSIEUR PROUX

(genuinely touched)

You'd do that, rather than forsake our love?

SIMONE

No. But tell him I would.

PROUX's face falls. SIMONE's leans over and whispers in his ear to console him:

SIMONE

Sign it quickly. Then you can ravish me again. On linens for which he so dearly paid.

PROUX rebound with puppy-dog eagerness; he traces her lips with his forefinger.

MONSIEUR PROUX

Yes, on the satin twill... and then, I beg you, on the bear-skin rug in his study... and finally... as a crowning gesture... we'll leave puddles of love on the Peruvian marble!

Slowly, he inserts his finger all the way into her mouth.

SIMONE sucks on it happily, like an infant nursing a teat.

FADE TO:

EXT. CHATEAU - LATER

ROYER-COLLARD walks up the impressive steps to the front door, GAILLON at his heels. Stuck there – with a quill pen – a letter. He plucks it, glances back at GAILLON, then starts to read. His iron jaw begins to quake.

INT. CHATEAU - ATRIUM - CONTINUOUS

He rushes through the grand foyer, up the magnificent staircase.

INT. CHATEAU - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lying haphazardly in the center of the mattress: A Ladies' Garden of Verse. ROYER-COLLARD makes a grab for it, only to turn it over and discover its true contents. A primal cry rises in ROYER-COLLARD's throat. Savagely he rips into the pages with his bare hands, shredding them. THE MARQUIS' words flutter down like snow. They fill the screen

LONG DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHARENTON - DUNGEON

CLOSE UP: THE MARQUIS' FACE, as the words trickle down, then gradually disappear. His hair is sopping wet. His skin is a pale blue, lined with purple veins. His teeth chatter, and he sputters for air. A loud CRANK, and he disappears from the frame with a start.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL THE MARQUIS, STRAPPED INTO THE CALMING CHAIR IN THE DUNGEON

GAILLON flips the lever. THE MARQUIS rises from the frigid bath; his expression is one of distilled fury. He cries out – ferociously – to an UNSEEN PRESENCE.

THE MARQUIS

Show your face! I've a right to see
my Inquisitor! You've an aptitude
for torture I really quite admire –
we're cut from the same cloth, you
and I –

GAILLON gives another YANK, dunking THE MARQUIS again with a loud SPLASH. When he rises, THE MARQUIS hisses at GAILLON:

THE MARQUIS

It thrills you, doesn't it, to hurt
me thus? Look, you're solid as bone,
you're straining your trousers –

Another dunk, another splash. THE MARQUIS tries a new tact:

THE MARQUIS

Stop, I beg you! I'll write dainty stories! Odes to Virtue! If even your God will forgive me, so should you –

Dunk, splash. Now, THE MARQUIS roars:

THE MARQUIS

EACH ABUSE – EACH TORMENT – ONLY CALCIFIES MY RAGE! DON'T YOU SEE, YOU MORON? YOU SELF-RIGHTEOUS FUCK! THE LONGER YOU CONTINUE YOUR VEXATIONS, THE DEEPER YOU ROOT MY PRINCIPLES IN MY HEART –

ANGLE ON: THE DUNGEON DOOR

We see the recipient of THE MARQUIS' spleen: peering through the peephole, ROYER-COLLARD. In his eyes, some small measure of vengeance, sated. He slips out of sight.

INT. MADELEINE'S ROOM - THAT NIGHT

MADELEINE tosses and turns on the straw mattress she shares with her mother; perspiration plasters her hair to her face. Finally, she crawls out of bed, and slips out of the room.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Torches light the way as MADELEINE moves down the corridor.

In the distance, we hear sounds previously unassociated with Charenton: the clanking of chains and the wailing of inmates. Perhaps GAILLON thunders down the hall, PITOU and DAUPHIN under each arm. At last, MADELEINE reaches the ABBE's quarters, and raps on his door.

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER draws on his robe, and cracks the door. MADELEINE slithers inside. He whispers:

COULMIER

You shouldn't be calling on me, not

at this hour; suppose the
nightwatchman saw you, or the cook –

COULMIER sticks his head out the door, glancing to and fro,
then closes it tightly; he can't disguise his pleasure at
seeing MADELEINE.

MADELEINE
(cutting him off:)
Don't turn us out, Abbe.

COULMIER
"Turn you out?"

Somewhere, a patient wails in the night; another pounds his
head against stone. All Charenton rumbles with discontent.

MADELEINE
It's a sin against God for me to
refuse your kindness. But my heart's
held fast here...

COULMIER
By whom? The Marquis?

MADELEINE
(with a rueful little
laugh)
Mother's not half so blind as you.

COULMIER understands the magnitude of MADELEINE's confession;
he also knows – all too well – its futility:

COULMIER
Madeleine, I... there are certain
things... feelings... we must not
voice.

MADELEINE
Why not?

COULMIER
They incite us to act. In ways we
should not... cannot... a lesson the
Marquis would do well to learn.

MADELEINE's so full of feeling that she starts to cry.

COULMIER reaches for her, and takes her in his arms.

COULMIER
Don't. Shhh. You mustn't...

He feels her body against his own. His resistance spent, they kiss. Abruptly, he pulls back.

COULMIER
Go back to your room. Quickly.

MADELEINE
What? What've I done?

COULMIER
Don't come back, not tonight, not again –

MADELEINE
You'll hate me now, won't you?

With no choice before him, he lies:

COULMIER
I love you, Madeleine, as a parishioner – as a child of God –

COULMIER swings open the door. He summons all his willpower:

COULMIER
My vows are mine and mine alone. So are my failings. Forgive me.

Stung, MADELEINE stifles a sob. She gives COULMIER a final hurt look and slips out the door. Alone now, COULMIER tries to walk off his arousal, circling the room like a prisoner in a cage. Impulsively, he goes to the door and opens it again.

INT. THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE COULMIER'S QUARTERS -
CONTINUOUS

He sees the figure of a GIRL, lurking in the shadows.

COULMIER
Madeleine –

Furtively, the GIRL steps forward; it's CHARLOTTE. She shoots him an accusatory glare; COULMIER ducks back inside, his heart pounding.

INT. ANOTHER CORRIDOR

MADELEINE, still smarting from COULMIER's rejection, walks down the gloomy, forbidding hall. She stops. Somewhere deep within, MADELEINE makes a sudden, irrevocable decision. She abruptly turns around, heading toward the MARQUIS.

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS

COULMIER kneels on the floor of his cell, his vestments lowered around his waist. He prays. Clutched tightly in his hand, a braided scourge.

COULMIER

"...Lead us not into temptation..."

He cracks the whip against his bare back; it leaves a wicked stripe. His body flinches, but his voice doesn't waver.

COULMIER

"...but deliver us from evil..."

And another crack...

INT. THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE MARQUIS' QUARTERS

MADELEINE watches as VALCOUR turns a corner. Once the coast is clear, she scrambles for her key.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT

She slips inside. She holds up her candle and – crumpled in the corner – THE MARQUIS. He glances at her, a wounded animal.

MADELEINE

They've taken your clothes?

THE MARQUIS

They decreed me a savage, and now they have made me one.

MADELEINE – embarrassed – abruptly turns away.

THE MARQUIS

Surely you've seen a man naked.

MADELEINE

It's only been described to me. In your books.

She rallies and turns to squint at him, seated in the gloom.

MADELEINE

I must say, in your novels you stoke the most unrealistic expectations.

THE MARQUIS

You're far crueler than I, my sweet.

MADELEINE tosses her shawl to him which he fastens like a skirt around his waist.

MADELEINE

The Abbe's sending me away. He fears for me here, what with the likes of you –

THE MARQUIS

Don't be fooled, Madeleine! He fears for himself. He's like a man starving, and you – ha! – you're like a pork chop dolloped with heavy cream –

MADELEINE

He's a man of God; he's true to his vows.

THE MARQUIS

First and foremost, he's a MAN. You remind him of that fact, and he resents you for it.

MADELEINE's brow darkens; she knows it's true.

THE MARQUIS

Don't you see, my sweet? In us, they see their own appetites, stripped bare. And so we are reviled; we are

beaten, we are trounced, we are
ridiculed, and we are silenced.

(past hopelessness)

What's to be done? It's the artist's
lot.

In MADELEINE, something stirs. An idea.

MADELEINE

It needn't be; not if you've another
story.

THE MARQUIS

How do you propose I write it? With
dust, upon the air?

MADELEINE

You could whisper it through the
walls of your cell.

MADELEINE sees THE MARQUIS perk, ever-so-slightly.

MADELEINE

Yes; that's it! A final volley from
us both!

THE MARQUIS

Go on, child.

MADELEINE

Tomorrow night, whisper a new tale
to your neighbor, Cleante. He'll
whisper it to his neighbor Dauphin,
who'll whisper it to his neighbor
Franval –

THE MARQUIS

(getting the idea)

– who'll whisper it to Bouchon –

MADELEINE

– whose cell lies next to the linen
cabinet! There, armed with a quill
of my own, I'll commit it to paper!

THE MARQUIS

(with real momentum)

now)
Yes! You shall. Of course you shall –

MADELEINE
(practically squealing)
A tale more horrible than all the
rest combined!

THE MARQUIS
Something to make the angels weep,
and the Saints to gasp for air...

He kisses her fingers, one by one.

THE MARQUIS
Practice your handwriting, my lovely.
So you'll do my words justice.

She nods, even as her eyes fill with happy tears.

EXT. CHARENTON - COURTYARD - DAY

A rumble of thunder from overhead; a storm is approaching.

MADELEINE tugs a sheet off the line. Standing behind it,
COULMIER. MADELEINE – startled – gives a little cry.

COULMIER
Madeleine –

Angrily, tugs down the next sheet.

MADELEINE
You don't fear the Marquis' sway on
me. You fear your own.

COULMIER reaches to take her by the arm:

COULMIER
If you'd grant me a final favor, I'd
like the chance to explain myself –

MADELEINE
(nasty, but tinged
with hurt:)
Don't come any closer, Abbe. God's
watching.

She grabs her basket by both handles and – insolently – skirts COULMIER and heads inside. COULMIER starts to follow, but in response she hurries her step.

INT. EXT. THE CHARENTON ASYLUM - THAT NIGHT

The sky cracks open with a deafening sound. Lightning cracks. Rain begins to pelt the stone walls of Charenton.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - A SHORT TIME LATER

MADELEINE swings open the door and sets down her laundry basket. She lights a small wall sconce, filling the room with an orange glow. She closes the door behind her. Next, she clears a space for herself on a small sewing table, pushing aside a pin-cushion, bolts of thread, and a heavy pair of scissors. She lifts a sheet off the top of the basket. Under it, a stack of parchment, an inkwell, and a quill. She removes each item, one-by-one. An EYEBALL watches her every move.

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

BOUCHON's hunched on the floor, peering through the old wooden door. A belt hoists his sack-cloth trousers above his waist. He's been dislodging bricks from the interior of his cell wall to reveal the hidden door to the pantry.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT

The MARQUIS dislodges a small stone from the wall, and peers into the neighboring cell.

THE MARQUIS

Psst... Cleante! Are you there? ARE YOU THERE?

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

CLEANTE is a study in nervous tics; his eyes blink, his ears wiggle, and his mouth quivers.

CLEANTE

Marquis? Is that you?

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT

THE MARQUIS

For fuck's sake, who else would it be? The witching hour's arrived; you've alerted the others, yes?

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

CLEANTE

I'm no longer a man! I awoke to discover I'd turned into a sparrow!

CLEANTE begins to warble. THE MARQUIS stares through the wall at CLEANTE, eye-to-eye. His words are hypnotic:

THE MARQUIS

Yes, well, I awoke to discover I'd turned into a cat. If you don't do as I say, I'll sink my little fangs into your drumsticks, and suck the marrow straight out of your bones.

CLEANTE

(trembling convulsively)
At your service, Count.

THE MARQUIS

Now give the signal.

CLEANTE lets loose with a piercing trill, to alert his compatriots.

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL

He sparks to the sound; at last, it's time!

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL

He looks up from his reading, candle in hand.

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

Even he registers the whistle with a low grunt.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY

MADELEINE whispers a tiny prayer, clutching the ink pot to

her bosom.

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT

THE MARQUIS
And so we begin...

With a certain improvisatory relish, THE MARQUIS begins to spin his tale:

THE MARQUIS
"Our story concerns the prostitute
Fanchon, whom Nature equipped with a
tight and downy fissure between her
thighs, and the most finely cleft
ass ever moulded by the hand of
God..."

Through the chink, THE MARQUIS hears CLEANTE moaning, ever so softly, masturbating to the tale. THE MARQUIS barks:

THE MARQUIS
CLEANTE!

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

CLEANTE springs into action, rushing to the opposite side of the room and perching on a chair. He whispers through a hole by a beam in the ceiling:

CLEANTE
"Fanchon was a prostitute with a
tight and downy fissure between her
thighs..."

He starts to forget the phrase; THE MARQUIS hisses from across the room:

THE MARQUIS (O.S.)
...the most finely cleft ass...

INT. THE MARQUIS' CELL

Under his breath, THE MARQUIS frets:

THE MARQUIS
My glorious prose, filtered through

the minds of the insane?
(a sudden, consoling
thought)
Who knows? They might improve it.

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL

DAUPHIN crouches, listening, as CLEANTE transmits the words:

CLEANTE (O.S.)
"...and the most finely cleft ass
ever moulded by the hand of God!"

He scurries across the room to relay the words to –

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL

– Franval.

DAUPHIN (O.S.)
"...a harlot, she was, name of
Fanchon, with a downy fissure and a
heavenly ass..."

FRANVAL lopes over to the wall he shares with BOUCHON. He removes a small sculptured crucifix, revealing a gap in the stone.

FRANVAL
Psst... Bouchon...

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

BOUCHON' still busy peeping on MADELEINE, heedless of FRANVAL.

FRANVAL (O.S.)
...BOUCHON!

Distracted, BOUCHON turns in the direction of FRANVAL's voice. FRANVAL has to whisper loudly so the story carries:

FRANVAL
"...S about a harlot named Fanchon,
with a downy fissure and a heavenly
ass...."

BOUCHON's lips curl in a grin.

MADELEINE (O.S.)
Bouchon! You've something for me,
haven't you?

Almost shyly, BOUCHON ekes out the words:

BOUCHON
"...a downy fissure, and a heavenly
ass..."

MADELEINE (O.S.)
(urgently)
You must remember each word, exactly
as it's told to you. Yes? Yes?

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT

THE MARQUIS
"One day, Fanchon's first client was
a surgeon. He ran his fingers across
her naked skin, pulling apart folds
of flesh, inspecting each and every
follicle..."

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

CLEANTE
"One day, Fanchon was visited by a
surgeon. He ran his fingers across
her naked skin, pulling apart folds
of flesh, inspecting follicles..."

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL

DAUPHIN
"One day, a surgeon came to visit
Fanchon. He felt her naked skin,
pulling at her folds, fingering every
hair..."

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL

FRANVAL
"One day, a surgeon came to visit...
feeling her naked skin... pulling at
her folds..."

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

BOUCHON gives a low giggle; it's a naughty story, this one.

BOUCHON

"One day, a surgeon... ran his fingers
over her naked skin... her naked
skin... naked..."

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY

MADELEINE writes as fast as she can.

MADELEINE

(muttering)

...yes, I've got that bit...

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENTS - CONTINUOUS

THE MARQUIS

(savouring the words)

"What shall I ready?" asked Fanchon.

"My mouth, my ass or my succulent
oyster?"

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

CLEANTE

"What shall I ready?" asked Fanchon.

"My mouth, my ass or my succulent
oyster?"

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL

DAUPHIN

"What'll it be?" she asked. "My mouth,
my ass or my succulent oyster?"

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL

FRANVAL

"My mouth," she asked, "My ass or my
succulent oyster?"

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

BOUCHON's really in the spirit now:

BOUCHON

"Which hole? My mouth, my ass or my succ... succ... succ... succulent oyster?"

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

MADELEINE scripts the words "succulent oyster."

INT. THE MARQUIS APARTMENT

Now THE MARQUIS is seized by inspiration; this story is vile!
Truly vile!

THE MARQUIS

"None!" cried the surgeon, brandishing his scalpel. "I'll carve new orifices where... there... were... none... before!"

He laughs, delighted at his own powers of invention.

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

CLEANTE claps his hands, rapturous.

CLEANTE

"None!" cried the surgeon, brandishing his scalpel. "I'll carve new orifices where there were none before!"

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL

DAUPHIN's so excited by the tale, he slaps his bald head with both hands.

DAUPHIN

"None!" cried the surgeon. "I'll carve new orifices where there were none before!"

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL

FRANVAL's aroused; he adjusts the rising staff in his trousers.

FRANVAL

"None!" he cried. "I'll carve new orifices where there were none before!"

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

BOUCHON removes one brick, then another.

BOUCHON

"I'll carve new... new... NEW... orifices where there were none before!"

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY

MADELEINE scribes the word "carve."

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT

His face pours sweat; he's in a state of orgasmic excitement.

THE MARQUIS

"With that, Fanchon expelled a scream so extravagantly pitched, that the surgeon was obliged to tear out her tongue –"

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

CLEANTE

(beside himself)

"With that, Fanchon expelled a scream so extravagantly pitched, that the surgeon was obliged to tear out her tongue –"

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL

DAUPHIN

(exhilarated)

"With that, she screamed so loud that the surgeon was obliged to tear out her tongue –"

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL

FRANVAL

(red-faced)

"She screamed – so long and so loud –
that the surgeon was obliged to tear
out her tongue –"

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

BOUCHON whips off his belt; his trousers crumple to the floor.
He hooks the buckle over the head of a nail in the hinge.
Next, he twists the belt around his hand for leverage and
begins to pull.

BOUCHON

(rife with guilty
pleasure)

"She screamed, so he felt he should –
he felt he ought – to tear out her
tongue –"

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY

MADELEINE wets the tip of her quill with her own tongue, and
then transcribes the same word...

INT. THE MARQUIS APARTMENT - MEANWHILE

THE MARQUIS

"To seal the wound, he took a poker
from the fire –"

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

CLEANTE

"...a poker... he took a poker from
the fire..."

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL

DAUPHIN stares, still hypnotized by FRANVAL'S candle.

DAUPHIN

"A poker from the fire! From the
fire... from the fire... the fire,
the fire, the fire!"

He reaches through the hole and steals the candlestick; The wax scalds his hand; he hurls it onto his bed with a yelp.

The mattress bursts into flame.

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL

FRANVAL's left high and dry; coitus interruptus indeed.

FRANVAL

Dauphin? What's the next bit? You must tell me the next bit...

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

Outside, sounds start to grow; DAUPHIN, hollering "fire" from his cell. Other LUNATICS – agitated – pounding on their cell floors. BOUCHON wrests another nail from the hinge.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY

MADELEINE

(a frightened whisper)

Please. The words. Tell me the words.

ANGLE ON: MADELEINE'S QUILL, POISED TO WRITE

MADELEINE

I can't hear the words.

INT. CORRIDOR

Smoke pours out from beneath DAUPHIN's cell, and into the hall. VALCOUR – several guards in tow – races down the corridor to investigate.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY

MADELEINE hears their footsteps rushing past, and the rising cry of "fire!" She cracks the door slightly and peers out, transfixed by what she sees.

MADELEINE'S POV: She glances to her right, in time to see VALCOUR and his MEN tearing open DAUPHIN's door. Smoke pours forth. The GUARDS are disoriented; it stings their eyes, and fills their lungs. They stumble; VALCOUR coughs, then doubles over. As he wretches, DAUPHIN clips the keys from his belt

and slips outside.

MADELEINE senses that all hell is about to break loose; she closes the door, and turns back to retrieve her parchment and tell-tale quill. She glances up to see – with horror – that BOUCHON's door has been dismantled. She stands and backs away, until she bumps into a HULKING FIGURE. She turns. It's BOUCHON, sewing scissors in hand. MADELEINE tries to calm him, her voice tremulous:

MADELEINE

Remember your manners, Bouchon, like the Abbe says.

But his leer tells the truth. She tries to dodge him, but – with a lunge – he's upon her.

MADELEINE

HELP ME! ABBE! SOMEONE... ANYONE...
OH, GOD...

INT. THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT/CORRIDOR - MEANWHILE

The MARQUIS recognizes the howling voice down the hall.

His face goes white.

THE MARQUIS

Madeleine... MADELEINE!!!

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL

In a trance-like state, CLEANTE continues to mimic the MARQUIS.

CLEANTE

Madeleine! Madeleine!

INT. FRANVAL'S CELL

FRANVAL

Madeleine! Madeleine! Madeleine!

INT. CORRIDOR

DAUPHIN runs up and down the hall, VALCOUR's keychain in hand, unlocking cell after cell. The LUNATICS pour out.

They pick up the sing-song cry, screaming Madeleine's name at a hideous pitch.

LUNATICS

Madeleine! Madeleine! Madeleine!

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS

COULMIER's awakened by the sounds of the LUNATICS crying "Madeleine! Madeleine!" He starts pulling on his vestments with trembling hands.

INT. THE SERVANT'S CORRIDOR/MADELEINE'S ROOM

COULMIER rushes down the hall and glances into MADELEINE'S QUARTERS. MADAME LECLERC lies alone in the bed she shares with her daughter.

COULMIER

Madeleine –

MADAME LECLERC stirs, reaching out for her child, patting the lumpy mattress, hoping to touch her.

MADAME LECLERC

Maddy? Where are you now? Maddy?

INT. CHARENTON - MAIN STAIRCASE (LUTON HOO)

A burning pillow cascades down, trailing straw. As COULMIER bounds downstairs, he catches sight of a figure: a CHAMBERMAID, rushing past.

COULMIER

Madeleine –

He follows her, dodging MADMEN brandishing broomsticks, bedsheets, and the splintered remnants of furniture.

INT. CHARENTON - INFIRMARY

The CHAMBERMAID enters the infirmary; COULMIER races after her. He has to fight his way past Charenton's MOST DIRE CASES, who lurch toward him in the smokey haze like zombies. An aging MADMEN with elephantiasis; a WITHERED OLD CRONE in a stolen nun's habit with a hideous grin, her hands thrust

under her own skirts; ONE AILING MADMAN carries ANOTHER through the murk; a demented pieta. In the background, curtains blaze.

COULMIER catches sight of the CHAMBERMAID. He makes a beeline for her, grabs her by the arm, and swirls her around.

It's not MADELEINE at all, but CHARLOTTE. COULMIER can't help it; his face betrays dismay.

CHARLOTTE

It's her fault the Devil's unleashed himself upon us... it's her fault...

COULMIER thrusts CHARLOTTE aside.

COULMIER

Madeleine! Madeleine!

From outside, a horrible scream. COULMIER's eyes fill with alarm.

INT. ROYER-COLLARD'S OFFICE

ROYER-COLLARD empties the last dregs from his wine bottle; a pitiful little puddle in the bottom of his glass. Before him, the asylum record books in grave disarray. GAILLON lounges in a near-by chair. As the DIN of the RIOT grows around them, they exchange a look; one that says "We knew this would happen. How could it not?"

EXT. CHARENTON - TERRACE

COULMIER, soaked in the rain, searches the courtyard. All around him, WARDS – like pagans – are stripping off their clothes, dancing in the storm. PITOU rides atop GUERIN's shoulders; LOUISON tries to beat him off with an andiron.

The scream again; COULMIER whirls around, expecting to see MADELEINE. Again, his hopes are dashed. It's MICHETTE, pinned to the wall, set upon by a group of LASCIVIOUS WARDS, their limbs all intertwined in an orgiastic frenzy.

ONE BESTIAL MAN turns to look at COULMIER, his eyes wild, a scrap of MICHETTE's clothing dripping from his mouth, like a flap of flesh.

COULMIER dives in to rescue her, but – instead – he's set upon by more MISCREANTS, who tug at his robes and paw at his hair, like creatures turning on their Master.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE ROYER-COLLARD'S OFFICE

From above, the insistent, demonic chanting of Madeleine's name. GAILLON bursts from the office and makes for the stairs; ROYER-COLLARD strides out after him, glancing imperiously this way and that.

INT. THE MARQUIS APARTMENT

THE MARQUIS
(a desperate howl)
MADELEINE!

EXT. CHARENTON - TERRACE

Still fending off MADMEN, COULMIER bellows at the sky:

COULMIER
MADELEINE!

INT. OUTSIDE THE LINEN PANTRY

As he passes, ROYER-COLLARD hears a scuffle from within.

He pauses, and reaches for the knob. Just then, he hears COULMIER and THE MARQUIS in the distance, each crying out for MADELEINE. From the pantry, her voice:

MADELEINE (O.S.)
Abbe? Is that you?... He means to
kill me... save me as you have
before... I beg you... I'm sorry for
all that I said... please... oh,
please...

ROYER-COLLARD's face calcifies with hate. From inside, a heart-piercing scream. He feels a surge of victory in his chest, and lifts his hand from the knob.

INT. THE GRAND STAIRCASE AT CHARENTON

Cinders fall from above. Poised along the stair, ORVOLLE, VALCOUR and GAILLON. They're passing pails of water upward

in an effort to quell the flames. ROYER-COLLARD joins the line, passing a sloshing bucket from ORVOLLE to VALCOUR

ROYER-COLLARD

Quickly now! Altogether men, as one!

ORVOLLE looks at him, surprised to see the aloof DOCTOR suddenly so proactive.

ROYER-COLLARD

QUICKLY! Before it reaches the rafters
on the upper floors –

GAILLON gazes at his BOSS with glowing admiration. Coming down the stairs – disoriented in the smoke and the melee – MADAME LECLERC. With one hand, she clings to the railing. With the other, she grasps at the air.

MADAME LECLERC

Maddy! Where are you, child? Maddy!

The LUNATIC QUARTET – in their night drawers, their faces blackened with ash – trundle after her, playing a jaunty tune.

INT. OUTSIDE THE MARQUIS' APARTMENT

COULMIER – his cassock torn and soaked through, his face scratched – races down the stairs THE MARQUIS, meanwhile, screams bloody murder from the peephole in his cell:

THE MARQUIS

Let me out your morons! Let me loose!

COULMIER catches his eye, and shoots an accusatory glare.

"You've played a part in this, haven't you?" he seems to be asking. THE MARQUIS turns silent, even stony, staring back at COULMIER with lethal eyes. COULMIER moves on.

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL

COULMIER races through the room. He sees the dismantled door, lifted off its hinges, lying sideways against the wall.

INT. THE LINEN PANTRY

Coulmier's eyes dart feverishly about; the linens are drenched in blood. He glances down at his feet; he sees a few pieces of parchment. He picks up a sheet. The last SENTENCE READS "tear out her tongue" before trailing off the page. He recognizes the curve of MADELEINE's script.

His heart pounding, he moves toward the laundry room, terrified of what he might find. Underfoot, a growing pool of water.

COULMIER'S POV: At the far end of the laundry room, BOUCHON, dripping wet, his lower lip quivering like a naughty child, recedes into the shadows. Meanwhile, MADAME LECLERC emerges from the smoke, clutching her stirring stick like a pike for protection. THE SOUND OF WATER SLOSHING. She turns, her face full of dread.

ANGLE ON: THE LAUNDRY VAT. Water cascades down the sides of the vat. MADAME LECLERC climbs atop her pedestal, inserts her stick into the brew, and begins to stir.

COULMIER stands, dizzy, the room spinning around him in a mad whirl that becomes...

THE SWIRLING WATERS OF THE LAUNDRY VAT

Rising to the surface like a phantom from the mist, MADELEINE. Her skin is translucent blue. As her corpse rolls in the water, we see that it is riddled with scissor gashes.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHARENTON/PAVILION - THE NEXT DAY - DAWN

The sun turns the horizon a feverish red. In the distance, a cock crows. ORVOLLE and LOUISON nail wooden planks across Charenton's windows; WORKMEN fortify the grounds with barriers. The asylum stands, like an injured beast, too obstinate – and now, too cruel – to die.

ANGLE ON: THE PAVILION. The HORSEMAN waits, but there's no one to greet him with a manuscript. A final, lingering look and – dejected – he turns to leave. His horse rears up on its hind legs in distress, then gallops away through the morning mist.

INT. BOUCHON'S CELL - THAT AFTERNOON

The door swings open, and light illuminates BOUCHON. As soon as he sees VALCOUR and GAILLON in the doorway, he scuttles under his cot.

VALCOUR

Now, now. Don't be shy. We've a nice surprise just waiting for you...

BOUCHON peers out from beneath the bed.

VALCOUR

That's a good boy.

INT. THE DUNGEON - MINUTES LATER

Sweat trickles in tiny rivulets down BOUCHON's forehead. We hear the CREAK of HINGES; a metal cage snaps over his face.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

VALCOUR AND GAILLON, SOLDIERING SHUT THE IRON DUMMY

BOUCHON's eyes bulge as he's encased – forever – in a sarcophagus made of steel.

PULL BACK EVEN FURTHER TO:

INT. ROYER-COLLARD'S OFFICE - MORNING

ROYER-COLLARD closes the door to the dungeon, and cracks his knuckles with barely-controlled fury. COULMIER sits, his head bowed.

ROYER-COLLARD

Of course, we mustn't blame Bouchon; he's merely one of Nature's experiments, gone awry. No discipline. No conscience. No morality.

He rears up from behind his desk:

ROYER-COLLARD

IN FACT, IT IS OUR DUTY TO PROVIDE THOSE THINGS ON HIS BEHALF. IS IT NOT?

COULMIER raises his head. His eyes are red from crying, but he's resolved not to lose his temper before the DOCTOR.

COULMIER
As you say, Doctor.

ROYER-COLLARD
He was so impressed with the Marquis' tale that he chose to re-enact it, yes?

Upon a certain chambermaid.

COULMIER nods. ROYER-COLLARD blithely sticks the knife in and gives it a turn.

ROYER-COLLARD
Perhaps you'll be so kind as to remind me of her name...

COULMIER
I beg you, Doctor, don't make me say it.

ROYER-COLLARD
HER NAME, ABBE.

COULMIER chokes back a sob and manages:

COULMIER
Madeleine.

THE DOCTOR tosses MADELEINE's bloody manuscript onto the center of the desk, and lays into COULMIER savagely:

ROYER-COLLARD
So tell me: when you're called before God, how will you answer for Madeleine's death?

INT. CORRIDOR - SHORT TIME LATER

COULMIER blazes down the hall, torch in hand.

INT. A PIT - CONTINUOUS

COULMIER climbs down a spiral stair built along the parameters

of an enormous pit. In its center, a LUNATIC, crouched in a feral pose. He wears a heavy iron collar with four long chains, each strapped to a different wall in the room. He no longer resembles a man; he looks like a beast, trapped in a stone cage; it's THE MARQUIS. He peers into the gloom with wolverine eyes.

COULMIER

Murderer!

THE MARQUIS blurts, defensively:

THE MARQUIS

Oh, I'm to be blamed now, am I?

COULMIER

Your words drove Bouchon to –

THE MARQUIS

For fuck's sake, Abbe! What am I to do? Police my readers as you police me? Suppose one of your precious wards had attempted to walk on water and drowned? Would you condemn the Bible? I think not!

COULMIER

An innocent child is dead.

THE MARQUIS

(icily)

So many authors are denied the gratification of a concrete response to their work. I am blessed, am I not?

This flagrant disregard for MADELEINE cuts through COULMIER.

COULMIER

It's no secret that you loved her.

THE MARQUIS

Oh, that's rich – coming from her lapdog –

COULMIER

I saw the longing in your eye –

THE MARQUIS
– that was lust –

COULMIER
– the passion in your heart –

THE MARQUIS grabs his own crotch:

THE MARQUIS
Don't confuse one organ with another –

COULMIER
I know, because I felt it myself –

THE MARQUIS
I WANTED TO FUCK HER, THAT'S ALL!

COULMIER
AND DID YOU?

THE MARQUIS
IT'S NOT YOUR PROVINCE TO ASK.

COULMIER
You're no stranger to rape, Marquis;
and yet with her, you cooed. You
courted. You begged.

THE MARQUIS
Go to hell!

COULMIER
Why was it you never took her by
force?

THE MARQUIS
Who's to say I did not?

COULMIER
Was it impotence?

THE MARQUIS
NEVER!

COULMIER
Then it must've been love –

The MARQUIS chokes on COULMIER's last word.

THE MARQUIS
I FUCKED HER COUNTLESS TIMES! IN
EVERY ORIFICE! AND ALL THE WHILE,
SHE PLEAD FOR MORE –

COULMIER
(triumphant)
We inspected the body, Marquis. She
died a virgin.

A stunned pause. The MARQUIS cracks – a tiny cry at first,
which erupts into genuine sobbing. He sinks to his knees,
and claws the dirt with his hands. Finally, he whispers:

THE MARQUIS
Give her a proper burial. In the
churchyard, at my expense. Do not
inter her sweet body in the same
ground as the devils who inhabit
this accursed place.

Pause, and then:

COULMIER
Your terrible secret, revealed. You're
a man, after all.

Suddenly – savagely – THE MARQUIS spits in his face.

COULMIER wipes away the indignity. He stands, severe now.

COULMIER
All that remains now is your
punishment.

THE MARQUIS extends his arm:

THE MARQUIS
I dare you. Stab my flesh. Which one
of us will bleed?

COULMIER
Tomorrow, we'll cut out your tongue.

For once, THE MARQUIS' balks.

CUT TO:

INT.OPERATING THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE UP: THE MARQUIS' LEFT HAND

VALCOUR manacles it to an operating table.

CLOSE UP: THE MARQUIS' RIGHT HAND

VALCOUR cuffs it, too.

Next, GAILLON splays the MARQUIS' feet, and clamps them in irons. He buckles leather restraints around the MARQUIS' torso. The MARQUIS cranes his head, and glances at the table beside him. On it, primitive medical instruments, laid out ominously in a row. A RAT scurries across them.

GAILLON sharpens his blade on a stone. COULMIER watches.

GAILLON

I've opium to numb the pain.

COULMIER

(crisply:)

Our intention here is punitive. If we numb the pain, what's the point?

The MARQUIS twists his neck to find the PRIEST:

THE MARQUIS

Abbe de Coulmier!

COULMIER

I'm here.

THE MARQUIS

Surely you'll grant me a final word.

COULMIER

(terse)

Of course.

The MARQUIS' eyes flash with malevolence.

THE MARQUIS

Would that I were so easily silenced.

COULMIER wrenches his hand free. GAILLON raises his scalpel, and looks to COULMIER for permission to begin.

COULMIER nods.

INT. OUTSIDE THE OPERATING THEATER

From within, an animal cry. COULMIER walks down the corridor, away from the grisly proceedings. On his face, a tiny flicker; perhaps – somewhere deep down in his soul – he feels the thrill of victory.

INT. CHARENTON - ROYER-COLLARD'S OFFICE -

A SHORT TIME LATER

The DOCTOR is knee-deep in paperwork; COULMIER bursts into the room. He slams a glass jar down on the DOCTOR's desk.

Bobbling in alcohol, THE MARQUIS' tongue, so long and serpentine it's wrapped around a dowel.

ROYER-COLLARD

(surprised)

My, my. You have exceeded my expectations.

COULMIER

And my own.

ROYER-COLLARD

How is the patient faring?

COULMIER

Poorly.

ROYER-COLLARD

And you? It must've been an ordeal.

COULMIER

I'm not the first man God has asked to shed blood in His name. I will not be the last.

ROYER-COLLARD

Will you sleep soundly tonight?

COULMIER

(faltering)

No, sir. Plainly put, I never expect to sleep again.

INT. CHARENTON - CHAPEL - LATER

On a slab in the center of the chapel lies MADELEINE, draped in white silk. A CREAK as the door opens. COULMIER approaches the body, and places a wreath of newly-cut flowers at MADELEINE's head. He kneels to pray. In a voice choking with emotion, he mumbles:

COULMIER

"In nomine patris et filii et spiritu
santu..."

A bead of sweat trickles down COULMIER's face. He takes the hem of MADELEINE's death shroud, and wipes the droplet away. The shroud slides off MADELEINE's face. She lies dormant.

Her skin is rosy, and her lips are slightly parted. Unable to resist, COULMIER tugs the shroud off further, exposing her shoulders. COULMIER marvels at her breasts, sloping beneath the fabric. His heart pounds like a kettle drum.

Impulsively, COULMIER pulls the shroud all the way off. MADELEINE lies before him, flawless. There are no wounds, no sign of the gore which accompanied her death.

He gazes at her with an almost childlike wonder. Slowly, he circles the body. Tentatively, he reaches out his finger to touch her lips; to trace the white porcelain of her collarbone; perhaps even graze his hand across her breast. He hesitates, then he leans down to kiss her. It's an almost chaste moment, but it stuns her awake.

MADELEINE lives. COULMIER leaps back, alarmed. But MADELEINE wraps her arms around his neck. She returns the kiss, passionately.

It's all the encouragement COULMIER needs; he crawls astride her on the slab. Soon, he's running his hands in and out of her rounded thighs, feeling each hollow, each moist crevice. His touch grows from gentle to frantic as desire mounts.

MADELEINE

Ah!

Roughly, COULMIER parts her legs. She grabs his back, her nails digging into his skin, as though she were hanging on for dear life. With a guttural sound – his Id, at last unleashed – COULMIER grimaces with pleasure and enters her.

One savage thrust; then two. His eyes light on the crucifix hanging across from him on the wall.

ANGLE ON: THE CRUCIFIX. CHRIST's forehead is pierced through with nettles, and blood flows in tiny rivers down his face. He stares at COULMIER.

ANGLE ON, COULMIER who shudders and glances down at the body beneath him.

COULMIER's POV: The lifeless corpse of MADELEINE, bearing the wounds which killed her, desecrated, on the cold marble.

ABRUPT CUT TO:

INT. COULMIER'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

COULMIER's eyes bolt open. He lurches upright, and tries to stay the bile rising in his throat. A loud knocking at his door.

VALCOUR (O.S.)

Abbe! You'd best come quick.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

VALCOUR and COULMIER move down the hall like bullets down the barrel of a gun.

INT. THE PIT - CONTINUOUS

VALCOUR unlocks the wrought-iron gate, and they enter.

Gasping for breath, VALCOUR covers his face with a handkerchief. He raises his lantern. In the din – flickering orange – words. Everywhere, words. On the ceiling. Written on the floor. Etched on the walls. It's as if the TWO MEN have stumbled into the tomb of Tutankhamen, with its glyphic

texts, or a Sanskrit monument covered in symbols.

VALCOUR

He spat into his own filth. Made
himself a kind of paint.

COULMIER stares, awe-struck. He can't help but be impressed;
the effort is nothing less than Herculean.

COULMIER

Dear God.

COULMIER glances down to the pit's base. There, the MARQUIS
lies, his face pale and his breathing shallow. In spite of
his decrepitude, there's the look of triumph in his eyes. A
look which says, "I persevered."

COULMIER rushes to him. He feels for his heart-beat; it's
faint. The MARQUIS tries to speak, but the soiled bandage
across his mouth prevents him. He can only murmur. COULMIER
calls up to VALCOUR.

COULMIER

Free his mouth.

VALCOUR

Mustn't do that, sir.

COULMIER

I must grant him his last rites.

VALCOUR

I don't take my orders from you; not
anymore.

COULMIER

You'd deny a dying man his salvation?

Sullenly, VALCOUR tosses his knife down to the ground, then
recedes into darkness. COULMIER tenderly cradles the MARQUIS'
head in his lap, and mops his brow. He takes the knife and
delicately snips the bandage; it falls away.

Slowly, painfully, the MARQUIS parts his lips. He coughs for
air. He tries to speak, but – sans his tongue – he can't
form words.

COULMIER

Shhh... shhh...

(praying softly)

Dear Heavenly Father. Prove Your infinite mercy, and open Your gates to this man, no less Your child than any other.

COULMIER kisses the MARQUIS' forehead. He makes a painful admission for the first time:

COULMIER

There is... in each of us... such beauty... and such abomination. No... man... is... exempt.

The MARQUIS tries to smile. COULMIER smiles, too, his eyes brimming with tears. The old affection between the two men is evident, even now.

COULMIER

Forgive him. Forgive us all.

COULMIER places the small ivory crucifix of his rosary over the MARQUIS's mouth.

COULMIER

There now. Kiss the cross.

A flicker of life in the MARQUIS's eyes; a remnant of his old self. He opens his mouth savagely, and grabs the crucifix in his teeth.

COULMIER tries to wrest it out, but the MARQUIS clamps down tighter with his teeth. The chain breaks; rosary beads go streaming across his face, bouncing across the stone floor.

With concerted effort – almost gagging – the MARQUIS swallows. COULMIER watches, appalled. We see the shape of the cross – in relief – as it inches down the MARQUIS' gullet, beneath his skin. Finally – with a last gulp – the crucifix goes down; The MARQUIS has ingested Christ.

THE MARQUIS' pupils roll back into his lids. He stares at COULMIER with a lifeless gaze. COULMIER finally breaks; he lets loose with a primal cry:

COULMIER
NOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

INT. DAUPHIN'S CELL - MEANWHILE

DAUPHIN is shackled to the wall; his skull has been trephined, and bears the trace of his own barbaric surgery.

He hears the scream, echoing down the corridor. His face contorts in empathetic pain.

INT. PITOU'S CELL - MEANWHILE

PITOU desperately covers his ears with his hands, but he can't ward off the sound.

INT. CLEANTE'S CELL - MEANWHILE

CLEANTE – sitting atop a crudely-fashioned perch – hears his Master, and lets loose with an urgent whistle.

INT. THE DUNGEON - MEANWHILE

BOUCHON peers out from his human cage.

INT. THE MARQUIS' PIT

COULMIER's whole face contorts in pain and rage; a man crying deep from within the Belly of the Beast.

FADE UP ON:

THE BRIGHT, SHINING FACE OF THE NEW ABBE DE RICHARD He has all the optimism – the idealism – that COULMIER once brought to the halls of Charenton.

SUBTITLE: ONE YEAR LATER

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. CHARENTON CORRIDOR - SOMETIME LATER

ROYER-COLLARD greets ABBE DU MAUPAS, a youthful priest with a face filled with optimism; he carries a small traveling valise.

ROYER-COLLARD

Welcome to Charenton, Abbe du Maupas.

ABBE DU MAUPAS

I'm pleased to have the new post,
sir.

ROYER-COLLARD

I'm afraid that our endowment has
shrivelled to a mere pittance; we're
the laughing stock of all France.
But – on a happier note –

The DOCTOR smiles, and pats the ABBE jovially on the arm.

ROYER-COLLARD

– the hospital is now in my sole
command.

ABBE DU MAUPAS all but runs to keep pace with the DOCTOR.

ROYER-COLLARD

Here each man must work for his keep.

ROYER-COLLARD swings open the gate to the work-room for the
ABBE DU MAUPAS.

INT. CHARENTON ASYLUM WORK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The place is abuzz with the sound of industry; the bowels of
Charenton have been transformed into a veritable publishing
house.

ROYER-COLLARD

The Charenton Press, Abbe.

ROYER-COLLARD waves toward a bank of printer's desks, where
a few PATIENTS – FRANVAL among them – are setting type,
their fingers blackened by printer's ink.

ROYER-COLLARD

The compulsive inmates set the type –

He gestures toward sewing and binding tables, where DAUPHIN –
among others – bind the books, their aprons sticky with
glue.

ROYER-COLLARD

– and the listless ones do the binding.

ABBE DU MAUPAS

It's remarkable, Doctor. The patients are so subdued; so docile.

ROYER-COLLARD

They've the satisfaction only a hard day's labor can provide.

CLEANTE turns the handle on a giant press. PITOU plucks out the pages – one-by-one – and hangs them on lines to dry.

ABBE DU MAUPAS notices the title page: Opus Sadicum.

ABBE DU MAUPAS

(stunned)

I don't believe it. The Marquis de Sade? You're actually publishing his novels?

ROYER-COLLARD

Ever since his unfortunate death, there's been a surge of interest in his work. I'll use the profits to restore Charenton to her former glory.

A WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Oh, Doctor.

It's CHARLOTTE. No longer a common chambermaid, she looks resplendent now in a dress befitting a young woman of station; perhaps a future DOCTOR's bride.

CHARLOTTE

You've a meeting with Herr Becker at four o'clock. He wants to publish a Swiss edition – on gilded paper, bound in calfskin.

ROYER-COLLARD

Thank-you, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE turns coquettish; she and the DOCTOR exchange a telling smile; theirs is more than a professional alliance.

CHARLOTTE
My pleasure. Truly.

ROYER-COLLARD
Have a look at page seventy-four;
I've turned the corner down...

EXT. THE COURTYARD - MEANWHILE

VALCOUR and GAILLON load crates of books onto wagons.

MICHETTE – idling by the well – watches as the COACHMEN depart, charging toward Paris and beyond.

INT. CORRIDOR - MINUTES LATER

ROYER-COLLARD escorts the young ABBE on a tour, passing through the PATIENT's WARD.

ROYER-COLLARD
Of course, everything's not as
harmonious as it seems. I hope you've
a strong constitution.

ABBE DU MAUPAS
My years tending the lepers at St.
Emilion steeled me for life's
grisliest offerings, Doctor.

ROYER-COLLARD
We've still a few lone incurables.
Prone to violence, to perversion.

They reach THE MARQUIS old cell; the peephole is open.

ABBE DU MAUPAS steps forward to get a look at the MADMAN inside; A FIGURE stands with his back to us. His hair is long and unkept. The PATIENT speaks:

VOICE
So you're my successor. Yes?

Slowly, the speaker turns around. It's COULMIER. The ABBE – startled – exchanges a look with ROYER-COLLARD; who is this haunted figure?

ABBE DU MAUPAS

My successor?

COULMIER barks a scabrous laugh, then abruptly changes his tone. He presses himself against the door, and implores DU MAUPAS:

COULMIER

Listen to me, Abbe, and listen well.

He casts a sidelong glance in ROYER-COLLARD's direction:

COULMIER

I've stared into the face of evil...

(back to the ABBE:)

...and I've lived to tell the tale.

Now... for your own sake... let me write it down.

ROYER-COLLARD

Gibberish, my friend. He rants and he raves –

COULMIER offers the DU MAUPAS a challenge, urging him to defy ROYER-COLLARD:

COULMIER

Prove you've an ounce of Christian charity... Bring me parchment... ink... and a quill.

ABBE DU MAUPAS looks to the DOCTOR; what should he do?

ROYER-COLLARD

You'll do no such thing. This patient poses a grave danger, to himself and to others.

With lightning speed, COULMIER reaches through the peephole, grabbing ROYER-COLLARD by the collar. He yanks him, hard, against the door, strangling him with his own cravatte. The DOCTOR's face starts turning purple.

ABBE DU MAUPAS pauses for a moment; who should he honor?

His employer, or the mad prophet in the cell? Impulsively he acts, loosening COULMIER's grip on the DOCTOR. ROYER-COLLARD gasps for air.

ABBE DU MAUPAS
Are you all right, sir?

COULMIER
Don't you see –

ROYER-COLLARD
(interrupting)
Don't you see, Abbe?

A pause, and then contemptuously:

ROYER-COLLARD
Some men are past redemption.

ROYER-COLLARD straightens his collar and smooths back his hair, and starts striding back down the hall. ABBE DU MAUPAS – queasy now – follows, but he can't help glancing back at COULMIER.

COULMIER (O.S.)
A quill! A quill, goddamn you! A
QUILL!

INT. COULMIER'S CELL

Discouraged, COULMIER slides down to the ground, defeated.

He hardly notices when the trap opens, and a bundle of sheets tumbles forth. Hoping against all hope, he folds the top sheet back. There – nestled in the fabric – an ink well, parchment, and a quill. He leaps to his feet, and slides open the peephole. Staring back at him: the milky eyes of MADAME LECLERC.

MADAME LECLERC
Use it well; you owe her that.

COULMIER's eyes fill with grateful tears.

ANGLE ON: MADAME LECLERC, TEETERING DOWN THE HALL

As she goes about her rounds, she sings THE MARQUIS' song,
Claire de la Lune.

A QUILL PEN, FLICKERING ACROSS THE PAGE

It seems to dance. The VOICE OF THE MARQUIS rises up from the stone walls of Charenton:

THE MARQUIS (V.O.)

"Beloved Reader... I leave you now with a tale penned by the Abbe de Coulmier, a man who found freedom in the unlikeliest of places. At the bottom of an inkwell; on the tip of a quill."

COULMIER scribbles away with all the fervor – the mission – of a man frantic to impart his story to the world.

THE MARQUIS

"Be forewarned: its plot is bloodsoaked, its characters depraved and its themes unwholesome at best. But in order to know virtue, we must acquaint ourselves with vice. Only then can we know the full measure of man.

Sunlight ignites COULMIER's face. A smile flickers across his lips.

THE MARQUIS

So come, I dare you... turn the page..."

COULMIER begins to hum Claire de la Lune as we FADE TO BLACK.

THE END