

The Unknown Soldier



The Unknown Soldier

tragedy in five acts

by

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Based on the novel by Marie-Louise de la Ramée, also known as Ouida

(1991)

Dramatis personae:

Lord Royallieu, nicknamed "Royal"
Bert Cecil, called "Bertie", and
Berkeley, called "Berk", his sons.

Jack, Bertie's butler

Lord Carrington

Marquess of Rockingham, called "the Seraph" or "Rock"

John Davis, doubtful book-maker

Five other book-makers

Audience at the races at Derby

An international horse racing audience

an unknown lady of high position, "Lady Guinevere"

a Jew

corporal "Black Falcon", later sergeant

Marquess of Chateauroy, colonel

a general

a caliph

a bartender

soldiers

arabs

Cigarette

Djelma, Arabian beauty

Leon Ramon, soldier, ex-artist

Ben Arsli, arabic antiquarian

Princess Zurga of Corona de Amagues

a butler

an Arabian butler

a barber-surgeon

The action is in England in the 1860s (first act)
and for the rest in Algeria.

The drama was dedicated to the Croatic nation on October 5th 1991,
based on "*Under Two Flags*" from 1867 by Ouida (1839-1908)

Act I, scene 1. Piccadilly, the 1860s.

Jack (waking his master in the morning) Well, Sir, how have you been sleeping?

Bertie (a dashing blond young man, getting out of bed ready in a white shirt)

Just perfectly, my friend. I have slept just perfectly. Lovely dreams of lovely ladies have given me a terrific appetite. Is breakfast ready?

Jack Of course! *(brings in the breakfast on a rolling table: a sumptuous breakfast on a white cloth on silver service)* How else could it be?

Bertie (getting up) Have you been to the stables already?

Jack Of course! Where else would I have been?

Bertie Your goodness and service knows no limits, Jack.

Jack Of course.

Bertie How is my Forest King today?

Jack He couldn't be more fit. He is just longing to race his master in the saddle for the cup in the great Derby.

Bertie That day is constantly getting nearer, Jack. So you have no complaints today of my jockey?

Jack That knave! He doesn't know his horses at all, Sir, and Forest King least of all. That divine horse is a personality who must be treated with respect, but that groom just drives him on like an animal.

Bertie Discipline is better than flattery for a horse, Jack. That's why you are not allowed to keep Forest King alone.

Jack And that you will regret one day, Sir, I am sure!

Bertie I have no reason to mistrust a servant until he fails me, Jack.

Jack It's still mortally dangerous to trust someone all the way until he fails you.

Bertie A perfect breakfast, Jack, but I have no time. It's already late.

Jack But Sir, you haven't even touched my delicious jam crêpes! That was the very clou of your breakfast today!

Bertie Some other time, Jack. Now, help me dress.

Jack Certainly, Sir. *(takes out Bertie's uniform as one of the Queen's Horse Guards.)* Apropos, your brother called on you. I refused to let him in.

Bertie Is he short of money again?

Jack What else?

Bertie Let him in at once.

Jack But Sir, you haven't got any money yourself!?

Bertie In my family we don't let anyone down as long as we live! Let him in! *(buttons his red coat)*

Jack (bowing) Yes, Sir. *(leaves to let Berkeley in)*

Bertie It's sad that my little brother can't handle his money, but what can you do? You can't pretend that he just doesn't exist.

Jack (shows in Berkeley) Berkeley, Sir.

Bertie (greeting his shabby little brother cordially) Berk! How are you?

Berk (ashamed) I made a mess of it again, Bertie.

Bertie How much?

Berk I need fifty quid at once.

Bertie A debt of honour?

Berk Yes.

Bertie When will these debts of honour of yours ever come to an end, Berk? You know it can't go on like this.

Berk What can you do? I was unlucky.

Bertie You bet on the wrong horse.

Berk Yes.

Bertie Give him fifty pounds, Jack.

Jack But Sir...

Bertie Give him the money, Jack! And he doesn't have to pay it back. But this is the last time, Berk.

Berk How can you say so?

Bertie You get all I have got left, Berk. I will have no more salary until next month. (*Jack gives Berkeley the money.*)

Berk (overwhelmed) Thanks, brother! You are a god after all!

Bertie But Berk...

Berk Yes?

Bertie Don't gamble any more on horses. You don't know the art.

Berk But what else is there to gamble on? (*leaves*)

Bertie Well, Jack. What do you say? Lecture me now!

Jack That brother, Sir, will ruin you and your family.

Bertie What does it matter, as long as it is only about money? The only thing worth having, Jack, is honour and glory.

Jack And if your brother ruins them too?

Bertie He can't He only thinks of money and himself. He has no honour and glory to waste. That's why he is harmless.

Jack You trust him too much.

Bertie He is my only brother.

Jack And if he fails you?

Bertie He will still be my only brother. (*takes on his helmet*) Is it all right, Jack?

Jack (full of admiration of Bertie's handsome appearance in full uniform, white cloak and panache) It couldn't fit you better, Sir!

Bertie Thanks, Jack. We must not lose more time. The Queen is waiting. (*leaves*)

Scene 2. At the gates.

(*Five active bookmakers*)

- 1 Two to one on Forest King!
- 2 Two to one on Bay Regent!
- 3 Fifteen to seven for Wild Geranium!
- 4 Three to five on Pas de Charge!

5 Nineteen to six for Day Star!

Carrington Well, gentlemen, here it is! Five favourites, and every one of them could win! Who will then dare to stake his fortune on any of them?

Rockingham Isn't it our friend Bertie's brother over there lurking? I bet all I own that he has waged everything on his brother's horse.

Carrington You know Bertie, Seraph! He rides his horse himself, he is the only representative of the brigadiers, and his whole regiment is waging on him. Although he must have had a sleepless night he is as cool as a corpse, he knows his horse and takes no chances. He is a card of high value indeed, but there is hard competition.

Rockingham One thing is certain. He can't afford losing.

Bertie (coming up to them) Well, gentlemen, how do you feel? Do you have enough jelly in your knees? Now it's for the Blue Ribbon!

Carrington Everyone here has soft knees except you, Bertie. You look as if you never in your life had had anything to do with horse races.

Bertie I know my horse and am prepared to do my duty just as he is.

Rockingham (patting his shoulder) We all have faith in you, Bertie.

Bertie How are the odds?

Carrington Rather even. All the five favourites are about two to one. The rest are already out of the game.

Bertie Don't forget that we are thirty-two racing. We all have equal chances.

Rockingham But the initiated know who the favourites are, and they are only here for the favourites, and here are almost only the initiated.

Bertie I think I see inordinately many people.

Carrington It's about double to normal. It's because the absolute favourites are five. Normally they are only two or three.

Rockingham But in the throng of the mob there are the more fishy figures lurking around. Look at that adventurer, for example. (*indicating John Davis, who tries to talk Berkeley into something. Bertie immediately darkens.*)

Carrington (to Rockingham) You risk ruining his day from the beginning.

Rockingham (back) He would have noticed him anyway.

Bertie (approaching Davis and Berk) Mr. Davis, what is a dirty scumbag like you doing here among honest people?

Davis Watch the dandy! Are you still intolerable?

Bertie Didn't I tell you never more to show yourself among decent people?

Davis (jokingly) What people are decent when it comes to horse races?

Bertie (to Berk) Don't have anything to do with him, Berk. He only speculates in ruining people.

Davis Your brother enacts a preacher of morals while managing his own dirty business. As a fool he only makes a pathetic impression.

Bertie Sir, you have no business here!

Davis Mr. Soapy has nothing here to do himself if he thinks there could be any business that isn't dirty.

Bertie I command you to leave my brother alone!

Davis Throw me out, if you dare!

(Bertie grabs him, lifts him up and throws him off the stage.)

Bertie Down there in the ditch you are in your own company of toads and reptiles!

Davis (spitting water, coughing, furious) You will live to regret this, you damned conceited hypocrite!

Bertie (taking his brother by the shoulder) Never have anything more to do with that man. His profession is to purposely mislead people into ruin to make profits of it.

Berk (ashamed) He seemed to have only good intentions.

Bertie That's the most dangerous type. It's safer to trust someone who is threatening your life than a flatterer. *(returns to the lords)*

Rockingham Great show, Bertie, you did that well!

Carrington But wasn't it a bit risky before the race?

Bertie You have to deal with everything that turns up in your way, gentlemen. How else can you face a steeplechase? I must ask your permission to retire. I have to dress before the start.

Jack (entering) There you are, Sir! They start in twenty minutes!

Bertie That's just what I need for preparing. Good luck, gentlemen! *(leaves)*

Carrington I think I'll wage everything on him anyway. My nose can smell a good deal.

Rockingham The more risky the deal, the bigger could be the outcome. I said 'could be'. I will follow your example. *(They leave.)*

Scene 3. The galleries.

(Crowded with high society people in top hats and long gowns, binoculars and note books, like in 'My Fair Lady'.)

Carrington Here they come! What a noble sight!

A lady (with binoculars) My horse Wild Geranium is the finest.

Her husband (taking her binoculars) But Bay Regent is more masculine.

Another lady (delighted) Watch the elegance of Pas de Charge!

A colonel It's the pride of the regiment.

Carrington What does Bertie's attitude tell you, Seraph?

Rockingham (watching in his binoculars) Caution, careful calculation of the chances, strategic concentration and an almost impertinent calm.

Carrington At least he doesn't show off unnecessarily.

Rockingham But the more when it is needed. He alone represents the Queen's own Home Guards.

A lady (turning to them) Wasn't he the one who threw out a book-maker in front of everyone?

Rockingham It was no book-maker. It was a parasite.

The lady Then he did right, but he could have been disqualified by the act for making publicity.

Rockingham Bertie is not like that.

The lady Yes, I know, and that's why I have waged everything on him. (*resumes her binoculars*)

Rockingham (to Carrington) All who put their bets on Bertie seem to have waged everything on him.

Carrington (with his binoculars to his eyes) I am sure he knows it.

Rockingham While those who placed their bets on others waged on many more than one horse.

Carrington (leaves his binoculars to him) I am sure he knows that as well.

A lady The start is to go off any moment now.

A gentleman Let's hope no one fumbles or starts too soon. Delays at the start is the worst of all.

A lady The pistol is raised! Everything ready! Here goes the shot!

(*A shot is heard. At once 128 hooves start moving into gallop, and you hear the enthusiastic cries and cheers typical of a mass audience.*)

Rockingham (with the binoculars) Bay Regent takes the lead!

Carrington Is that Wild Geranium and Forest King next to him?

Rockingham Yes, but not for long! Pas de Charge is passing them all three!

Carrington Let me see! (*takes the binoculars*)

The delighted lady It's my elegant favourite! He is winning already!

Colonel Easy, my lady! They only just started.

Rockingham How is Bertie riding?

Carrington Carefully, with surprising carefulness.

Rockingham He knows what he is doing. That is all.

A man It's between four horses. Day Star has no chance any more, unless all the others break their backs.

A hysterical lady My horse is winning! My horse is winning!

(*A high fence is coming up. All cry out.*)

What happened to my horse?

Her husband (casually) My darling, Pas de Charge just broke his back. (*resumes his binoculars*)

Rockingham How is Forest King managing?

Carrington Steady third.

Rockingham Let me see. (*takes the binoculars*)

A book-maker Ten to one on Bay Regent! Hurry up!

Another Forest King is the winner! Ten to one!

A third Wild Geranium coming up to Bay Regent! Eleven to one!

A fourth Something is wrong with Forest King! The Queen's guard is losing speed! The Queen's guard is losing!

Carrington What's happened?

Rockingham One of his stirrups seems to have broken. But he is catching up.

Carrington I wage for that! It's the very challenge he needs! Now we are getting somewhere!

Rockingham I'll warrant that! Now he passed Wild Geranium!

Carrington Let me see! *(takes the binoculars)*

Lady 1 (disappointed) My elegant horse seems to have given up.

Her husband That's what I always said: strength always outlasts beauty.

The lady But beauty always beats strength. *(tramples demonstratively on his toes, making him grin of pain.)*

Carrington Forest King is closing in on Bay Regent. They are almost even now.

Rockingham And there is only one fence left, the great water ditch.

Carrington Half of all horses will give up after that. One of the two must fall or fail.

Rockingham I bet Bertie right now is whispering into the ear of his horse: "Kill me, but don't fail me!"

Carrington Many have moved their bets from Forest King to Bay Regent.

Rockingham You must never anticipate a victory.

Diverse voices The last ditch! Forest King is going for it! Bay Regent – no! He hesitates! Forest King makes it! Forest King has won!

Carrington (casually) Not yet. *(takes the binoculars)*

Rockingham (hysterically) He made it! He made it! He made it! We have won, Carrington! *(embracing him)*

Carrington No, Seraph. It's Bertie who has won. *(sets the binoculars to his eyes)* He has beaten everyone and bestowed on the Queen's Guard a highly unexpected but most well-deserved victory.

(The galleries are swarming with a furore of the most exaggerated sentiments of either disappointment or exalted victory ruse. There are almost fisticuffs.)

Davis (appearing on top) That was your last victory, you dashing scoundrel!

Scene 4. At the gates.

Bertie's friends waiting for him with great expectations. As he arrives he is almost overwhelmed by the enthusiastic greetings and welcoming by his comrades.

He is immediately tossed.

Rockingham (embracing him) Well done! I knew you would never let us down!

Bertie (with calm) I only did my duty, Seraph, but I was also lucky, which I can't bear without misgivings.

Carrington How so, my boy?

Bertie Luck is not to be trusted, for temporary luck is always but temporary.

Rockingham Luck! It was splendid riding, my boy!

Bertie If it is splendid to risk your life, you are lucky if you survive.

Rockingham But you did survive, my boy! You have to celebrate and be happy!

Bertie (sees a lady) That's exactly what I am going to do.

The lady (who staked everything on him) I only wanted to thank you. I staked everything on your victory, and you did not fail me.

Bertie (with her hand to his mouth) It was only for your sake I won.

The lady Still you don't even know who I am. You wouldn't have greeted me if I did not come to you.

Bertie The more necessary a compliment.

The lady I thank you. But what you did was terrible.

Bertie What did I do that was terrible?

The lady You hurled yourself into the arms of death and came through just by a happy coincidence.

Bertie You noticed that?

The lady Yes.

Bertie (kisses her hand again) I thank you for your close attention.

The lady You are one of those few men in the world who never would let anyone down.

Bertie Try me, Madame.

The lady When you risked your life I had a feeling that it was the only thing in life that could offer you any pleasure. Was that correct?

Bertie It's not risking your life that is the sport. The thing is to do it handsomely so that the effect becomes overwhelming by its beauty. That's the only sport worth while at length.

The lady Then you are a poet.

Bertie Then reality is my notebook.

The lady But if you so gladly stake your life at such very risky odds, isn't it probable that you one day will lose?

Bertie So far I never did, and as long as you don't, the sport will remain thrilling and rewarding, especially if you take care to always risk your life for a good cause.

The lady Even in the best cause you can lose all.

Bertie That's the thrill of the game. It wouldn't be democratic if the chances were uneven according to the quality of their causes.

The lady So eliminating evil as a factor of life would be something undemocratic?

Bertie Yes. Democracy needs challenges.

The lady (thoughtfully) Maybe you are right.

Bertie May I invite you as my lady for the party tonight?

The lady Yes, if you drive me home afterwards and leave me before midnight.

Bertie Then you must be of some nobility.

The lady Indeed, we shouldn't even be seen together. (*offering her hand, which he kisses one last time*)

The friends Hurrah! (*still celebrating him. He turns to them joyfully*)

Bertie May I present – lady Guinevere!

The lady Are you then Lancelot?

Bertie Almost, but not yet.

The lady *Au coeur vaillant rien d'impossible.*

Bertie You suggest there is hope?

The lady Almost, but not yet. (*takes his arm and leaves with him. The friends follow.*)

Scen 5. The Royallieu residence. Heavy upper class luxury.

Bertie My father wishes to speak with me? Here is something out of the ordinary. He always hated me. (*enter father*) Has anything happened, father?

Royal My son is dying.

Bertie (upset) Dying? How so? What happened?

Royal He took your place in the fox hunt, while you were absent and busy with your mistresses as usual, like you always are when you are needed!

Bertie What happened to him?

Royal His horse bolted, as no one was watching him. It ended as it always does, but your brother got away with a broken arm and concussion, while the horse broke his back and had to be shot.

Bertie Which horse was it?

Royal(mimicking) Which horse was it? You would of course have preferred to have Berkeley shot!

Bertie Now you are unfair.

Royal Am I? You live like a duke! You have the same expenditure as your colleagues, that Seraph Rockingham and the wealthy Carrington, but have neither their income nor their fortune! You are a beggar in the Queen's horse guards!

Bertie Still it's my brother who always comes begging me for money and never to you.

Royal Because he loves me! He honours and respects me! But you only think of yourself and your adventures with married ladies! How many have you got? They appear to be three at the moment!

Bertie Father, I would have loved you as well if you had ever given me any reason for it, but you always hated me. Why?

Royal I might as well tell you. May the knowledge embitter your life as it always embittered mine! Your mother never loved me. She always scorned me. She always loved your cousin Alan Bertie instead, and you are like him. You speak with Alan Bertie's voice, you have Alan Bertie's hair, everything indicates that you are his son more than mine...

Bertie Father, you dare insinuate...

Royal You are not my son! You are your mother's son but not mine! I can never learn the truth, but you are certainly not my son! Your brother though is my son for certain, for he is like me in everything. And now he is lying on his deathbed because of your negligence. You do whatever just to risk your life, ruin yourself and your reputation, but whatever you do seems only to carry success. I hear that you won the blue ribbon the other day. Half of London and the whole aristocracy were ruined by the wrong horse winning.

Bertie Father, I can forgive you anything but not your slander of my mother.

Royal She only made a total slander of herself.

Bertie How can you judge her without proof?

Royal I have the walking proof in front of me. How dare you go on living as a walking insult and dishonour to me as my cousin's living image?

Bertie I have nothing more to say to you. (*starts leaving*)

Royal Your brother is dying!

Bertie Tell him to stop trusting bookmakers, so that he doesn't get into trouble with tampered saddles! (*leaves*)

Royal The cursed scoundrel! I never want to see him again! (*growls to himself*)

Scene 6. Like scene 1.

(*enter Jack.*)

Jack He sleeps like a rake, the young god. Whatever was he up to last night? It's noon, and he is still snoozing! It's very much unlike him to be that idle. Wake up, my lord! It's already afternoon! (*wakes him*)

Bertie (tired and worn out) What? How? Who?

Jack Your breakfast has gone cold three times over!

Bertie (waking up) Jack! Why haven't you woken me up?

Jack I was asleep when you came home. I know it's unlike me, but I waited for you until seven. Then I didn't think you would be home any more for some days. But whatever have you been up to? You look like a wreck overgrown with seaweed just brought out from the bottom of the sea!

Bertie I have broken up with my father, Jack. I can never see him again.

Jack What have you done?

Bertie He insulted a lady in my presence.

Jack Whose lady?

Bertie His lady.

Jack And what was that to you?

Bertie She was my mother.

Jack A deceased lady! That makes some difference.

Bertie Do you mean to say, Jack, that he was allowed to insult my mother if she had been alive?

Jack Yes, for then she could have returned the compliment.

Bertie What a knave you are!

Jack (bowing) You always told me so, Sir. Therefore I could be nothing less.

Bertie Cheer up, Jack! What's new today?

Jack Your brother is here.

Bertie As usual. What does he want this time?

Jack He wouldn't say.

Bertie As usual. How much?

Jack He wouldn't say, but he says he has never been in such a difficult situation before.

Bertie As usual. But this time it's different from all his previous monetary predicaments.

Jack How so?

Bertie I have no money to give him.

Jack Shall I tell him so?

Bertie No, let him in. I have to face him when he brings on his pathetic excuses and I have to turn him down. Let in my poor little brother!

Jack (opens the door) Mylord will receive you. *(leaves as Berk enters with his arm in a sling)*

Bertie Berk! I told you not to come here any more on business! *(embraces him as usual)*

Berk I am sorry, brother, but I am really into thick trouble now.

Bertie Didn't you win anything on my victory last week?

Berk Yes, but it didn't last very long.

Bertie I told you a thousand times not to play on dice.

Berk If you are crazy you just can't help it. You should know that as you always keep risking your life.

Bertie It costs nothing to risk your life. But you are wasting money that belongs to your entire family.

Berk Don't preach to me. You know it won't help.

Bertie And if I die there will be many happy winners in the family who will feel the relief of having one heir less to quarrel with.

Berk Don't be angry with me.

Bertie I am sorry, Berk, but last time you wanted to borrow money it was the last time, I told you so, and you had to accept it.

Berk I have to get 300 pounds at once, Bertie. I have no choice. I am desperate.

Bertie Why then do you come to your poor brother who doesn't own anything?

Berk You have rich friends. You can borrow from them.

Bertie Can I? Berk, all I have is my position as a horse guard of Her Majesty. I have no other income. If I would lower myself to borrow 300 pounds from Lord Rockingham I would next day be expelled from the regiment, where by every right it is considered a dishonour to borrow money from a friend.

Berk Your noble friends would never turn you down, Bertie. You know that. They all adore you.

Bertie Have you then no honour and self-respect yourself, Berk, who obviously is more the son of a noble father than me, when you thus demand of a brother to sacrifice his honour for the sake of you having wasted your own?

Berk It's only about money, Bertie. Don't dramatize.

Bertie Ask somebody else.

Berk I am not of age, Bertie. No one would accept a draft with my name.

Bertie Ask your father then. He would not deny you.

Berk You know I am afraid of him.

Bertie You hardly have any reason to be. He hated me all his life, and still I never could fear him. He loves you, and you are afraid of him. What have you to fear? At the most some preaching like of me. But he would never fail you as he failed me.

Berk Has he failed you?

Bertie I can never see him again.

Berk Why?

Bertie That I can't tell you.

Berk Your damned hypocritical secrecy! Whenever you need a reason for getting rid of me you present some secret which you insist on concealing! I understand that kind of language! You let your own brother down! But I warn you! I shall not be accountable for the consequences!

Bertie (lower) Kill me if you want, but don't disgrace the family. How is your arm, by the way?

Berk Don't pretend to pity me! How come you don't piss in your pants for all your pathetic pride! *(leaves in fury. Bertie retires exhausted to his bed.)*

Jack (enters as soon as the brother is gone) He seemed somewhat angry.

Bertie He *was* angry.

Jack Evidently he didn't get his money.

Bertie And I fear he will do something foolish as a result.

Jack Did you sleep at all tonight, Sir?

Bertie Jack, what happened tonight was not my fault. It was an accident. I can tell you about it, but you must promise to forever remain silent about it to others.

Jack What happened, Sir?

Bertie We went through Richmond Park she and I. There are always deer running around in there. Unfortunately we had Maraschino, the risky hunting horse, to our carriage. He scented a deer and started off with our carriage while *she* was holding the reins. Of course she lost control of him, and he bolted. I had to jump up on Maraschino and force him to stop. He couldn't stop until the carriage was wrecked. We had to walk back the whole way, she and me. You know who she was. She was married.

Jack Lady Guinevere?

Bertie Precisely. I had to give her my word of honour never to reveal the episode to anyone. She would gladly risk her life together with me but not her marriage. I will never see her again.

Jack I see. That's why you were so tired.

Bertie The walk took four hours. Those four hours are deleted from my life.

Jack You are a true cavalier.

Bertie But that, Jack, I am afraid is all there is to me. And no matter how true a cavalier he is he doesn't stand a chance against misfortune and evil without money.

Jack What kind of misfortune and evil do you expect?

Bertie Anything. But with or without money I will anyway do what is right. But it's time to get dressed. The Queen is waiting.

Jack And your breakfast?

Bertie My breakfast will have to wait.

Scene 7. Baden, Prix des Dames.

(like scene 3, but the audience is even finer: the whole continental society with counts and baronets, dukes and princes, baronesses and royal celebrities ad infinitum.)

Carrington Well, Rock, how does it feel?

Rockingham Splendid. We can pride ourselves today.

Carrington But can England really afford to bet on only one horse?

Rockingham Would you hesitate to bet on your only safe card?

Carrington How safe is it? The horse has had a difficult transport across the Channel and on rails all the way here to Baden. Our friend Bertie has risked everything.

Rockingham As usual. That's why he also will win it all.

Carrington But there he is!

Rockingham Bertie! My golden boy! How nice to see you! All England put their faith in you today!

Carrington How does it feel?

Bertie Splendid.

Rockingham That's what you always say.

Bertie How are the odds?

Rockingham Forest King is everyone's favourite. Your odds are almost too certain. No one wants to repeat their losses on your winning.

Bertie What do you know about the other horses?

Carrington The French Étoile is next to you, but she has no chances. More than the double have bet on you than all the others together.

Bertie It's almost boring to be such a certain winner. An Englishman is always better off with some competition.

Rockingham How is Forest King?

Bertie He has never been better.

Carrington You needed some competition, you said. There is a tip from London that Forest King would be a certain loser, and some have taken it seriously.

Bertie What does that mean?

Rockingham A vicious rumour, nothing else.

Bertie Forest King has never been more fit, has never lost a race and has never shirked a fence.

Rockingham That's fine, Bertie! Carry on!

Carrington The London tip could also be a strategic effort to better the odds.

Bertie I have to go, gentlemen. We must not disappoint the ladies by shirking the show.

Rockingham Get on with it, Bertie, and get rich, with the help of God!

Bertie Thanks, Seraph. *(leaves)*

Rockingham There he goes, my darling and the favourite of all England and Europe!

Carrington That tip from London could also be a warning about some evil intent from somewhere, Rock.

Rockingham Who would wish anything bad to Bertie and his horse?

Carrington I don't know.

Rockingham Nonsense, Lord Carrington!

A Jew Pardon me, gentlemen, but do you recognize this signature? (*shows a document*)

Rockingham What is it? Let me see. It's my name. What is your purpose, Jew?

The Jew It's a draft on your name due tomorrow.

Rockingham The signature is false. Who wrote the draft?

The Jew I will be back tomorrow. (*vanishes discreetly*)

Carrington What does this mean, Rock?

Rockingham Someone forged my name as a warrant to cash a draft. Nothing to worry about. It happened before. Everyone knows how well off I am. All you have to do is to identify the other name on the draft, who then is a common swindler, and turn him over to the police.

Carrington You didn't notice the other name or the amount?

Rockingham No. We shall know it tomorrow, if the Jew dares to show his face again.

Carrington Jews never give up when it is about money.

Rockingham I know, and it's not very pleasant.

Carrington The race is about to start. Get ready.

Rockingham Do you have the binoculars?

Carrington Of course. (*takes them out and uses them*) Forest King is proud like a rooster. He has never looked more fit. Bertie cuts a more elegant figure than ever. Everyone seems to be agreed that he has already won the race.

Rockingham (*taking the binoculars*) All he has to do is to fetch the prize and then become national hero as the best rider of all times. Here goes the starting signal. (*A shot is fired.*) Forest King takes the lead at once. He outshines all the others from the start. It's almost unnecessary to continue. There is only one possible end to it. (*removes the binoculars*) Would you like to see?

Carrington (*takes the binoculars*) You are right. Étoile is already too far behind to be able to catch up. But what is this? (*uses both hands for the binoculars*)

Rockingham What is it?

Carrington The lead is losing. There is something about Forest King. It is as if he was blinded. Has he got sick?

Rockingham (*takes the binoculars. A general murmur is spreading. It rises to astonishment and upset cries.*)

Carrington Do you see what I see?

Rockingham Yes. Forest King has broken the race.

Carrington Why?

Rockingham He is sick. He is not fit. Bertie turned his horse himself. (*takes down the binoculars*) The horse must be drugged.

Carrington Why? By whom?

Rockingham Who knows? That tip from London...

Carrington Yes?

Rockingham The poison is from there.

(Most of the audience are upset showing astonishment and disappointment. The enthusiastic mood is completely altered into wrath and dejection. No one is happy any more, and the race continues without enthusiasm.)

Carrington (after some while) Étoile wins.

Rockingham Yes.

The Jew (returning) Pardon me, gentlemen, but this most unexpected result of the races necessitates my making a reminder.

Carrington And what has your damned business and damned false signatures got to do with that damned failure down there?

The Jew Pardon me, gentlemen, but I had hoped the Englishman would have been able to pay his debts after his winnings. Now he can't.

Carrington What business does a sanctimonious swine like you have to do with an unusually decent Englishman?

The Jew The signature. (shows the entire paper)

Rockingham (can't believe his eyes) Bertie!

Carrington Is it Bertie's own handwriting? He couldn't have signed a false draft!

The Jew If you gentlemen suspect the draft to be false I suggest you demand an explanation from the man himself who signed it.

Rockingham Miserable vulture, can't you see that the man, whose signature here has been falsified to a criminal draft, just lost everything by someone having fixed his horse, the pride of all England? And you want to bring him on trial for something that made him the victim? Are you not human?

The Jew If anyone wants to avenge himself on your Englishman I know nothing about it. I only know that I lent some money, and I have the right to get it back.

Carrington You shall get your money, you miserable dog, if only you forget all about it. (brings out his wallet) How much is it?

The Jew 600 pounds, Sir.

Carrington (with a gasp) 600 pounds!

The Jew Yes. 300 pounds were borrowed on reasonable interest.

Carrington (controls himself with difficulty) I am afraid, Rockingham, that we have to talk with your Bertie about this.

Rockingham I am afraid so too.

Carrington Can he face it?

Rockingham Only if he is innocent.

Carrington He must be innocent.

Rockingham Yes, he must. Or else he is truly lost.

Carrington There he is.

Rockingham Call on him.

Carrington Bert Cecil! Can you come up here?

(Bertie comes up. The remaining audience evades him. No one wants to come near him. He calmly comes up to the three gentlemen while all the others disappear.)

Bertie I am sorry about the loss, gentlemen.

Carrington So are we.

Rockingham What the devil happened to the horse?

Bertie No one knows. The vet has checked him but didn't find anything.

Rockingham Someone must have drugged him.

Bertie Who? And why? If it really happened there is no trace left of the poison. The groom has been dismissed of course. I could with difficulty keep Jack from flaying him alive.

Carrington Unfortunately, Bertie, we are faced here with another serious problem. This Jewish usurer has presented Rock with a draft written in his name and yours. It must be false. Can you prove it to be false?

The Jew (showing the draft) If it is false I am prepared to nullify it immediately. I claim, though, that it was signed by you personally, Mr. Cecil, the morning of the 15th at 7.50 with my partner. If you can prove that you were somewhere else the matter is cleared and there is nothing more to do.

Bertie Let me see. (*eyes the draft, stiffens and grows pale; to himself:*) My brother!

Rockingham Well, Bertie, where were you then? Please remember, for God's sake!

Bertie (collecting himself) I can only assure you that the draft is false.

The Jew Prove it!

Rockingham Of course it is false, Bertie, but we will not get rid of this mean and disgusting creep until he is convinced of his own mistake! Where were you on the morning of the 15th? At the club? Home in bed? Can Jack confirm it?

Bertie I am sorry, gentlemen, but I may not tell you where I was at the time.

Carrington What nonsense is that?

The Jew Then the law must have its course.

Rockingham But this is utterly insane! Here, accursed Jew, is my check book! I give you a check in my name! Write whatever amount you wish, and let the case be closed!

Bertie (interferes and tears up the check) No, Seraph, you mustn't do that. Let the law have its course. Here is a misunderstanding and mystery that has to be cleared up. Let me do it in the name of the law.

Rockingham You will be disgraced, Bertie! We can't allow it!

Carrington You must prove yourself innocent here and now! Or else there will be unsurveyable consequences of unpleasantness for us all!

The Jew (slyly) I am sorry, Marquess Rockingham, but if I followed your advice and received your check it could be interpreted by the law as a bribe for silence. I must abide by the law.

Rockingham You base baboon, is then money at the cost of a noble young man's future and honour more important than a human life? Is your human dignity so worthless, you miserable creep and creeping miser, that you don't hesitate to humiliate an already ruined man? Is your Jewish God then only brutal greed at any price and nothing else?

The Jew Don't get religion mixed up in my business.

Carrington Bertie! Do something! Say something! What do you know about this? Why do you keep silent? What have you to hide?

Bertie A woman's secret. I am sorry, but I can't defend myself, but I have to maintain that the draft is false.

The Jew Police! Guards! Over here! (*Enter some guards who waited outside.*)

Bertie No! Not in public! Not on a day like this! (*escapes*)

Carrington Yes, Bertie! Run for your life! Kill those bastards! Avenge your secret envious enemies! Unveil the forger!

Rockingham He'll make it. He is too quick for them.

Carrington But who could have brought himself to commit such a terrible forgery?

Rockingham There is only one possible answer, that could account for Bertie's impossibility to defend himself.

Carrington And the criminal is?

Rockingham It must be Bertie's younger brother, a gambler without character, their father's favourite son.

Carrington Will Bertie bring him to court?

Rockingham Never. It would disgrace the whole family forever.

Carrington What do you think he will do?

Rockingham I think he will just disappear from all of us forever and leave no trace.

Scene 8. An intimate scene ad libitum,
for instance a beautiful ballroom or garden.

Bertie (discreetly) I had to see you once more.

The lady Why? You are a lost horse. All Englishmen in Germany have lost a fortune on you.

Bertie I sacrificed everything for you, Madame.

The lady Did you? Rather it was England who sacrificed everything for you and lost it all.

Bertie My horse was drugged by my groom, who was bribed to commit this treason against me by someone who sought my ruin. If England sacrificed everything for me it was jealousy that sacrificed England.

The lady What is it you really want?

Bertie I only wanted someone that I leave behind to know about my destiny.

The lady And why was I the chosen one?

Bertie Do you remember the 15th? You asked me to forget four delicate hours of my life. I obeyed your wish. No one knows where I was that morning.

The lady Was it asking too much?

Bertie That very morning my younger brother falsified a draft in my name and the Marquess of Rockingham's. After the race that ruined my horse and me and England I was brought to answer for this false draft. I could neither reveal that my brother was the falsifier nor that I had been with you that morning.

The lady Nothing obliges you to keep your promise to me under such circumstances.

Bertie Nothing, Madame? Not even my own conscience? Not even my heart as a cavalier? Not even my self respect and will to perseverance as a gentleman?

The lady You may choose. Either you are an English gentleman, and then you don't expose me. Or you expose me, and then you are just an ordinary man.

Bertie There is a third alternative, Madame.

The lady Which is?

Bertie That *you* save me.

The lady Then I risk my marriage, my honour, my position and everything I have.

Bertie I admit that would be asking too much.

The lady What will you do?

Bertie Leave Europe. I will join the Foreign Legion in Africa.

The lady For the rest of your life?

Bertie Rather that than sully my family's name.

The lady You bury yourself alive.

Bertie But I save everyone's life.

The lady It's hard to lose economically.

Bertie Inhumanly hard.

The lady (giving her hand) I will think about you.

Bertie (kissing it) And I will forget you. Farewell, Madame. *(leaves)*

The lady Such a gentleman can't just get lost. I am sure he will be exonerated with time. Or else there is no God. *(leaves)*

Act II scene 1. A shabby café somewhere in Algeria. Flies and dirt.

Corporal Any recruits today?

Soldier No devil is so stupid any more as to join the foreign legion.

Corporal You can't be too sure. The last idiot isn't born yet.

Soldier It takes more than an idiot to end up here.

Corporal The world is full of them. Don't forget that the greatest of them all was Napoleon Bonaparte, who founded our legion!

Soldier Greatest in what category?

Corporal Qualified madmen.

Soldier You are right, Monsieur.

(enter Bertie, still in British uniform but somewhat torn.)

Corporal (lower) Watch that one.

Soldier What do you think he is?

Corporal The very kind we discussed. I can smell them.

Soldier Are you sure?

Corporal Sure I am! *(joins Bertie at the bar, claps his shoulder)* An absinth, Monsieur?

Bertie I would love to, thanks.

Corporal What is an Englishman doing here by the Sahara? Have you lost your way?

Bertie It depends.

Corporal How so?

Bertie If you accept people like me.

Corporal It depends on what you are looking for.

Bertie I would gladly join up.

Corporal For what?

Bertie Voluntary chasseur.

Corporal What can you do?

Bertie Risk my life.

Corporal For France?

Bertie France is female. I would gladly risk my life for something female.

Corporal Misfortune in love?

Bertie Fraud.

Corporal New identity?

Bertie Yes, please.

Corporal And if your past makes you unfit for us?

Bertie Then I'll join the Arabs instead against you.

Corporal Are you so willing to die?

Bertie Yes.

Corporal Then join the Arabs.

Bertie Shall I take it that you wish more to die by my hand than I wish to die myself?

Corporal Do you think you could kill a Frenchman?

Bertie I was one of the Queen's horse guards and could always fight like a man.

Corporal How then could you lose?

Bertie I played honestly in a crooked game.

Corporal What kind of game?

Bertie Horses.

Corporal Did you bet?

Bertie No, but the world bet on me, and my horse was drugged.

Corporal Forest King in Baden?

Bertie Yes.

Corporal Were you the owner of the horse?

Bertie I owned and rode him.

Corporal I heard about it. You were wanted for weeks and months afterwards, but you were lost without a trace. There were speculations that you were disowned and disinherited by your father.

Bertie I know nothing about that.

Corporal You just disappeared?

Bertie Yes.

Corporal You abandoned an ideal career. Do you know what you are doing?

Bertie I am fairly well informed.

Corporal You don't know anything. Out of a hundred legionnaires about two return to life in reality.

Bertie I have no wish to return.

Corporal You will be treated like an animal by both Arabs and Frenchmen.

Bertie I usually treat my animals better than people.

Corporal You must not have anything to do with women for five years to begin with.

Bertie I never want to see women again.

Corporal You can never fall behind. Then you die.

Bertie I am prepared to die for less.

Corporal You are a madman.

Bertie No, a gentleman.

Corporal Why are you doing this?

Bertie Because it amuses me.

Corporal You hardly look like being able to smile.

Bertie There are higher pleasures than those you smile at.

Corporal For example?

Bertie The attraction of the cruelty of fate.

Corporal Napoleon himself never returned.

Bertie Who said anything about returning?

Corporal (losing interest, to the soldier) François! Sign him up!

Soldier Your name, Monsieur?

Bertie Louis Victor.

Corporal Welcome to the Foreign Legion, Monsieur, the worst hell on earth. Only New Caledonia and Devil's Island are worse, but you might end up there as well.

Bertie So be it, if God so wills.

Corporal What has God to do with the hell of the foreign legion?

Bertie If he has nothing to do with it, maybe it's time for him to give a hand.

Corporal And how would he be able to give us a hand?

Bertie Leave it to Him, so you will not have to worry.

Corporal Leave it to the Legion, and *you* will not have to worry.

Bertie As you wish, Corporal.

Corporal (grasps his hand) Congratulations. You have lost your identity but become a Frenchman instead. It's a great honour for you. Good luck!

Bertie Thank you, Monsieur.

Scene 2. The Royallieu residence, like in act I scene 5.

Royal Don't take it so hard, my son. He is just an ordinary lost son, we have too many of them here in England, and I still have my better son left.

Berk But it was my fault, father.

Royal It's to your credit that you take on the blame for your brother's shame, but it's not fair. Forget him, as I have forgotten him.

Berk I could never forget him. He was my only elder brother, he always helped me, but I failed him.

Royal He is dead to us now, but life goes on. All his friends and colleagues in the guards have already forgotten him. As long as he was among us he was a splendid promise, a demigod, a sun to our humdrum existence, but what is left when such a god is gone? Just plain air, and even the breath of his sweeping by is long since gone. He is dishonoured, dead and buried. Instead you have all the possibilities, my son. (*enter a butler*) What is it, Pugsy?

Butler The Marquess of Rockingham, Sir.

Royal What does he want?

Butler He says he brings important news.

Royal Then it's bad news. Isn't he satisfied enough with the total dishonour of his family?

Butler (opens the door) The Marquess of Rockingham, Sir. (*admits the Marquess and leaves*)

Royal Well, my lord? How could the lost one harm us still?

Rockingham Sir, it might be of some satisfaction to you that your wishes have come true.

Royal What wishes?

Rockingham I carry some good news for you. Your son is dead.

Royal Dead – for real?

Rockingham A train accident in France has claimed twenty casualties. Most of them were massacred beyond identification, but some of their luggage has been identified. There was luggage proved to belong to Bert Cecil and his butler Jack. None of them were among the survivors.

Royal So he has at least refused to survive his own dishonour. – What happened to the bodies?

Rockingham They were buried on location. A common monument marks all the unidentified.

Royal So he even got the anonymous tomb that he deserved. – Anything else, Marquess?

Rockingham No. Only this. I and many others are convinced of your son's innocence.

Royal (getting angry) On such overwhelming evidence? He even forged your name and only for his own greed!

Rockingham The forgery was probably committed by another. (*watching Berk*) Bertie could at any moment have asked for ten thousand pounds of me and got it directly for nothing.

Royal But who would do such a thing in my son's name? Who could have wanted to harm him so incurably as to deliberately make him so utterly dishonoured?

Rockingham (leaving his watch on Berk) No one knows, Sir. But we know that your son had enemies among certain bookmakers who lived on fixing horses. One of those could very well have taken steps to get your son out of the way.

Royal If that is the case he succeeded indeed with a finished corpse and grave and everything. – Have you any reason to suspect anyone in particular?

Rockingham A certain John Davis, whom your son warned your younger son against, was by Bertie personally thrown out from the races for the Blue Ribbon two months ago, and there were witnesses that he swore revenge.

Royal So my son could have been innocent. But it doesn't help much, does it? He is dead and buried. – What do you suggest, Rockingham?

Rockingham That we don't consider the case closed.

Royal Could evidence be produced against the bookmaker?

Rockingham It's possible. And one more thing, Sir.

Royal Well?

Rockingham Always remember, that there is neither final evidence of Bertie's guilt nor of his death. (*leaves*)

Royal What do you think about it, Berk?

Berk He is right, father. Nothing is proved.

Royal And what if Bertie returns? If he manages to prove himself not guilty? What will we do then, my son?

Berk (after a pause) Then I hope he will forgive us. (*leaves*)

Royal Forgive us? For what?

Scene 3. The same shabby location as in scene 1.

Beggars, Arabs, lepers, drunkards, decayed soldiers and one or other fallen woman.

Jack (entering, goes to the bar) An absinth. (*is poured a glass, makes use of it and looks around, cautiously to the bartender:*) You don't happen to have seen a blond Englishman here recently?

Bartender Description?

Jack Tall, handsome, striking appearance, a gentleman.

Bartender Such blokes only come here to disappear.

Jack Disappear to where?

Bartender Look around, Monsieur. What do you see? Only human wrecks. If your man was here he is now one of them. Sorry, can't help you.

Corporal (coming forth) What do you want, stranger?

Jack I am looking for a friend.

Corporal I can only help you if he joined the Foreign Legion. If you want to be helped you have to join up too.

Jack If I know my friend is with you I would gladly join.

Corporal He probably is.

Jack I must know for sure.

Corporal What's his name?

Jack I mustn't say.

Corporal Sounds like a positive case. He is one of us.

Jack I will join when I have met him.

Corporal Then we must know more.

Jack His name was Bert Cecil.

Corporal And what is it now?

Jack I don't know.

Corporal (takes on his hat) Goodbye, my friend.

Bert (has been sitting in a corner of the joint with his back to some other legionnaires. He has listened to the conversation and now turns around. He is irrecognizable: dirty, worn out and unshaved like an ordinary roughed up legionnaire.) One moment, corporal. *(to Jack)* Who are you looking for?

Jack An Englishman and gentleman.

Bert (sadly) Can't you recognize him?

Jack (recognizing) Bertie! *(embracing him)*

Bert Jack! Where have you been?

Jack I have been looking for you all over Europe!

Bert You have found me.

Jack Your track was not easy to follow! I had to bribe half the harbour of Marseille!

Bert How did you get out of the train crash?

Jack I woke up unconscious in the bushes. At least that's how I felt.

Bert Our luggage was found but never our bodies. It was the most serious train accident in French history. We have been lucky. All who were not found and recognized were considered dead. We are dead, buried and forgotten by all Europe, Jack!

Jack Didn't they even miss our bodies?

Bert There were almost no bodies. There were only various body parts spread out all over the place.

Jack Sir, it's good to see you no matter in what condition you are.

Bertie Corporal, I have another perfect legionnaire for you! He has fought against all Indian and English authorities in all India!

Corporal We can't have any insubordinate recruits.

Bertie I promise you, corporal, that this one will be as humble and brave a daredevil as I.

Corporal Is he also on a constant chase for death?

Bertie At least he is as familiar with it as I.

Corporal We'll have to accept him, then. Guard! Sign him up!

A guard (taking up documents) Your name, Monsieur?

Jack Jack.

Guard What else?

Jack Only Jack.

Corporal Suits us perfectly. Most of us are of the kind that have everything to hide. Such a name is very fitting into the context. Welcome, Jacques.

Jack May I ask: what is your own name?

Corporal Call me Black Falcon. That's what everyone calls me.

Jack And my friend here?

Corporal His official name here is Louis Victor. He hasn't had any other official name.

Jack Good. Louis Victor. (*tries the name*)

Bertie You don't know what you have gone into. But if you survive the first night it will then be easier every night.

Jack What happens the first night?

Bertie You make the acquaintance with your natural neighbours.

Jack The Arabs?

Bertie The Arabs you encounter only if you spend the night under the sky, and in the morning you will have no clothes and no life left. But there are also other surprising acquaintances. The rats are the most common and harmless. They keep you awake, and that is all. Also the flies are harmless unless you walk around with open wounds and are dirty. Then we have the spiders and the scorpions. The spiders are large and hairy and rare and mortal, if you get bitten.

Jack Then we only have the scorpions.

Bertie They are either green or black. The black give you bites like of seven bees, you get swollen and have fever, but you don't die. You do die from the green ones. They usually hide under stones, where they are invisible, so don't get too close to a loose stone in the desert, and never use one for your pillow, for leaning to or sitting on. Green scorpions love biting legionnaires in their bottoms. It's their nature.

Jack Anything more?

Bertie There is one more scorpion, the meanest of all. It looks black, so everyone ignores it, but if you then pour some water on it the black colour will wash away, it was only dirt, and it reveals itself to be white. It is more quick and poisonous than the green ones.

Jack What about yellow and brown scorpions?

Bertie A scorpion is always a scorpion. Avoid them. The worst ones are the human scorpions, and they cannot be avoided. There are also bedbugs. You get used to them. They never eat you up completely. You should be careful not to get typhoid, but most get it anyway, and half of them die. A practical advice: avoid getting scratches. If the body is leaking in the tiniest wound, anything may enter that is deadly.

Jack You seem to have survived, Sir. Then I should be able to survive as well.

Bertie I might have survived but not much more. (*taking him by his shoulder*)
Come on, Jack. I'll show you the barracks. (*They leave.*)

Cigarette (stealing up to Black Falcon) What is your price tonight, Black Falcon?

Corporal Have you run out of money again?

Cigarette You know I always am.

Corporal All men want you. How come you then are always without money?

Cigarette There are so many needing in this world. You know I am honest. I could never keep well deserved money for long.

Corporal I am tired tonight, Cigarette.

Cigarette Black Falcon is never tired. Isn't he always a man at least?

Corporal What is a man to a woman if he is out of money?

Cigarette You always have money.

Corporal I lost my month's pay yesterday on écartes.

Cigarette Poor Black Falcon! Is there anything I can do for you?

Several soldiers Sing to us, Cigarette!

Others Yes, sing to us, the sweetheart of the whole legion!

Corporal You have no choice, Cigarette.

Cigarette (takes a tambourine and sings while dancing like another Carmen at the centre of the café)

I was born the daughter of a chief,
but his identity was never given me.
Instead they made a changeling of me
in which everyone took part in mischief
just to make the whole world love me.
Thus my only saviour was the entire army,
so what does it matter that they all became my lover
when they made the whole world love me?
(During her show Bertie has re-entered and taken a seat.)

A soldier A challenging song! More! More!

Another Is there anyone you haven't loved, Cigarette?

Cigarette (points at Bertie, without his noticing) That one.

The soldier No one knows anything about him. We are all curious about him. Can't you find him out?

Cigarette His nobility makes him untouchable.

Soldier Make an effort! Let's bet on it! You get a whole month's pay for nothing, to which we all contribute.

Cigarette What do you want to know about him?

Soldier His tragedy.

Cigarette I'll do my best. *(steals herself up to Bertie's table)*
How did you like my song, soldier?

Bertie Very indecent, but remarkable by its innocence.

Cigarette How can innocence be indecent?

Bertie Rather ask how indecency could be innocent.

Cigarette Well?

Bertie The whole army is your lover, Cigarette. You are the mistress of the whole army. But in spite of this you are no bad or fallen woman but instead the more innocent and lovable. That is what is remarkable.

Cigarette Why then did you never love me, soldier?

Bertie I don't love women, Cigarette.

Cigarette What do you have against women? Do you prefer men?

Bertie I only had one love in my life, Cigarette, and it was neither a woman nor a man.

Cigarette What was it then?

Bertie A horse.

Cigarette Was then that horse so faithless that she could fail you more than men?

Bertie No, Cigarette. Everyone failed me, but the horse did not.

Cigarette How then did your great love end?

Bertie Men poisoned my horse, Cigarette.

Cigarette (immediately more sensitive) I am sorry, soldier.

Bertie Nothing to be sorry for. What's done is done and can't be undone.

Cigarette No man ever succeeded in poisoning or ruining me.

Bertie What do you really want from me, Cigarette?

Cigarette I want to know your tragedy. I don't think your horse was the whole story.

Bertie (rising and leaving) Some other time, Cigarette.

More soldiers Sing some more, Cigarette!

Cigarette (resumes the tambourine)

I am no man but brave enough
and without sex, invincible as such,
and therefore all men eagerly desire me,
just for not being too much of a woman;
but although desert storms may bury them in sands
they will not miss their greatest pleasure,
for I was created only to be soldier
in a female frame just for their leisure
as the closest friend of every legionnaire.
(All are enthusiastic, crying: "More! More!")

Cigarette (stealing up to Black Falcon)

Corporal Well, did you learn anything about the British sphinx?

Cigarette (emptying his drink) Not yet, by I scored some points in the first round. *(joins the party with the other soldiers)*

Scene 4. The tent of the Caliph.

The Caliph (spitting and foaming with wrath) By all bloody heathen dogs! By all filthy pagan swine! By all rotten corpses of monkeys and vultures of the plague! This is the highest top of baseness! I can't accept it! They shall be exterminated to the last man as verily as I am the mightiest caliph of Africa! How dare they? Although I thought the worst of my enemies I could never imagine such hair-raising baseness and devilish lousiness in men who yet can fight! My French enemies have proved themselves more worthless as human beings than castrated hyenas!

An Arab O lord, they sent a messenger to us.

Caliph How dare they? He shall be flayed alive and slowly hanged to the sight of all Frenchmen to show them what they have to expect! But first we shall receive his message. He must be very stupid indeed if he dares to bring us a message!

Arab What we call stupidity they often call bravery, o lord.

Caliph It's the same thing. We flay him alive to the sight of them all under the desert sun anyway! Send him in! *(The Arab shows in Bert.)* Well, my misfortunate fellow, I have seen you before. We have met in many hard battles. You are among the bravest in your company of disgrace. How dare you come here?

Bert I have a letter for you, my worthy lord.

Caliph How can you defend the misdeeds of your countrymen? How is my beloved Djelma? Have you already disgraced her like you disgrace all women, you lousy godless outrageous strangers in this sacred world? Answer me!

Bert My lord, she is well. No one has touched her.

Caliph Why then did you take her away from me?

Bert My lord, my colonel wishes to thereby compel you to accept his peace. Read this letter, and it will explain everything.

Caliph Read it yourself. Read it loud to me.

Bert As you wish. (*opening the letter and reading*)

“In the moment you attack us your beloved mistress will lose her life. If you remain in arms I will make her my mistress and then turn her over to the soldiers as a regular whore. The only way for you to get her back alive would be to immediately lay down all your weapons, surrender for good and confess to be the dogs you and your ancestors always were. Marquess of Chateauray, representative of France.”

Caliph (after a murderous silence) And that is supposed to be an offer of peace?

Bert Your highness, if I had known the contents of this letter I would never have delivered it.

Caliph That I can well understand. You French will do anything to stay alive.

Bert Not I. Allow me to present a suggestion.

Caliph You can't save your life by bluffing.

Bert Believe it or not, but I offer you an honest deal.

Caliph You will be flayed and salted down and returned to your fellows without a trace of skin left on your body anyway, and after that your fellows will be treated the same way until the last Frenchman in the world has ended up as fodder for the vultures! Let's hear your outrageous suggestion of a compromise!

Bert I will deliver Djelma untouched to you before the sun is down.

Caliph You surprise me. And if you fail?

Bert Then I will come back anyway and fight by your side against all Frenchmen, if you let me live.

Caliph You are a brave fellow. You show respect for ladies and for the true love of men. I believe you, for you are an exception to all rules. I never thought a European could gain my respect. But do you really think you could succeed?

Bert I only risk my life the same way with the colonel as I have done with you.

Caliph How could a man like you be born a European and not an Arab? (*after some pause*) I actually think I have found a friend. I promise you this. If you succeed, the French will have peace, (*warningly*) but only if Djelma is untouched.

Bert I will answer for that with my life.

Caliph How is it possible for a brave and decent man to be a common Frenchman?

Bert That's just how it is.

Caliph You must have come from a more exotic country. (*Bert bows and moves out.*)
At last a friend and equal among the enemies!

Scene 5. With the colonel.

Chateauroy You blundering idiot! Do you think I could give up the fairest goddess of Africa? Of all diplomatic blunders this is the worst in my experience!

Bert Colonel, I am sorry, but you have no choice. It's the only way to achieve that peace which is necessary for us. This is a golden chance that can't be missed to transform our worst enemies to our friends.

Chateauroy I know we have no choice, and that's what makes me so furious! You miserable villain of a noble traitor! I never saw anything like it! If only the Caliph had executed you! If he does when you return his whore I would rejoice for the rest of my life!

Bert Then you would get no peace.

Chateauroy I know that, you foppish scoundrel! And we can't afford to have any more wars on us from the Caliph right now! You will have to bring her back. But be certain that I will never be able to forgive you! Never think that you will be promoted any more! I will consider you my mortal enemy for the rest of my life!

Bert Is it worth it for the sake of a woman?

Chateauroy (to a soldier) Bring her in!

(He brings in Djelma, an Arabian beauty without compare.)

Just look at her! Wouldn't just one night with her be worth an eternity of Arab wars against us?

Bert You are a romantic, colonel.

Chateauroy I know what you think. Romance in politics is a foolish madness. Therefore I let her go. But I can never forgive you!

Bert Understood, Sir.

Chateauroy Bring her back to them, you foolish romantic madman.

Bert Yes, colonel. *(offers his arm to Djelma and politely escorts her out)*

Chateauroy Give them a reliable escort of ten men. Nothing must happen to Djelma on her way to the Caliph. This chance of a peace means life or death to us.

Soldier Yes, Sir. *(leaves)*

Chateauroy You need an English scoundrel to make a Frenchman refrain from the most sacred thing there is in life! Aaargh! *(hits the table with his fist in anger)*

Act III scene 1. The joint.

Corporal How damned boring life has become since we had peace with the Caliph!

Leon Ramon Instead we can smoke and drink and fuck as much as we like.

Another It will blow over, Leon Ramon, it will blow over.

Leon Ramon I know. Just give an Arab a little too much to drink, and nothing can withhold him from a killing spree.

A third There are many around here. Pick your choice. But put method in the provocation.

(Enter the general.)

General (content) Free drinks to everyone! *(Cheers from everyone.)* We haven't lost a man for a month. It has never happened before. Is the Black Falcon here?

Corporal At your service, mon général.

General We have your chasseur Louis Victor to thank for a miracle. How did he do it?

Corporal He fraternized with the enemy.

General And transformed our most dangerous enemy into our best friend. How did he achieve it?

Corporal Apparently he has had some good experience with women in his days.

General Yes, what was the matter with that woman?

Corporal Colonel Chateauroy thought he had the Caliph in his grip when he succeeded in stealing his most beautiful odalisque from his harem, a certain scandal beauty called Djelma. But that incorruptible Louis Victor said to the colonel: "It's a soldier's duty to war against men and not against women," took care of her and brought her chivalrously back to the Caliph. Because of one man the Caliph has now taken all Frenchmen to his heart.

General And Chateauroy?

Colonel Green of anger, envy and regret and Louis Victor's enemy for life.

General And Louis Victor is still alive? *(He happens to enter in this moment quite discreetly, heading for the bar totally unaware of the conversation)*

Corporal So far. And Chateauroy has promised never to promote him.

General (to Louis Victor, alias Bertie) My friend, la France is thankful to you.

Bert (indifferent) For what?

General You made peace.

Bert There are always those who break it.

General You are not a Frenchman.

Bert What difference does it make?

General (signing to the bartender to give Victor an extra absinth) Are you Austrian?

Bert I serve under the banner of France. That should be enough said about me.

General We once had an Austrian aristocrat among us. He was so noble that he finally got murdered by a misunderstanding. No one knew who he was, and no one was ever to know.

Bert What is your point, general? *(Chateauroy enters, notices the general and Bert and keeps in the background, starts discussing with a few Arabs and offers them raki.)*

General I want to understand you.

Bert Then understand me correctly. I am here to be anonymous.

General Are you an Englishman?

Bert I am nothing.

General (to the corporal) What do you know about this man, corporal?

Corporal He is extremely cold-blooded, fearless, tireless, brave and – self-sacrificing.

General I will make you a corporal, Louis Victor. You are hereby promoted. Now tell me something about yourself.

Bert What do you want to know?

General Your background, your ladies, your secret. (*enter Cigarette*)

Bert And if I refuse?

General Then I can't help you.

Bert Why do you want to help me?

General You are brave. You are an asset to France.

Bert Mon général, with all respect, I thank you for my honour. But if it is a soldier's foremost duty to always obey, I haven't heard that it would be any officer's privilege in the world to have his intimate curiosity satisfied.

(*Death silence all around. Everyone expects a reaction from the general.*)

General (controlling himself, flushing red) A regular reprimand, on my honour, honestly and earnestly delivered. I thank you for a good lesson.

Bert Mon général, I thank you for your self control. (*reaches for his hand. The general accepts it, they shake hands cordially, and all relax and cheer.*)

General Another round for everyone! All drinks on me!

(*The mood is cordial, several soldiers come forth to congratulate Bert.*)

first soldier Congratulations, Louis!

Second At last a well deserved promotion!

Third Everyone appreciates you.

(*Behind Bert one of Chateauroy's Arabs has stolen up. Now a knife is seen glimmering in his hand aimed at Bertie's back.*)

Cigarette (the only one to have noticed it) Cigarette au secours! (*Fires a gun on the Arab, who is dead shot through his front lobes.*)

Cigarette (calmly, blowing off the smoke from the gun) He had had too much to drink.

Corporal What's the meaning of this, Cigarette?

Cigarette See the dagger. One more second, and our new corporal would have been lying there in his blood instead.

General L'ami du drapeau, a master shot!

First soldier But why did he want to kill the corporal?

Cigarette (like before) He had had too much to drink. (*Chateauroy is leaving.*)

Bert My child, you saved my life.

Cigarette So what? Am I not a soldier?

Bert Yes, but not just a soldier.

Cigarette What else?

Bert (assessing her) A woman, although regrettably unsexed by your way of living.

Cigarette (stiffens) If you see a woman in me, corporal you should know better than make a woman your enemy. (*leaves offended*)

First soldier What happened to her?

Corporal He said she was unsexed. You can't say that to Cigarette. No matter how much of a soldier she is, she has had all men.

Soldier 2 Except one.

Soldier 3 Who?

Soldier 2 The one who now must make up for the insult against our most unwomanly girl's womanhood. And he, the bravest of us all, will never make it. *(They all turn their backs to Bertie.)*

Bertie (thoughtfully) She actually saved my life.

Scene 2. An Arabic curiosity shop.

Ben Arsli (standing in the door towards the street in front. He tries vainly to interest passers by to his curiosities.) Mon ami! How is it! Long since I saw you!

Bert (appearing in sight) How are you, Ben Arsli?

Ben Arsli Very bad, until the moment when you appear again, Monsieur! You saved my life once! I can never forget it!

Bert I saved so many lives, Ben Arsli, that I wish I could forget them all.

Ben Arsli Pourquoi, Monsieur? But enter, please! This is always your home! What do you wish?

Bert (exhausted) I only wish to sleep, preferably forever.

Ben Arsli Voulez-vous une pippe?

Bert That's exactly what I need.

Ben Arsli Come in, Monsieur! *(Bert enters the exotic curiosity shop.)* Everything I own is yours! Just tell me whatever you want, and my life is at your disposal!

Bert You exaggerate your good will to serve, Ben Arsli.

Ben Arsli Not at all, Monsieur! All I have is yours!

Bert That's what I mean.

Ben Arsli Then we are agreed, Monsieur! Come in, come in!

(fawns to the extreme and prepares the water pipe. Bert sinks down into the cushions. He is completely washed up, smokes for a while and then passes out in deep sleep.)

Ben Arsli Allah knows what life he has saved this time. It was probably as valueless and poor as everyone else's. But it's an act of mercy to save a human life, no matter how worthless it is. *(leaves the sleeping chasseur in peace, returns to his position by the door, inviting passers by to enter. Princess Zurga, young, rich and beautiful, enters.)* Come in, Princess! All I have is yours!

Zurga I know you are reliable as a business man, Ben Arsli. You never made me buy any trash.

Ben Arsli I never fool anyone, Madame.

Zurga (giving him a glance) At least you never fooled me.

Ben Arsli You are the last one I would try to fool, Madame.

Zurga That's what I mean.

Ben Arsli But come in, come in!

Zurga That's what I am doing.

Ben Arsli You Europeans are so cautious and careful in your fine manners. But look around! Not all the Arabian nights have so much dreams and miracles as my magazine!

Zurga You know I am a very appreciating customer.

Ben Arsli More than appreciating, Madame. You are an enchanting customer who works miracles.

(While Ben Arsli shows her around she gradually gets nearer to the sleeping chasseur.)

Zurga In what way? *(eying the antiques)*

Ben Arsli You buy everything which no one else is buying.

Zurga *(notices the sleeper)* Is that item for sale?

Ben Arsli He is asleep, Madame. Don't wake him up.

Zurga Who is he?

Ben Arsli One of the bravest of the brave, a gentleman in simple uniform, a tortured nobleman, a rescuer of lives that could be punished just for that.

Zurga What nationality?

Ben Arsli No one knows.

Zurga Wake him for me.

Ben Arsli Impossible, Madame.

Zurga Has he smoked too much opium?

Ben Arsli No, Madame, but he is completely exhausted.

Zurga I have seen him before somewhere.

Ben Arsli Impossible, Madame.

Zurga Nothing is impossible in this world of mysteries, Ben Arsli. I know this man as an exquisite carver of chessmen.

Ben Arsli Impossible, Madame.

Zurga You are as persistent as the life-rescuer's sleep.

Ben Arsli We all must awake, Madame, even a sleeping opium-eater.

Zurga He is beautiful when he sleeps. It would be a pity to wake him up.

Ben Arsli My princess, I always felt it to be a pity that the Sleeping Beauty ever was woken up after a hundred years. The tale was only beautiful as long as she slept.

Zurga I agree with you, Ben Arsli. *(Bert awakes slowly and yawns.)*

Ben Arsli Madame, I think your prince is awakening.

Zurga Is he a prince?

Ben Arsli He carries the uniform of a simple corporal, but I suspect that he once was something much nobler.

Zurga He has suffered much.

Ben Arsli His colonel always bullied him and refused to promote him.

Zurga I am positive. He is the carver in ebony.

Ben Arsli Ebony, Madame? Impossible!

Bert *(opening his eyes)* Ben Arsli! Is this a dream?

Ben Arsli Yes, mon prince. It is reality. You are awake.

Zurga Sleep on! You are tired!

Bert *(rising, alert)* Madame, I was tired.

Zurga Your name?

Bert *(hesitating at first)* Louis Victor.

Zurga That's not your real name.

Bert It's the only name I have left.

Zurga How many have you lost?

Bert (instinctively) As many as you, Madame.

Zurga How did you know I was a widow?

Bert I didn't. I presumed it.

Zurga You have a woman's intuition.

Bert So do all who have suffered.

Zurga You have lost everything.

Bert And more.

Zurga What?

Bert A horse.

Zurga That's more than the entire world.

Bert Madame, you understand me. *(a pause)*

Ben Arsli Monsieur, you never mentioned to me that you carve in ebony. I will pay anything for your chessmen!

Zurga I can do much for you. I could mention you to the emperor next time I visit Paris.

Bert (bowing his head) I only have one wish, Madame.

Zurga Tell me your only wish.

Bert To be forgotten.

Zurga Then you wish what no one else could wish.

Bert I was always something of a loner.

Ben Arsli Monsieur, is it true that you carve in ebony?

Bert Unfortunately it's true, Ben Arsli. My colonel tried to present Madame with my chessmen as a gift, but she was good enough to refuse to receive them if I was not paid. But I refused any payment.

Ben Arsli (upset) But why did you never tell me? I could have offered you the whole world as payment

Bert That's why, Ben Arsli.

Ben Arsli You alone deserve the whole world, since you alone have lost the whole world.

Bert (changing the subject) But look around, Madame! Here the whole world is at your disposal!

Zurga The whole world and more. But there is only one thing in the world I miss.

Ben Arsli I will get it for you with all my heart, Madame.

Zurga You can't make it alone, Ben Arsli. *(turning to Bert)* But if you don't want any payment for your chessmen, what could I then offer you instead?

Bert I already mentioned the only thing I lack.

Zurga Don't be so pathetic. You can do better! Wish whatever you like! I promise to fulfil it.

Bert Then I have yet another wish.

Zurga Well?

Bert To be regarded as a gentleman without being offered a servant's wages.

Zurga So you will not accept money?

Bert Give the money to my comrades. They are starving, for they have no spirituality. I won the entire world in giving up myself.

Ben Arsli It's a good rule uniting Christians and Muslims to give to those in need.

Zurga You interest me, corporal. Who are you?

Bert Nobody.

Zurga Not even to a woman?

Bert Possibly to some horse.

Zurga Someone abused animals in your presence. You will never forgive humanity for that.

Bert I would rather be abused myself, Madame.

Zurga By human animals?

Bert Even by human animals shaped like women.

Zurga You have been bitterly disappointed.

Bert And in addition I became a disappointment myself.

Zurga You failed a woman?

Bert No, never a woman.

Zurga That brings me relief. Remember, I could mention you to the emperor.

Bert I have already forgotten that, Madame.

Zurga Still you serve a foreign legion instituted by your emperor.

Bert His uncle, Madame.

Zurga Still a Napoleon.

Bert There was only one Napoleon, Madame.

Zurga Still you are not French.

Bert If Napoleon the Great disappointed all other peoples, Madame, he still gave the Poles great hope.

Zurga The hardest hit people of Europe.

Bert I mean it, Madame.

Zurga You well fit the Foreign Legion. (*leaves*)

Bert Who was she, Ben Arsli?

Ben Arsli Princess Zurga, widow of prince Zurga of Comora de Amague with castles in Spain, Sicily and Portugal.

Bert So young and a widow already! Was the husband an old man?

Ben Arsli No. He was of the same age.

Bert What happened to him?

Ben Arsli They were betrothed. He happened to an accident. He lost both legs. She insisted on marriage all the same. She married him from sheer pity. He insisted on marriage at once, and on the day after he died.

Bert After consummating his marriage?

Ben Arsli With both legs incapacitated? No, Monsieur. She has had everything in life, but she was never given the opportunity of love.

Bert How terrible.

Ben Arsli Oui, Monsieur. And here you are carving chessmen which she falls in love with, and you say nothing to me about it!

Bert Maybe I wanted to avoid your involvement.

Ben Arsli You can never avoid a reward from someone whose life you have saved.

Bert But I could try.

Ben Arsli You failed utterly, Monsieur.

Space for intermission.

Scene 3. A hospital tent.

Cigarette Here is some ice for you. (*bathing the front of a dying patient.*)

Leon Ramon (feverish and dying) Cigarette, is that you?

Cigarette You know it's me.

Leon Ramon You are expert at keeping people from dying.

Cigarette It's my duty and profession as soldier and woman.

Leon Ramon But I will die anyway, Cigarette.

Cigarette The more important it is that I am here.

Leon Ramon You were the only one I would have wished to be at my side. Have they pulled out the spear from my lung?

Cigarette Yes.

Leon Ramon It feels as if it still was there.

Cigarette Don't work yourself up, Ramon, and don't worry. Just take it easy.

Leon Ramon Do you think anyone could take it easy when he is about to die?

Cigarette Death is only a passing moment. Life is forever.

Leon Ramon Still life is made especially exciting by the constant presence of death. It's impossible to take it easy when you are about to die, Cigarette. The clearer you see the end of life, the more you have to deal with from your past, and the more sweet and lovely life becomes.

Cigarette Try to take it easy, Leon Ramon.

Leon Ramon How many muslims did I kill in the battle?

Cigarette Seventeen.

Leon Ramon It's a good score, isn't it, Cigarette? Seventeen superstitious muslims for one loyal Frenchman, eh, Cigarette?

Cigarette It's a beautiful proof of your courage, Leon Ramon.

Leon Ramon But I will still die, Cigarette.

Cigarette We all die wherever we are.

Leon Ramon Even your hero will die one day, Cigarette.

Bertie (has entered, ignores Cigarette) Dear Leon, how are you?

Leon Ramon Louis! I am still alive!

Bertie I can see that, and it gives me pleasure.

Leon Ramon Although I have lost everything.

Bertie But still not your life.

Leon Life? What do you know about life, Louis, who never loved a woman?

Bertie There is more to love than sex.

Leon That's what I mean. You never loved.

Bertie That's what every lover says of all the other lovers. That is why love is so dangerous.

Leon That's what I mean. Never love a woman, Louis.

Bertie It's unnatural for a man to never love a woman.

Leon Comme tu es banale! You are right. It's unnatural for a man to never violate a woman. But I am talking about love.

Bertie What does a legionnaire know about love, Leon?

Leon I know it all. I loved with all my heart. I lost everything.

Bert What do you mean, Leon?

Leon You know I was an artist.

Bert I have seen several of your exquisite portraits. Why does an artist become a legionnaire?

Leon I painted a woman.

Bert (jokingly) Naked?

Leon (angry) No. That's just what I didn't! But I painted her soul. I immersed myself completely in a woman's life of the soul. I painted her soul. I entered her completely. I accomplished the perfect portrait of a woman. All France loved my woman. But there was nothing left of me afterwards. I had lost myself in the portrait of a woman. I was finished. She took my soul away from me while I gave her my soul. It was lovelier than any coition. But it took all away from me. That's why I became a legionnaire.

Bert Was it worth it?

Leon I had no choice. Our legion was the only institution in the world that could accept no identity at all. That's why I became a legionnaire.

Bert It was definitely one of Napoleon's brighter ideas.

Leon And Cigarette? She is also one of us. Will you take care of her when I am gone?

Bert Cigarette is not one of us, for she is a woman.

Leon Is she? You yourself declared her without sex.

Bert You remember?

Leon She is more than without sex. She is the very heart of the legion. If anyone has a heart she is the one. But from where are all these flowers, this cleaning up of our camp hospital, this extended personnel?

Bert From another woman's heart.

Leon Whose?

Bert The Princess Zurga of Corona de Amague.

Leon A princess? What does she look like?

Bert Young and beautiful.

Leon Why all this charity?

Bert Because she is a woman.
Leon She must be rich.
Bert Abundantly.
Leon Happily married?
Bert Widow after one day.
Leon That's what I always said. Only sorrow breeds noble feelings, constructive deeds and all that is good in this world.
Cigarette (coldly) Yes. An aristocrat with influence is always unbearable, but let him meet with disaster, and he becomes an azure knight.
Leon Which he remains only as long as he is on trial.
Cigarette Yes.
Leon I die, Louis. Take care of the army when I am gone.
Bert I'll do my best.
Leon And be happy with that princess.
Bert That I cannot promise. (*Leon Ramon dies.*)

A noble heart has broken. He was a true artist, Cigarette. He belonged to the Salon des Refusées.

Cigarette (coldly) Did he paint the princess?
Bert No, he never had time. But he was the better as a soldier.
Cigarette One of those whose life you couldn't save.
Bert I tried. But he was too eager in waging it.
Cigarette For a lady whose soul he found and painted.
Bert (looking at her) No, Cigarette, for his own soul, which made him suffer.
Cigarette Unto death?
Bert No, Cigarette, death is scientific, and its only function is to deprive us of the secret of a dying soul forever. Leon Ramon came to us without identity. Now by death he has succeeded in keeping his soul's secret for his next life.
Cigarette Will you also deprive us of your soul, Louis?
Bert No, Cigarette, everything else, even my identity, but not my soul.
Cigarette Your soul is all we need, Louis. Never leave us without it.
Bert I will do my best, Cigarette.

Scene 4. The joint.

Chateauroy (at the bar with Jack) How is it, Jacques?
Jack Only well, colonel. We make the best possible out of the least possible.
Chateauroy That's how you always survive. But some time you would wish to have it a little better, wouldn't you, Jack?
Jack The advantage of always existing at the bottom is that then things can only get better.
Chateauroy The wisdom of a Solomon from a humble servant. That humility should be brought up a little. I intend to promote you, Jacques.

Jack Why?

Chateauroy You are so clever. Your comrade has already been promoted to corporal by the general. You are as good as he, since you always do what he does. So you could also deserve some promotion.

Jack I thank you, Sir.

Chateauroy (in a flash) I'll make you sergeant directly.

Jack It's a great honour to me.

Chateauroy You will immediately depart for Oujda on a confidential mission. You will get further orders there.

Jack Does that mean I have to stay there?

Chateauroy Yes, until further orders, maybe to send you to Morocco.

Jack Pardon me, colonel, but that's not possible.

Chateauroy What are your objections, sergeant?

Jack I can't desert my comrade.

Chateauroy That's no excuse. In the legion you obey orders, or you are shot. March or die.

Jack I can't leave my master alone.

Chateauroy Your obstinacy, sergeant, is most irrelevant. If all legionnaires minded their sexual relationships more than the legion it would cease to exist in a week.

Jack (gives him a frank knock-out. The colonel falls backwards dragging several tables and chairs with him in the heavy fall. Everyone in the café starts paying attention.) Scum!

Chateauroy (minding his bleeding chin) This is not only insubordination! It's an attack on a senior officer!

Jack Pardon me, colonel, but you actually insulted me.

Chateauroy There must be a court martial! Take him in! *(some soldiers calmly take care of Jack.)*

First soldier (to Jack) About time somebody gave that scumbag a lesson.

Second soldier The whole regiment will sympathize with you, Jacques.

Chateauroy (getting up, brushing off his dust) Take him away!

Jack May I remain private now, Sir?

Chateauroy You will never get out of here, Jacques! You will sit and rot to be mummified alive in your cell until your eyes have dried up in their sockets! I will hogtie you and leave you naked in the sun until the ants and flies have devoured you and left your skeleton bare with only shit! Away with him!

First soldier Why did you do it, Jacques?

Jack He insulted me.

Second soldier You should have taken it.

Jack It doesn't matter. At least I'll now remain in the regiment.

1st soldier We will try to get your sentence mitigated.

2nd soldier Your behaviour was always perfect.

Chateauroy (furious) Away with him! *(Jack is taken away.)*

Scene 5. The hospital tent.

Cigarette How is he?

Barber-surgeon You saved his life for the second time, Cigarette. And adding to that you saved the whole regiment. Louis Victor led the attack against a hopeless superiority of force. If you hadn't come like an amazon and war goddess all had perished and the Arabs had won. Now we got away with only minor casualties.

Cigarette You can't imagine how bravely he fought.

Surgeon I imagine so.

Cigarette He didn't even notice when he got a sabre through his shoulder.

Surgeon The more noticeable the wounds become afterwards. But how could you find him among all the corpses in the battlefield?

Cigarette The dog of the regiment helped me. We pulled him out of a heap of corpses. He was at the bottom and we assumed he must be dead. But he was still breathing.

Bertie (feverish) Father! Father!

Surgeon Quiet! He is getting back.

Cigarette He is delirious. Leave me alone with him. I shall wake by his side.
(Barber-Surgeon leaves.)

Bertie (as before) How could you think that bad of me?

Cigarette (wiping his front) Cigarette is with you.

Bertie (frenzied) How could you die without forgiving what I hadn't even done!

Cigarette He is unhappy. He has been the victim of some injustice. Perhaps at last I'll learn something about him.

Bertie Brother, I never let you down. How then could you let me down? But I am dead and buried. I must not grudge my brother his title. And the inheritance will probably last several years before he has wasted it on gambling.

Cigarette He is a nobleman from a rotten family that has betrayed him.

Bertie Did *I* never love? How could you believe such a thing! I who courted every noble lady in England and honoured them beyond myself!

Cigarette So he is of high English descent. Nothing for me.

Bertie Princess! You shall never know anything about me! It's best that way. Remain a young and beautiful widow forever. Love is only humiliating. Spare yourself and go on living without love.

Cigarette That beautiful princess again! *(rising perturbed)*

Bertie (opening his eyes) Cigarette! Is that you?

Cigarette No, it's not Cigarette. You are only delirious.

Bertie You are the best friend of the whole legion! What would France be without you? You have saved the honour of the legion. But what am I doing here?

Cigarette You were found among the bodies and were supposed dead.

Bertie So I am not then quite dead yet? What a disappointment!

Cigarette France needs you, mon soldat.

Bertie Let me then die for France. *(loses consciousness)*

Cigarette Gradually I discern the contours of a vague destiny in the fog, but much is still hidden. Au revoir, mon soldat. I will never desert you. *(leaves without a noise)*

Act IV scene 1. The joint.

Rockingham I am exceedingly satisfied with what I have seen, mon general. I am honestly speaking impressed by the perfect order here, the good comradeship between the soldiers and above all by your own military progress against the local primitive and uneducated population.

General Most legionnaires are extreme and eccentric originals, and the more extreme they are as individuals, the braver they are, and it's these that always took the most important initiative to our greatest victories.

Rockingham Remarkable! Are there any Englishmen among you?

General Not many. Maybe a few. All legionnaires are anonymous and usually have every reason in the world to maintain their incognito. *(enter Cigarette and Bertie)* They are the main backbone both of the legion's force and splendid concord.

Rockingham I see. *(They continue their conversation together without noticing Bertie or Cigarette.)*

Bertie (sees Rockingham) Cigarette! That man must never see me here!

Cigarette Do you fear him?

Bertie On the contrary. He is a friend. That's why he must never find me here.

Cigarette Get out quickly. No one has seen you.

Bertie Find out how long he stays here. If he will remain for long, try to get me sent away on some deadly mission.

Cigarette I'll see what I can do, Bel-à-faire-peur.

Bertie (retreating while Cigarette gets nearer) I never believed that man would show himself to me again. He was my best friend. He promised, that whatever I would do in life, he would take my hand and stick to our sworn eternal friendship. Would I then expose him to the temptation to take my hand here in this company to demonstrate such a sacred friendship? Never. I would rather die than risk putting him to the test to see the smile of his friendship crack up in one single hint of a wrinkle. Continue in peace, Marquess of Rockingham. I don't know you, because I am dead, and I will never expose a friend to the phenomenon of a double. May my phantoms be as dead as my self. Go safely back to Europe. I have no other home than death. *(leaves)*

General (discovers Cigarette) Here is the young soldier who carried our latest victory.

Rockingham (can't believe his eyes) But it's a lady!

General Is she? The whole army loves her like a lady and protective angel, but she is more of a man in her soul than all the others.

Cigarette It's an honour to have an Englishman visiting us. *(shakes Rockingham's hand with some emphasis)* Have you come to join the legion?

Rockingham Oh no, mylady, I am not that warlike or brave.

General Our English Marquess is only here to reconnoitre.

Cigarette Will he stay long?

General Only a week, if we can't keep him longer. Maybe we could interest him to some countrymen of his in the legion. By the way, Black Falcon, do you know any brave and quiet man we could send to the bedouine of Marrakesh?

Black Falcon No one would undertake such a mission except a suicide.

General I know. That's the problem. And all our suicides are dead. The mission isn't altogether impossible to survive, though.

Cigarette I know a man who would gladly do it and survive.

General Who?

Cigarette Bel-à-faire-peur, the corporal Louis Victor.

Black Falcon She is right, mon general. He is the only one. He is bold enough, quiet and does not fear death.

Rockingham Is that another of your extreme originals, mon general?

General Yes, and one of the most interesting. He carried the impossible victory at Zarailah.

Chateauroy (has entered and heard enough) Take him, mon general.

Black Falcon Colonel, you only want to see him dead and that without reason just because you can't stand his personality, since he is better than all of us. But he will survive even the most impossible of missions just to make you feel awkward.

Chateauroy Don't be insolent, sergeant.

General Never mind. The thing is settled. Louis Victor shall have the assignment. Do you know anything about him, sergeant, that we don't?

Cigarette No one knows anything about him and least of all the sergeant.

Rockingham May I see such an interesting original before he leaves, just in case that would be the only chance?

General I am sure you will have the opportunity, Marquess. *(empties his last glass and leaves cordially with Rockingham)*

Cigarette (when they are gone) No, Marquess, you may not, as long as he lives and as long as I live. For the only danger that threatens him is his past, and you have brought it here as a risk he must be spared. His past will never succeed in separating him from me and from his only element of freedom which is the free life as a crusader. Over my dead body!

Black Falcon What do you have against the English marquess, Cigarette?

Cigarette He is so handsome and comes from a better world.

Black Falcon You are right. The sooner he returns there, the better.

Scene 2. In prison

(Bertie is let in. Jack is irrecognizable.)

Bertie Jack! *(Jack shows himself.)* What have they done to you!

Jack It's only the colonel. I am dying, Monsieur Victor.

Bertie But why?!?!

Jack The colonel had an idea that he could learn something from me to hold against you. I didn't even tell him the truth. He messed me up until he realized he had gone too far. There is no way back, Sir.

Bertie If I had known!

Jack But what are you doing here in the backyard of hell?

Bertie I was trusted with a risky assignment, and I extracted the general's permission to bring a trusted helper along with me. I am not riding without you, Jack.

Jack I am afraid you have no choice. But you will make it, Sir. The Arabs are cruel but stupid. Their only power is superstition. You can easily outwit them.

Bertie I can't desert you now, Jack.

Jack Unfortunately it's I who for the first time have to let you down. But I will ride with you behind in the saddle and protect you. I will have greater powers as dead than as alive.

Bertie I have come to save you, Jack.

Jack Too late. The colonel's fists went in too hard and too deep under the belt. I am bleeding to death inside. There is nothing we can do. Just tell me one thing, Sir.

Bertie What, Jack?

Jack You didn't do anything irregular to come here, did you, Sir?

Bertie No, Jack. It was my discretion to save a married lady's honour plus my younger brother's recklessness in gambling that brought me here.

Jack I knew it. But I know more than that. I know that you now are Lord Royallieu. Your father is dead, and you are the only legal heir.

Bertie I am dead. So my brother is the heir.

Jack But you are alive.

Bertie Not according to the law. If I return I would instantly be taken to court.

Jack But you are innocent.

Bertie It doesn't help. I can't prove it.

Jack You sure can, but will not because of the lady.

Bertie I can't for the lady.

Jack There is always a lady in the way for the course of justice and happiness! If it were not for the ladies there would be no destiny and no tragedy.

Bertie Still we can't manage without the ladies, Jack.

Jack Yes, Sir. That's the problem. But you will return. I know it.

Bertie I hope you are wrong.

Jack Are you so in love with your own tragedy, Sir? (*dies*)

Bertie Jack! Jack! (*tries in vain to wake him up*) Dead! (*determined*) Well, I will perform my task and survive it only to later be able to settle with le colonel Chateauroy.

Scene 3. The joint.

Cigarette Why did you want to see me?

Rockingham You appear to be acquainted with a certain corporal Louis Victor and to know him well.

Cigarette What do you want from him?

Rockingham I had hoped to see him before he left on a dangerous mission, but apparently he wasn't equally eager to see me.

Cigarette What do you want from him?

Rockingham He is known to have carved a beautiful set of ebony chessmen which caught the interest of a certain princess...

Cigarette That princess again! Will she never leave him alone?

Rockingham (alarmed) What do you mean?

Cigarette I know all about that business! She offered him money for the collection which he refused to accept. Instead she acquired the set for nothing, and since then she has persecuted him by trying to force gold on him anyway...

Rockingham Young lady, do you know about whom you speak?

Cigarette Princess or whatever, I don't care, she is still only a woman and as crazy about men as all other women. And just because Louis Victor is totally disinterested about women she concentrates on him only without realizing the harm she is doing...

Rockingham In what way is she causing harm?

Cigarette Colonel Chateauroy is her weapon! She uses him against him without suspecting that he only tortures him! He just tortured Louis' best friend to death only because he refused to tell what he knew about him...

Rockingham Young lady, you seem to know everything except that the princess happens to be my cousin.

Cigarette Your cousin?

Rockingham Yes, my cousin, if it is the Princess Zurga of Corona d'Amagues you mean. She married into that Portuguese title of princess but was before that the daughter of a British marquess. You will have to excuse me, but it is very painful for me to hear you insinuating things about my royal cousin in connection with a private corporal and legionnaire without name or background...

Cigarette I am sorry, but I only wanted to defend and protect him.

Rockingham He seems to be of great concern to you.

Cigarette More than you can imagine.

Rockingham Do you think he will come back?

Cigarette I would think so. He always comes back.

Rockingham Would you in that case like to present him to me?

Cigarette No, I don't.

Rockingham May I ask why?

Cigarette No, you may not.

Rockingham He seems to be a special figure, this mysterious corporal. He concerns everyone but in very different ways: ladies go to extremes to defend him, and his superior kills his best friend only to find out more about him. Is he so remarkable?

Cigarette Ask your cousin.

Rockingham She doesn't know him.

Cigarette No one else does either.

Rockingham Not even you?

Cigarette The one who knew him was his only friend who died.

Rockingham I should take a closer look at this.

Cigarette It wouldn't do any good.

Rockingham How can you know?

Cigarette You are only wasting your time.

Rockingham Time exists only to be wasted. What is that to you? Why do you want to stop me?

Cigarette (swallows a tear, breaks off, turns around and rushes out.)

Rockingham What the hell was the matter with that amazon? There is a some dog deeply buried here somewhere. Hem!

Scene 4. By Jack's grave.

Bertie (reads) "Fallen for the glory of France, Jacques, chasseur de la légion étrangère, faithful to the honour and glory of his legion and his comrades unto death."

I was not permitted to write the epitaph myself, although I was the only one who knew him. No one must never tell that he was manhandled to death by his colonel, for that would violate the unwritten law of the legion: no identity but the legion's honour. I am thankful for my powerlessness. To be silent and obedient until death under the brutal command of a barbaric sadist of a colonel – what a future! But I have no choice. Only death can liberate me. I envy you, Jack. *(Berkeley shows up.)*

Berk Bertie!

Bertie (rising abruptly as by an ambush. After some pause:) Whatever are you doing here?

Berk I followed the Marquess of Rockingham to escort his cousin the Princess of Corona d'Amagues. You saw me yesterday but turned away your face. Did you think I would not recognize you?

Bert I was hoping you hadn't recognized me.

Berk Bertie! We were all positive you were dead! You know that father is dead and that I inherited the title?

Bert Yes. How have you used it?

Berk Impeccably. I never gambled again after the last final turn, when I was compelled to draw that draft. Had I known that you were still alive I would have confessed everything and never accepted the inheritance.

Bert I am and remain dead, Berk. I can never come back.

Berk What do you mean? I don't understand. This life is unworthy of you.

Bert You look happy, Berk. Are you happy?

Berk I can't deny it.

Bert Only I could ever disturb your happiness. Allow me not to do it. Go home and marry the Marquess' beautiful cousin. She needs love.

Berk What the devil do you mean? And you?

Bert I am happy here. My existence here is modest enough for me and free from responsibilities.

Berk Brother, it's not fair.

Bert Is there any happiness that is just? No, Berk, not in this life. Justice only brings misery, regret and bitterness, while the illusion of happiness can only exist in ignorance and freedom from the injustice of destiny. Be happy, Berk, as long as you can, while you can, and let me remain dead.

Berk Your suggestion is a terrible sacrifice.

Bert That's my problem. Of the two alternatives we have it's the better one. You could never bear any trial of unhappiness nor any adversity or hardship. It would crush you immediately. I can handle it. So let me go on living with it.

Berk But something must be done. You must needs have some sort of exoneration.

Bert It could never happen except at your cost. Certainly you can see that.

Berk It doesn't feel right.

Bert It feels right to me. I am older than you. Let me decide. Carry on in peace, brother, and forget about me.

Berk That will be difficult.

Bert Anything else would be more difficult.

Berk I commit myself to nothing, Bertie, but I will think about it.

Bert I hope you reach the right conclusion and then immediately go straight home again with the marquess and the princess. There is nothing for you here.

Berk And what is here for you, the noblest of us all, in this hell of a burning scorching merciless sun against which there will never be any protection?

Bert The nights are cooler.

Berk Yes, outside you freeze to death. I commit myself to nothing, Bert. *(leaves)*

Bert Yet another phantom from the past. The arrival of one seems to immediately result in the arrival of legions. Jack, you are indeed the only person in the world whom I envy. *(kneels by the grave)*

Scene 5. In the tent of the Princess.

Zurga Well, colonel, what's on your mind?

Chateauroy I have at last obtained important information, Madame.

Zurga About the corporal Louis Victor?

Chateauroy About the very man.

Zurga Well, what did you learn?

Chateauroy We already knew that his closest friend, the so called private Jacques, was English. They stuck together which made us all wonder what kind of background they could have in common. Private Jacques attended on Louis Victor like a butler on an aristocrat. Well, recently the aforesaid Jacques made himself guilty of a crime of insubordination, which gave him a hard prison sentence. Unfortunately he died before the sentence was completed.

Zurga Is that all?

Chateauroy No, Madame. When the clothes of the deceased were returned to the store a notice was found in one of the pockets cut out from a newspaper, which maybe sheds some light on the case. (*shows the paper clip. The Princess studying it becomes pale but controls herself.*)

Zurga It's an ordinary obituary. So what?

Chateauroy And why would a private legionnaire attending on a countryman like a dog on his master go around with an obituary concerning a high British aristocrat? Because he was the faithful servant of the deceased aristocrat's son and heir! By this torn piece of paper we have at last been able to establish the corporal Louis Victor's true identity. His name is Bert Cecil and is the oldest son of the deceased Lord Royallieu, which brings us to the next question. What is such a person doing here?

Zurga Well?

Chateauroy We have found the story of Bert Cecil. He disappeared from England some years ago and was presumed dead as one of the casualties in a train accident in France. Why then did he suddenly leave England?

Zurga Well?

Chateauroy Shortly before leaving England there was an order for his arrest for a major forgery. He had forged a draft on a large sum of money and signed it himself. The other name on the draft, which he had forged just to obtain a large some of money by criminal means, was the name of his best friend and benefactor. That name, Princess, was the Marquess of Rockingham, your own cousin.

Zurga Would such a gentleman and exquisite craftsman be such a deceiver?

Chateauroy That's the only motive behind his retreating out to the desert to bury himself alive, forget and get over his own shame.

Zurga Do you have evidence?

Chateauroy Evidence can be produced.

Zurga You seem certain of your case.

Chateauroy Absolutely certain.

Zurga I am not so sure. I must discuss the matter with my cousin.

Chateauroy Of course. As a French gentleman I understand completely the delicacy of the matter. You can depend on my absolute discretion.

Zurga Colonel, as a daughter of England and princess of Portugal with experience of mentalities in both Spain and Italy I am too well aware of both the meaning of honour and of putting your trust in strangers. I shall be completely frank with you. I don't trust you for a moment. Something tells me that you have come here from very hidden and suspect motives only to slander an English gentleman in

my face. I can't be the judge of the degree of his guilt or innocence, but it is ignoble enough of you, to investigate such a secret in one of your own soldiers by covert means and apparently only for the sake of harming his case, to make me shudder of disgust in your presence.

Chateauroy Madame, I only wanted to warn you. I know that you have met corporal Victor in secret. Your cousin the Marquess knows it as well and is very concerned.

Zurga How does he know?

Chateauroy By the girl Cigarette.

Zurga Colonel Chateauroy, I have nothing more to say to you. I must ask you to leave me.

Chateauroy (rising) I apologise if I have offended you. *(is impertinent enough to try to kiss her hand. She reluctantly allows it. Chateauroy smiles.)* I am sure everything will come out well. Au revoir, Madame. *(leaves)*

Zurga Not all the worms, reptiles, spiders and insects of Africa can give me more revolting creeps than that vampire. How can such an ill will, envy and viciousness by malicious slander and lies be possible in a soldier against one of his own best men? Louis Victor, alias Bert Cecil, Lord Royallieu, to be a simple forger? There is something very wrong here.

Scene 6. Ben Arsli's curiosity shop.

(Exactly like in act III scene 2,

Ben Arsli at it again in the door of his shop attracting customers.)

Ben Arsli My good friend! I have been waiting for you! *(Bert becomes visible.)*

Bert What's up, Ben Arsli?

Ben Arsli Come in! Come in! *(Bert follows him inside.)* It's a matter of vital importance.

Bert Your messenger said it was a matter of life and death.

Ben Arsli Exactly, my friend! Come forth, Princess!

(Zurga appears.)

Zurga Good evening, Bert Cecil, Lord Royallieu!

Bert (shocked) You have fooled me, Ben Arsli.

Ben Arsli Don't try to fool yourself, my friend. No one can deny himself forever.

Bert What do you want from me, Princess? Why do you accost me with a dead man's name?

Zurga You are not dead, Bert Cecil.

Bert By what right do you use this name?

Zurga By what right has your brother taken your title?

Bert Have you hidden him as well behind your tapestries, Ben Arsli?

Zurga Your brother has left for Algiers. Finding you here was too much for him.

Bert Princess, you expose yourself to great danger by meeting a legionnaire privately in an Arab shop.

Zurga You have yourself exposed yourself to mortal danger ever since you came here and without right.

Bert What do you demand of me? What do you want from me?

Zurga I want to know the truth about your guilt or innocence.

Bert So you know the story about the draft?

Zurga I know all about the draft and your disappearance from England. But you never perished in that train accident in France. How could you let the world believe that you were dead? What did you have to hide in yourself? Were you really guilty of something or only foolish?

Bert That's the question, Madame.

Zurga You answer by a mystery.

Bert I give as good an answer as I can.

Zurga Can't you exculpate yourself and come home to England?

Bert If I could I would never have come here.

Zurga Answer me frankly. Are you really completely innocent, or do you have the slightest part in any guilt?

Bert Unfortunately, Madame, I fear that I am completely innocent. That's my dilemma. By my complete innocence I can never prove it.

Zurga Do you then have to be guilty just because you can't prove your innocence? Is it not rather the other way around, that you are innocent until proven guilty?

Bert That would be the case with most men, but concerning an English gentleman there is a difference. He must be perfectly spotless and even above all suspicion. My best friend's name has been forged in my name for the sake of money. There is the crime. As long as the guilty can't be found the forgery remains in my name forever. You can't come around that fact.

Zurga So you voluntarily accept the punishment for another's crime.

Bert Yes, since someone has to and the guilty can't be found.

Zurga Is there no way to trace him?

Bert The only way would be for him to give up himself.

Zurga Do you know who it was?

Bert I can prove nothing.

Zurga (sighs) I haven't spoken with my cousin about it yet. I wanted to speak with you first.

Bert I must ask you to keep it secret from him.

Zurga Why?

Bert He was my best friend. I don't want him to see me here. To him I am dead. Let me remain dead for his own sake.

Zurga What do you wish to achieve with such a policy?

Bert Nothing. But I want to follow my honour and conscience.

Zurga That I must respect, although I can't understand it.

Bert I thank you, Madame. (*turning to Ben Arsli*) Ben Arsli, don't do this again.

Ben Arsli What, my friend?

Bert Put a lady's honour and reputation at risk by joining her with a legionnaire in your shop.

Ben Arsli Not even if she commands it and is a princess?

Bert In that case least of all. Au revoir, Madame. *(leaves)*

Ben Arsli Well, Madame, are you satisfied?

Zurga I had hoped to clear up a mystery. Instead the mystery has doubled.

Ben Arsli Is it my fault, Madame?

Zurga No, Ben Arsli. It is everyone's fault but yours. Farewell, my good man. *(leaves)*

Ben Arsli Why must these Europeans always complicate life to themselves so far beyond all necessity? *(shakes his head and returns to his watch by the exit)*

Scene 7. The tent of the Princess.

Rockingham Well, colonel?

Chateauroy It's an indisputable fact that your cousin continues to see the corporal in secret.

Rockingham I can't understand it. How could she expose herself to such a risk and not tell anything about it to me? I am responsible for her here in Algeria!

Chateauroy There is only one thing to do, mon marquis. You must leave Algeria as soon as possible with your cousin.

Rockingham Is it the same advice you gave Lord Royallieu? Was that why he left this damned country so quickly?

Chateauroy I never met him. He left only on his own initiative.

Rockingham He must have got the jitters for something. How could he leave without saying goodbye? He didn't even leave any message! He just fled like a rabbit! For what?

Chateauroy (indifferent) I have no idea, your grace.

Rockingham You know more of this country than I do. What the hell is going on? We are beleaguered and immersed in a mystery which offers us no lead. And then that damned corporal, who takes liberties with my cousin but refuses to see me. Who does he think he is? An equal? A duke? And what's his catch on my cousin? Is she in love with him?

Chateauroy I know nothing, Monsieur. And all I can do is to advise you to leave the country as soon as possible before anything happens to your rich cousin.

Rockingham That's all we need. When is the next ship?

Act V scene 1.

Parade by the barracks. Blinding sunshine, all soldiers march and line up to trumpets and drums.

General (appearing in front) Attention! *(All salute.)*

At ease! *(All lower their weapons. Perfect discipline.)*

It's a great day today, a very special day, for we have a soldier to decorate. The cross of the Legion of Honour has been awarded to a very special member of us all, whom certainly nobody can grudge the most supreme of all rewards. May I ask the soldier in question to step forth – Cigarette!

(Some commotion in the lines. A general acclamation is murmured quietly.)

Cigarette shows herself.)

Private Cigarette, accept this award as a token for the extraordinary gratitude of the second empire and appreciation for your great valour and contribution in the battle of Zarailah, our greatest victory so far over the muslims of Algeria! *(attaches the Legion of Honour to Cigarette's uniform)*

What do you say, soldiers? Isn't she worth a cheer? Hip, hip!

All (including the general) Hurrah!

Several soldiers Our only female hero!

How many Arab dicks did you cut for trophies, Cigarette?

Cigarette More and better than yours! *(resounding cheers and clamours for joy)*

One word to all of you, soldiers, and to you, mon general. *(All fall quiet instantly.)*

Of course I must thank you for the honour, but I didn't really deserve it. What part did I take in that battle? I came riding with my zouaves when it was already almost over, and all the main job was already done before I came through. One man headed that hard work, and he is the one who deserves this cross and not I. He led the battle from dawn until sunset and lost nine tenths of his men but still carried on. When I arrived he was already dying from his wounds, and a moment later his life could not have been saved. Award the Legion of Honour to him and not to me! I am just an adventuress. *He was the true hero of the day! (general acclamation)*

Several What Cigarette says is true.

He fought like a god that day.

He is a legend even among the Arabs.

Why was he never decorated?

Cigarette I know why! He was never awarded anything while his nearest seniors always grudged him any promotion! He has been fighting valiantly for years and taken worse risks than anyone else and often risked his life on impossible missions just because no one else dared to, but his chief never promoted him.

General Cigarette, who is this man you are talking of?

Cigarette (loud) He calls himself Louis Victor.

General I promoted him myself once. He is a corporal and might deserve a lieutenant's rank, which we shall look into, but all procedures take time.

Cigarette Will you then allow colonel Chateauroy to continue harassing Louis Victor until death, like he did with his companion in arms, whom the colonel tortured to death?

General What are you saying, Cigarette?

Cigarette I ask a question. What right has a soldier in the Foreign Legion to mishandle another soldier just because he is of lower rank and comes from a finer family? I am just asking.

General Cigarette, your question is serious.

Cigarette I know. That's why I bring it up. All the legion knows, that the worst imaginable crime within the legion is disloyalty or persecution of a fellow soldier.

General Colonel Chateauroy!

Chateauroy Yes, mon general!

General You heard the accusation?

Chateauroy Yes, mon general.

General What have you to say for your defence?

Chateauroy Cigarette has got something wrong. I am the first to agree on that Louis Victor deserves promotion. He is one of our best soldiers, and he has made himself indispensable to us here in Algeria. May we never lose him.

General What do you say, Cigarette?

Cigarette If the colonel is as keen as I on having corporal Victor promoted and in protecting his life against any danger, so that he may serve us forever, we are on the same level.

General That's what I like to hear. May I ask: where is Louis Victor now?

Chateauroy He is out on a dangerous mission behind the enemy lines.

General I hope, colonel Chateauroy, that he will come back alive. I hereby hold you responsible for his life.

Chateauroy Yes, mon general.

General (loud) That's all! At ease!

(All the soldiers disperse and gather around Cigarette to congratulate her.)

Scene 2. In the tent of the Princess.

Zurga Yes, who is it?

An Arab servant A woman, Madame.

Zurga A woman? I know no women.

Servant A woman soldier, Madame.

Zurga Then it can only be... Show her in.

(Cigarette is shown in. She keeps her distance observing the princess.)

I know who you are although we never met. You are the soldier girl called Cigarette. You are welcome.

Cigarette (coldly) Why am I welcome?

Zurga Because you are the friend of the corporal Louis Victor.

Cigarette If you only knew what I was to him! But what are you? You must of course know that he loves you?

Zurga And why would he? We have hardly met.

Cigarette You are meeting in secret in a shop in the bazaar. The whole army knows about it.

Zurga Have you come here only to insult me?

Cigarette No, I came mainly out of curiosity. I wanted to see what Louis Victor's mistress looked like. Now I know that she is very beautiful.

Zurga With all respect for your wild way of life, miss, but you are jumping to rather loose conclusions.

Cigarette Do you mean that there is nothing between you?

Zurga Only friendship. He happens to be the best friend of my cousin the Marquess since childhood, which also makes him a friend of mine.

Cigarette Is that all? But he loves you.

Zurga What is your purpose?

Cigarette I want to help him away from this life which isn't right for him. He is too noble for us. If he remains here he will only be mishandled to death like his servant by the colonel. You can save him. He loves you. Take him with you back to England.

Zurga He doesn't want to himself.

Cigarette Why?

Zurga I wish I knew exactly.

Cigarette But your cousin could persuade him, couldn't he? Since he is his oldest and best friend, as you said.

Zurga It's not impossible that it would work. But he doesn't want to see my cousin.

Cigarette Why?

Zurga That's his unfathomable secret.

Cigarette Madame, I have bad misgivings. You must talk him into reason. You must receive him and make him look your cousin into his eyes.

Zurga We have the same wish, you and I, for his own good. Could you make him come here one last time?

Cigarette Maybe.

Zurga If you do your best, I will also do my best.

Cigarette Au revoir, Madame. (*hurries out*)

Zurga Maybe we can now resolve the mystery both to myself, to him and to my cousin?

Scene 3. The joint.

Rockingham Colonel Chateauroy, we leave tomorrow night at seven. I hope the Princess will not be bothered by any more legionnaires until then.

Chateauroy Her tent is under constant secret surveillance. Will you give me free hands with whatever legionnaire would dare to visit her?

Rockingham Your legionnaires are on your responsibility, not mine. All I want is to get away from this place where alien bandits seem to have a weird influence on my cousin. She has all day tried to make me meet with that corporal without telling me why, but I don't want to hear about him any more.

Chateauroy He is English. Will you give us free hands whoever he is?

Rockingham Do you know who he is?

Chateauroy We don't have proof of his right identity but might obtain it.

Rockingham Shoot him on the spot if he would dare to come near the Princess once more!

Chateauroy Are you quite well, mon marquis?

Rockingham Sorry. It's the heat. I've had a headache for days.

Chateauroy Drink some more absinth. It helps. (*offers him another glass*)

Scene 4. The Princess' tent.

Bert Madame, you called me here although it means mortal danger to dare to show myself in your vicinity.

Zurga Are you not used to risking your life?

Bert I am used to do anything for a woman including risking my life but only as far as she is not compromised.

Zurga My good friend, at your French girl friend's express demand I asked you here to persuade you to show yourself to my cousin.

Bert Madame, it's impossible.

Zurga You must identify yourself. He was always certain of your innocence. If you don't tell him everything he might believe you are protecting the one who once committed the crime.

Bert Does he know who I am?

Zurga Not yet. He still thinks you are dead.

Bert And you want to wake him up from that illusion. Why?

Zurga We want you back with us to England. This kind of life was not made for you.

Bert (on his knees, sincerely) Is it true then? Cigarette says that you love me. Is it true? Is that why you want me with you to England?

Zurga I never said so.

Bert (rising) Does that mean that you don't love me?

Zurga You are a dear friend to me, like you always were to my cousin, who is like a brother to me.

Bert Madame, your English coldness was not made for this climate.

Zurga You withdraw from the subject.

Bert Madame, you don't want to save me for yourself. You want to save me for England. What does it mean to save me for England? It means to save me for my English disgrace, for my English brother, to whom I can only import perdition and

disaster, and for my reputation of my English crime from which I can never be cleared. For the last time, Madame, leave me in peace for your England. *(leaves)*

Zurga Alas, what have I done!

(When Bert leaves the scene is turned to following him away from the tent.)

a voice Who goes there? *(Bert continues.)* Halt, or I fire! *(Bert stops.)*

Chateauroy ('s voice) It's that corporal. Lower your rifle. *(makes himself visible)*

So late out at night, corporal Victor? May I ask where you have been?

Bert (is silent)

Chateauroy You abandoned your post to take liberties in this direction. I must demand to hear your reason. *(Bert is silent)*

Chateauroy You don't answer! Do you know what that means? Insubordination! But I will help you. I know where you have been. You have been visiting your mistress, whose intimacy you have violated a number of times in spite of repeated warnings. How can you, a simple corporal in the foreign legion with a criminal past, dare to violate the reputation of an inviolable princess?

Bert (can't control himself, attacks the colonel and beats him up and bloody. Several other soldiers intervene, separates them and take charge of Bert.)

Chateauroy Now I have you at last, Monsieur Anglais, so fine and noble, so far too good for us, that he even deigns to steal our ladies! I have the right to shoot you down on the spot for your behaviour here and now! But I will prolong the joy. You have been so long a smudge in my eye, corporal, that I will wallow in making your destruction as slow and lengthy as possible! Your good friend got away cheaply, but I will make up for the damages on you! Arrest him! He shall be court martialled!

A soldier (leading him away) I am afraid they will have to let you be executed, corporal.

Bert The sooner the better.

Another There could be mitigating circumstances, though .The whole army would gladly testify to your benefit.

Bert No, my friends, there are no mitigating circumstances, no extraordinary details to consider and no witnesses except to my attack on the colonel, no matter how it was provoked. May the law and justice have its course. I will gladly finally complete my downfall.

A third No one will let you except the colonel.

Bert One man is enough to cause the death of life when it is about soldiers in wartime. No soldier was ever given a chance against his own death. *(they leave)*

Scene 5. The Court Martial.

General (chairman + judge) Bring in the accused! *(Bert is brought in.)*

The court martial is in session. *(All sit down.)*

Louis Victor, corporal in the régiment des chasseurs in légion étrangère, you are accused of insubordination of the first degree, which is violence against a superior

officer. The accusation is legally brought forth by colonel Chateauroy. Does the colonel maintain his accusation?

Chateauroy (rising) Yes.

General What was the cause of your dispute?

Chateauroy I can only guess. I presume that corporal Victor was disappointed by not having been promoted or had the legion of honour and let his disappointment out on me.

General So you did not provoke him in any way?

Chateauroy No. My witnesses can affirm that corporal Victor did not answer to a proper question, persisted in not answering its repetition and then suddenly used violence.

General May I ask the witnesses to come forth. *(The three soldiers from the previous scene appear.)*

What happened? You first.

First soldier I saw a dark figure approaching. I asked him: "Who goes there?" There was no answer. "Halt or I shoot!" Then colonel Chateauroy ordered me to lower the rifle. He went to the accused himself and tried to learn where the accused had been and why. He had no answer. Then the rumble started.

General (to the second soldier) Well?

Second soldier I heard the colonel tried to extract an explanation from the corporal, but the corporal said nothing while the colonel all the time raised his voice. Suddenly there was a scuffle. I hurried forth and saw the colonel bleeding on the ground. I then arrested the corporal by order of the colonel. The corporal made no resistance.

General (to the third) And you?

Third soldier The colonel always provoked the corporal.

General Why?

Soldier 3 Because the corporal once acted as a true gentleman towards an Arab beauty which the colonel had taken prisoner.

General Are you suggesting that this justifies violence against a superior officer?

Soldier 3 Not at all.

General Well? What else?

Soldier 3 The colonel always hated the corporal.

General We are here to assess facts, not to analyse feelings. Enough witnesses. *(The three soldiers return to their places.)*

I now turn to you directly, corporal. I insisted myself on being the chairman and judge of this court martial because you are the man in our army I least of all could do without. I want to save your life at any price, if only it would be possible. I now want to know why you used violence against colonel Chateauroy.

Bert I plead guilty of the crime. I acted wrong against the colonel in using violence against him because I could not control myself.

General But why? You always could control yourself. You were the most self-controlled soldier of our regiment. He must have told you something that made you furious. What was it?

Bert (is silent)

General Are you trying to protect your colonel?

Bert I try neither to protect him nor myself.

General Since you yourself understand that you can neither protect him nor yourself by silence you must also understand that you can't protect anyone else by silence.

Bert (is silent)

General (sighing) You pleaded guilty of your crime. Are you aware that the only possible punishment is execution?

Bert Yes.

General I hope by God I may still find some reason to pardon you. The sentence is death by military execution. Bring out the accused. *(the sentence is brought home. The court is dissolved.)*

Bert (to himself) Thank God that the colonel at least did not involve the princess! *(He is brought out.)*

Scene 6. The joint.

(Chateauroy and Rockingham at the bar, just like in scene 4.)

Rockingham So, you got that knave yesterday! And he will be shot! Well, good riddance. It's always best what happens. But why the devil did you not arrest him *before* he visited the princess?

Chateauroy The guard didn't see him until he came out.

Rockingham And you want me to believe that?

(enter Cigarette in a bad mood)

Cigarette (to some soldiers) Have you seen the colonel?

Soldier 1 There is murder in your face, Cigarette.

Cigarette It's because they will execute an innocent.

Soldier 2 What has happened?

Cigarette Louis Victor has been sentenced to death because he hit the colonel for insulting a woman! *(goes straight up to the colonel and spits demonstratively in his face)*

Chateauroy What is this, Cigarette? Have you gone mad?

Cigarette And they made such a pig colonel in our army!

Chateauroy We all get promoted if we keep it up. Don't stain your legion of honour, Cigarette.

Cigarette (turns to Rockingham) And you, Monsieur English, do nothing although your beautiful cousin of a princess tempted a countryman of yours to his own destruction! Are you English always like that towards each other?

Rockingham My dear amazon, I actually don't know what you are talking about.

Cigarette Neither do I! But I know that much, that you deny him, and that he denies you, and none of you wants to see the other although you are old friends! It's a shame!

Rockingham Who on earth are you talking about?

Cigarette Louis Victor! Your haughty cousin was supposed to bring you together! For that he will now be shot!

Rockingham I don't understand anything.

Chateauroy Pay no attention to her. She is in love with that corporal, and now she is mad because he will be shot.

Cigarette (turning to the colonel) Monsieur le colonel, I am not mad but just! (*draws her pistol.*) You are a bad soldier! (*shoots him down, to everyone's astonishment.*)

Cigarette (turning to everyone in the joint) Just execute me, anyone who dares! (*leaves calmly. Everyone makes way for her, since she is in a more dangerous mood than ever.*)

Rockingham On my honour, there is more behind this than only a romance! What does my cousin know that I don't? (*empties his glass and leaves quickly.*)

Scene 7. Ben Arsli's shop.
He stands as usual by the entrance.

Berkeley (passing by, drunk) Can I get opium here?

Ben Arsli My good man, you already had enough.

Berk I can never have enough! I deserve to die!

Ben Arsli Then at least I can make you sleep. Please enter. (*shows Berkeley politely the way in and presents him with the water pipe. He settles down. Enter Cigarette.*)

Cigarette! There are dark clouds over your brow!

Cigarette I am looking for that princess. Have you seen her?

Ben Arsli No. What can I do for you?

Cigarette (notices Berk) Who is that?

Ben Arsli A stranger, English, I think.

Cigarette There is something familiar about him. (*approaches him to eye him more closely*)

Monsieur, who are you?

Berk (interrupted) What?

Cigarette I recognize you! You are an Englishman! You have the same features as another Englishman in this country! Louis Victor! Do you know him?

Berk (gasping) It's my brother.

Cigarette Your brother? Will you also let him down?

Berk How so?

Cigarette He is to be shot tomorrow morning by military execution.

Berk Shot? What did he do?

Cigarette He defended a woman's honour! An English woman's honour! The Princess Zurga of Amagues!

Berk Is that not allowed in France?

Cigarette He hit an officer who insulted her! (*raises him up with both hands and grabs his collar*) Listen! Who is he?

Berk He is my only brother! He is my elder brother! He always helped me, but I always failed him! I thought he was dead! He is the only rightful Lord Royallieu!

Cigarette (releases him) So he is a nobleman. And this creep has failed, betrayed and forgotten him like everyone else in his country. Morbleu! What gentlemanly manners! Listen! You must save his life!

Berk How?

Cigarette Write immediately an affirmation of his identity! If I am lucky I will get there in time before he is shot.

Berk (doesn't hesitate any more, takes pen and paper and writes) "It is hereby certified that corporal Louis Victor is my older brother Bert Cecil, lord Royallieu, whose title I, Berkeley Royallieu, so far without right have assumed believing he was dead. Signed Berkeley of Royallieu." Is that all right?

Cigarette (studying the paper) Good! Now you may go on smoking and drinking yourself to whatever lower depths you want! *(leaves immediately)*

Ben Arsli So you are Louis Victor's brother. I should have guessed. You can't sit here idling while your brother's life is in danger, the bravest soldier in all Algeria. He saved my life and the lives of many others, but his own brother is sitting here smoking shit when his brother is about to die. A sad sight for an Arab. Get out from my shop! *(drives him out)*

(after him) Do something for the honour of your country! *(calms down and resumes his position by the entrance.)*

Scene 8. With the princess.

Rockingham Cousin, you owe me an explanation.

Zurga I will gladly explain anything I can.

Rockingham What happened between you and that corporal?

Zurga Nothing.

Rockingham Nothing? Why then do you meet in secret? Why do you associate intimately? No love, no feelings, nothing?

Zurga When I last saw him he offered me his love, but I declined.

Rockingham Aha! Concrete facts at last! So that was the drive of his courtship! Simply human and banal!

Zurga I can't say more.

Rockingham Is there more to it? What do you know about him that I don't know?

Zurga Everything but nothing that I can reveal.

Rockingham Is he a countryman of ours?

Zurga Yes.

Rockingham What is his real name?

Zurga (is silent)

Rockingham Always these mystifications. Well, I will reveal what I know that you don't know. A certain young soldier girl called Cigarette tried yesterday to bring him

and me together by you. He met you but not me, for when he left you he was involved in a quarrel with a colonel whom he hit. Do you know what that means?

Zurga No?

Rockingham Court martial and death penalty by military execution.

Zurga (can't understand it) It can't be possible. Not he. Why did he strike a colonel?

Rockingham Presumably because that colonel saw him coming from you and said something objectionable about it.

Zurga Would he have had a fight for my sake?

Rockingham Yes.

Zurga And will he be executed?

Rockingham Yes.

Zurga We must do something, cousin. That man must not die.

Rockingham And why would any man guilty of a disciplinary crime escape his lawful punishment?

Zurga Because he is a lord of England.

Rockingham (changes mind completely) We must do something. I will ride to the barracks immediately. *(hurries off)*

Zurga And what about me, who is guilty of his incrimination? If only I had accepted his proposal! – But even I can stand by him when it comes to the point. Quick! Away to the barracks!

Scene 9. The tent of the Caliph.

Two Arabs bring in Cigarette, who has been taken prisoner.

Arab 1 Look, o great Caliph, who we have taken prisoner!

Arab 2 The irritating soldier woman who defeated us at Zarailah!

Caliph That was great news indeed! However did you come across the most efficient of all our enemies?

Arab 1 She was riding through the desert at top speed through the night.

Arab 2 Her horse was driven to hard and broke down.

Caliph Well, Flower of the French, what have you to say before you die?

Cigarette You may well kill me, but listen to me first!

Caliph Release her, and let her speak! *(The Arabs let her go.)*

Cigarette (brings out her letter) Look. This letter is the only thing that could save your only friend among the French.

Caliph (eying the letter) Louis Victor! Is he in danger?

Cigarette The French intend to shoot him at dawn.

Caliph Why would they execute their own best soldier?

Cigarette Because he struck his colonel for insulting his lady.

Caliph That sounds very unfrench, absurd and impossible.

Cigarette It's true, They don't know what they are doing.

Caliph And you want to save him?

Cigarette Only I *can* save him. Just let me save him, and then you can hamstring me and leave me to die in the desert as much as you want.

Caliph (to his Arabs) Give her a fresh and well rested horse immediately! The best and noblest we have! Her mission is sacred, by Allah! My girl, if you succeed in saving him, then come back to me afterwards with him.

Cigarette Do you want to kill him as well?

Caliph No. I want to save both of you. Why don't you league with me? The Christians are too immoral for you both.

Cigarette I will consider your suggestion and mention it to Louis Victor. The French might want to execute us both. Farewell!

Caliph Hurry, my Flower!

Cigarette I fly! *(out)*

Caliph No one has caused us more harm than she and Louis Victor at Zarailah! How great would not then the victory be if both came over to us!

Scene 10. By the barracks.

The execution patrol marches in under the command of Black Falcon.

Falcon Right turn, march! Platoon, halt!

soldier 1 (to another) There is a rumour that Cigarette has shot the colonel.

soldier 2 Serves him right! If only it were true!

Falcon Quiet there! Bring forth the prisoner!

(Bert is brought forth, his hands pinioned, to the execution ground.)

Corporal Louis Victor, I am obliged to carry through the most unpleasant duty of my life. Why the devil did you attack the colonel?

Bert Sergeant, I regret, but I have nothing to say.

Falcon No devil in the whole legion who knows you would shoot you for what you have done. But what the hell can we do? If we don't obey orders there is no legion! Then we can all go home and leave the country to the Arabs! Can't you say anything for your defence?

Bert I have once and for all accepted the just sentence of the court martial.

Falcon (to himself) It takes a devil to be a damned soldier in this accursed situation! I wish the patrol would shoot me instead of him. –

Make ready for execution! *(Two soldiers go up to Bert offering to blindfold him.)*

Bert Thank you, I won't need it.

Soldier 1 None of the soldiers will be able to meet your eyes.

Bert I want to see the light! *(The soldiers leave him.)*

Falcon Ready! *(The soldiers raise their guns.)* Steady! *(All take aim.)*

Rockingham (outside) In the Queen's name, stop!

(All are disconcerted by the intruder's voice. Rockingham enters between the soldiers and the condemned, sweating and short of breath. He recognizes Bertie.)

You! *(can't believe his eyes)* Of all people!

Bertie I am sorry, Rock, that you ever had to see me again.

Rockingham We all thought you were dead!

Bertie I will be at last in five minutes.

Rockingham But how could you let us think you were dead? How could you cut off all communication? You are lord, Bertie, rich and respected!

Bertie It's too late, Rock.

Rockingham No, nothing is ever too late! You have everything to live for, Bertie! Tell these boys to go home! (*turns to the sergeant and the soldiers*) You can't shoot this man. He is a lord of England!

Falcon You are mad, Monsieur, or had too much of the sun. He is condemned to death by law for assaulting a senior officer. We can do nothing but shoot him.

Rockingham But I tell you he is a lord of England!

Falcon Can you prove it?

Bertie Let them kill me, Rock. It's best that way. I could never return home anyway to my dishonour there.

Rockingham What dishonour?

Bertie The draft that was forged in your name! The punishment and disgrace that I ran away from!

Rockingham You were innocent, Bertie.

Bertie How do you know?

Rockingham I always knew it.

(*to the soldiers*) You can't stand here to shoot down an innocent man in cold blood!

Falcon Out of the way, Monsieur English, or we have to remove you by force or shoot you as well!

Rockingham Then I prefer the latter! (*stays in front of Bert protecting him*)

Falcon (to some soldiers) Remove him! (*They carry away Rockingham by force.*)

I am sorry, Monsieur English, but we have no choice. He made himself guilty of a disciplinary crime of the highest degree by beating a colonel more than bloody, there are witnesses, and he has confessed to his crime. We can't compromise with discipline. Without strict discipline there would be no army! You must understand that yourself, if you are a soldier.

Rockingham (breaks down) Bertie! After all these years! To find you here! To find you only to see you die! No!

Bert (calmly) Go home, Rock.

Falcon (to the soldiers holding Rock) Blindfold him, so he doesn't have to watch. (*They blindfold him.*)

Ready! (*The platoon raise their rifles again.*) Steady! (*All take aim.*)

Cigarette (outside) In the name of France! Down with your weapons!

(*A trembling through the lines. The soldiers look at each other.*)

Falcon (with a shrill voice) FIRE!

(*In the same instant Cigarette throws herself between the platoon and the condemned. Shots are fired, but many are missing their goal. Both Cigarette and Bertie fall down badly wounded.*)

Cigarette (holding up her paper) He is innocent!

(Rockingham tears off his blindfold and rushes up to her, reads the letter)

Rockingham (triumphant) Here is the evidence!

(The soldiers start mumbling between themselves with some dissatisfaction.)

Falcon (comes up, reads the letter) You are right. We have shot a lord of England. A barber-surgeon, quickly! *(The soldiers keep mumbling and get increasingly upset.)*

(A barber-surgeon appears, quickly examining the wounded.)

Bert How is she, surgeon?

Surgeon Dying.

Bert For the honour of three women I sacrificed everything, but for her, who twice rescued my life, I could do nothing. And still she was perhaps the only one who loved me.

Cigarette Three times, monsieur le corporal.

Bert What?

Cigarette I saved your life three times. Even if a man would be let down by all women, there will always be one woman left who would not fail him. You, who sacrificed so much for so many, deserves to once have someone sacrificing herself for you. Am I still unsexed by my way of living? *(smiles and dies)*

Bert Is she alive?

Surgeon No, she is dead.

A soldier Sergeant, you have made us shoot down the dearest flower of the whole army! By mistake!

Falcon Is she dead?

Surgeon I am sorry, sergeant.

Falcon (helplessly, to the soldiers) It wasn't intentional! An accident! No one wanted it!

(A soldier starts shooting. The others follow suit. The sergeant falls down dead to their bullets.)

A soldier Revenge for Cigarette by God and la France!

Most soldiers Revenge for Cigarette by God and la France!

(They come up to Bert. The surgeon examines him.)

Rockingham How is it with him? He must not die!

(The surgeon looks at him and the others without answering.)

Zurga (arriving at last, throws herself down to Bert embracing him) Forgive me! Forgive me!

Surgeon Stay! Don't touch him!

Bert Madame, there is nothing to forgive.

Zurga What you have done has no importance! Come with us to England anonymously! We have money! We will do everything for you, and I will support you for the rest of your life! But live, dearest, live!

Bert Too late, Madame.

Rockingham Cousin, there is nothing against Bert Cecil any more. His brother has confessed and relinquished all his rights.

Bert Let me die with the crime, Rock. My brother didn't confess it, and he will not have to. I will die now, rightfully executed for violence against a superior officer. It's only right in the manly world of the soldiers. My brother doesn't have to fear anymore for my being alive.

Rockingham Bertie! We will never forgive you if you die!

Bertie I am sorry, Rock, but that's the last of my many crimes through which I will persist in maintaining my innocence.

A soldier Corporal Victor! Cigarette shot down the colonel!

Bert Then also she has earned her final pay. *(dies)*

Zurga No! No! *(throws herself desperately over his body)*

(Enter the general.)

General What is this? Is there no discipline? Where is the sergeant?

Rockingham General, whatever happened here, don't make it worse by demanding investigations and punishments. Here lie three innocent people as victims of a colonel's sadism.

General (observes the bodies) And Cigarette too! You don't have to say anything more, Monsieur le Marquis. For a disaster like this no one can be held responsible. *(to the princess)* Madame, this is no place for a woman. *(to Rockingham)* Bring her out of here. *(to the soldiers)* Get away the bodies! Quickly! *(The soldiers immediately get active and efficient.)*

Monsieur le Marquis, I have no doubt that you have a long and interesting story to tell.

Rockingham But overwhelmingly sad.

General I have seen the end. You only have to tell the beginning.

Rockingham (to the Princess) Come, sister. There is nothing more we can do for him but give him his absolute exoneration in England.

Zurga My brother, I have now seen the deepest depths of hell and only found manly military discipline and its consequences. Are all wars marked by the same utter terrible injustice?

Rockingham (can't answer) Come, my friend, let's leave this hell forever. Our friend was dead, and we happened to find him here, a lonesome angel misplaced at the bottom of hell. Let him remain dead, so that his family and name may be allowed to live on.

Zurga And his story?

Rockingham It's too much alive beyond all mortality.

(They leave together. The general and soldiers follow them. The corpses are carried out on stretchers.)

The end.

(Translation completed October 19th 2017)