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Babette's Feast

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Babette's Feast

Conceived and developed by
ABIGAIL KILLEEN

Written by
ROSE COURTNEY

Adapted from the short story by
ISAK DINESEN

Produced off-Broadway at Theatre at St. Clement's
in New York, N.Y.

Originally produced by Portland Stage Company,
Anita Stewart, Executive and Artistic Director

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Babette’s Feast received its world premiere at Portland Stage Company (Anita Stewart, Executive and Artistic Director) on Jan. 26, 2018. It was produced by Portland Stage Company in association with Jennifer Carolyn King and Timothy Fredel/ Rugged Elegance Foundation, Julia O’Brien and Abigail Killeen/Spikenard & Marigold LLC, and Mark Rodgers and Caroline Lucas/More Partnerships.

CAST:

Babette Michelle Hurst
Martine Abigail Killeen
Philippa Juliana Francis Kelly
Player 1 Sturgis Warner
Player 2 Jo Mei
Player 3 Steven Skybell
Player 4 George Bennett Watson
Player 5 Elliot Nye
Player 6 Sorab Wadia

PRODUCTION:

Director Karin Coonrod
Lighting and Scenic Design Christopher Akerlind
Associate Scenic Design Christopher Thompson
Costume Design Oana Botez
Sound Design Kate Marvin
Compositions Gina Leishman
Dance Consultant Aretha Aoki
Production Stage Manager Shane Van Vliet

Babette's Feast opened on March 25, 2018, at the Theatre at St. Clement's, New York City. It was produced by Julia O'Brien and Abigail Killeen/Spikenard & Marigold LLC, Mark Rodgers and Caroline Lucas/More Partnerships, in association with Jennifer Carolyn King and Timothy Fredel/Rugged Elegance Foundation, The Cook Trust, The Gardner Family, Scott and Kerry Hasenbalg/Redemptive Ventures LLC, and Demi and Dave Kiersznowski/Common Good LLC.

CAST:

Babette	Michelle Hurst
Martine.....	Abigail Killeen
Philippa	Juliana Francis Kelly
Player 1	Sturgis Warner
Player 2	Jo Mei
Player 3	Steven Skybell
Player 4	George Bennett Watson
Player 5	Elliot Nye
Player 6	Sorab Wadia

PRODUCTION:

Director	Karin Coonrod
Lighting and Scenic Design	Christopher Akerlind
Costume Design	Oana Botez
Sound Design	Kate Marvin
Compositions	Gina Leishman
Dance Consultant	Aretha Aoki
Production Stage Manager	Krista Swan

This play is dedicated to strangers in foreign lands,
for their courage and their gifts.

Babette's Feast

CHARACTERS

BABETTE: A mysterious French woman.

MARTINE: Elder daughter (by one year) of the dean.

PHILIPPA: Younger daughter of the dean.

PLAYER #1: Narrator; also plays the dean, the dresser and the postman.

PLAYER #2: Narrator; also plays a suitor named Lars, Erna, the lady of the Swedish court and Dagfinn the fishmonger.

PLAYER #3: Narrator; also plays Achille Papin, Alf and the horse groom to old Mrs. Loewenhielm.

PLAYER #4: Narrator; also plays Loewenhielm and Espen.

PLAYER #5: Narrator; also plays a suitor named Hans, Young Loewenhielm, the red-haired boy named Leif and Osvald.

PLAYER #6: Narrator, also plays Mrs. Loewenhielm, Astrid and Henrick the bread seller.

SETTING

TIME: 1830 to 1883.

PLACE: The yellow house and settings created by the ensemble, including the marketplace and the church, all located in the town of Berlevaag on the coast of Norway. Also, briefly, a dressing room at the Royal Opera of Stockholm.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Sound effects throughout the play are made in view of the audience. All props, except a few key items, are imaginary.

Babette's Feast

TWO LADIES OF BERLEVAAG

(The stage is illuminated by a glowing sun. The ensemble rises from sleep, and they make their way to the edge of the stage. They address the audience.)

PLAYER 1. In Norway there is a fjord ...

PLAYER 2. A long narrow arm of the sea between tall mountains named Berlevaag Fjord.

PLAYER 3 *(reveals the town behind them, which grows more and more light)*. At the foot of the mountains, the small town of Berlevaag looks like a child's toy town of little wooden pieces painted gray, yellow, pink and many other colors.

PLAYER 5. Two elderly ladies lived in one of the yellow houses.

MARTINE. They were christened Martine—

PHILIPPA. And Philippa—

MARTINE. After Martin Luther and his friend Philip Melanchthon.

PLAYER 6. These two ladies had a French maid-of-all-work—
ALL. Babette.

PLAYER 6. It was a strange thing for a couple of puritan women in a small Norwegian town.

PLAYER 3. It might even seem to call for an explanation.

PLAYER 6. The people of Berlevaag found the explanation in the sisters' piety and kindness of heart. The ladies spent their time and small income in works of charity. No sorrowful or distressed creature knocked on their door in vain.

PLAYER 3. And Babette had come to that door twelve years ago as a friendless fugitive, almost mad with—

ALL. Grief and fear.

PLAYER 4. But the true reason for Babette's presence in the two sisters' house was to be found further back in time and deeper down in the domain of human hearts.

PLAYER 1. Their father had been a dean and a prophet, the founder of a pious ecclesiastic sect, which was known and looked up to in all the country of Norway.

PLAYER 5. Its members renounced the pleasures of this world, for the earth and all it held to them was but a kind of illusion, and the true reality was the—

ALL. New Jerusalem—

PLAYER 5. Toward which they were longing.

PLAYER 6. They swore not at all, but their communication was—

ALL. Yea, yea—

PLAYER 6. And—

ALL. Nay, nay—

PLAYER 6. And they called each other "brother" and "sister."

(Inside the yellow house, MARTINE and PHILIPPA assemble baskets of food. There is a knock at the door. MARTINE answers it. ASTRID, a woman of limited sight, enters with a walking stick.)

ASTRID. Sister Martine, Sister Philippa—I am sorry to trouble you. Please forgive me. We have never had to ask anyone for help. But I don't know where else to turn. Our field has flooded, and the entire crop is gone. There was nothing stored up—I don't see how we'll eat. Jocham has gone to the city to ask his brother for help, and I worry about him traveling such a distance at his age. But we had no choice—

MARTINE. Sister, do not worry. God will provide. We were just now preparing a basket with plenty of food for you both.

ASTRID. But the water is rising. I fear for the animals, for the house ...

PHILIPPA. Come, sister, we'll go together. We'll take the food.

(MARTINE fetches PHILIPPA's coat and hands her a basket. ASTRID embraces each of them and exits with PHILIPPA, arm in arm.)

ASTRID. You are angels on earth. Bless you. Bless you.

(The ensemble creates the church space, and they begin to take their places.)

PLAYER 2. The dean had married late in life and by now had long been dead. His disciples were becoming fewer in number every year, whiter or balder and harder of hearing—

PLAYER 1. Not true!

PLAYER 3. I heard that!

PLAYER 2. They were even becoming somewhat querulous and quarrelsome, so that sad little schisms would arise in the congregation. But they still gathered to read and interpret the word.

PLAYER 4. You know very well that this is my seat, brother.

PLAYER 5. Nay, it is mine.

PLAYER 4. Nay, brother, you are wrong. I have been sitting there for sixty-five years!

PHILIPPA. Brothers, please. Let us begin.

PERPETUAL SNOW

(MARTINE and PHILIPPA put on bonnets and become young. It is now thirty-one years earlier.)

PLAYER 5. As young girls, Martine and Philippa had been extraordinarily pretty ...

PLAYER 3. With the almost supernatural fairness of flowering fruit trees or perpetual snow.

PLAYER 2. Even in their plain clothes ...

PLAYER 3. They were a sight to behold.

PLAYER 5. They were never to be seen at balls or parties, but people turned when they passed in the streets.

PLAYERS 2 & 5. And the young men of Berlevaag went to church to watch them walk up the aisle.

(The service is over. The sisters walk up the aisle and out of the church. Racing after them is LARS, a young man. LARS approaches the DEAN as he greets parishioners.)

LARS. Dean, I sat next to your Martine during the service today. I am smitten beyond measure.

DEAN. Praise be to God. May my sermons continue to embolden you, young man, until the end of your days.

LARS. But—Dean, I implore you—the fair Philippa began to sing, and I was ... see? Now. It's happening. I can hardly speak.

DEAN. Speak softly, but don't whisper. Avoid lemons and milk.

LARS. I am a good and honest man ... with twelve sheep ...

DEAN. And if those don't work, I recommend vocal rest for a year.

(LARS exits. Another young man, HANS, approaches the DEAN.)

HANS. Good morning, Dean!

DEAN. Brother, is something troubling you?

HANS. My heart is on fire.

DEAN. What sort of fire is it that afflicts you, dear boy?

HANS. The fire of love, Dean. I must have your daughter. I mean, I must marry your daughter.

DEAN. May I ask which of my daughters has inspired this ... feeling in you?

HANS. Either. Both. They are magnificent. I would be the luckiest man on earth to make either of them my wife. Let me call you father-in-law! Let me be your own!

PLAYER 1. But the dean had declared that to him in his calling his daughters were his right and left hand.

PLAYER 3. Who would want to bereave him of them?

PLAYER 4. The fair girls had been brought up to an ideal of heavenly love.

PLAYER 2. And although they were all filled with it and did not let themselves be touched by the flames of this world ...

PLAYER 6. They *had* upset the peace of heart of two gentlemen from the great world—

ALL. Outside Berlevaag.

MARTINE'S LOVER

(PLAYER 5 enters as YOUNG LOEWENHIELM on horseback.)

PLAYER 5. There was a young officer named Lorens Loewenhielm who had led a gay life in his garrison town—

ALL. And run into debt.

PLAYER 5. His angry father sent him on a month's visit to his aunt in her old country house near Berlevaag ...

PLAYER 6. Where he would have time to meditate and to better his ways.

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. Hello, aunt. Lovely house you have here. Quiet.

(YOUNG LOEWENHIELM dismounts his horse. MRS. LOEWENHIELM smiles, embraces him, and then stands, mute.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM *(cont'd)*. It'll do me good. Time to think. Collect myself, so to speak. That's what mother and father say.

(She continues to watch him, smiling.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM *(cont'd)*. Is there a town nearby?

PLAYER 6. Mrs. Loewenhielm nodded, "yes."

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. Splendid. In which direction?

(She points in the direction of Berlevaag.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM *(cont'd)*. Right. Well, then, I'll just go get the lay of the land. Don't wait up!

(YOUNG LOEWENHIELM gets back on his horse and takes off toward Berlevaag.

When he arrives, the town comes to life around him, forming a bustling marketplace. MARTINE and PHILIPPA move among the townspeople.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM *(cont'd, approaching PLAYER 2)*. Excuse me. Excuse me, miss. So sorry to trouble you, but can you tell me where I'd find the nearest pub?

PLAYER 2. God save you, sir!

(YOUNG LOEWENHIELM approaches PLAYER 1.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. Pardon me.

PLAYER 1. Yes?

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. I'm new to town, and I wonder if you could tell me if there's a bit of gambling to be found. Just some fun, you know—horses, dogs, even a cock fight would do.

ALL. Are you mad???

(PLAYER 1 hurries off.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM *(to PLAYER 3, who runs away as he sees the stranger approaching)*. Hello! Here's the thing. There are women, and there are *women*, and I'm just—

(MARTINE turns, and YOUNG LOEWENHIELM and MARTINE see each other. The rest of the ensemble watches them holding each other's gaze.)

PHILIPPA. Sister, how many bars of laundry soap do you think we'll need this winter?

MARTINE. Many. Bars.

ALL. The next day.

(MARTINE and YOUNG LOEWENHIELM continue to circle each other.)

PHILIPPA. Martine. The taller candles? I can never decide.

MARTINE. Candles?

PHILIPPA. The days are getting shorter.

MARTINE. Right. Light.

ALL. Another day.

PHILIPPA. Sister, how many yards of—?

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. She stopped. Finally.

PLAYER 5. In the Loewenhielm family, there existed a legend to the effect that long ago a gentleman of the name had married a—

ALL. Huldre—

PLAYER 5. A female mountain spirit of Norway, who is so fair that the air around her shines and quivers.

PLAYER 3. Since then, from time to time, members of the family had been second-sighted.

PLAYER 1. Young Lorens till now had not been aware of any particular spiritual gift in his own nature.

PLAYER 6. But at this one moment there rose before his eyes a sudden, mighty vision of a higher and purer life, with no creditors, dunning letters ...

PLAYER 5. Or parental lectures ...

PLAYER 2. With no secret, unpleasant pangs of conscience and with a gentle, golden-haired angel to guide and reward him.

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. Are you a young woman? Or are you a mountain spirit?

MARTINE. I'm a girl. Without a mother. Who loves God. And lives in a yellow house.

(PHILIPPA and MARTINE exit.)

PLAYER 6. Through his pious aunt, he got admission to the dean's house.

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. Sir, I have come to present myself to you. I have been stricken with an ... understanding. Of what my life might be. I'm shaking.

DEAN. Man, my friend, is frail and foolish. And in our human foolishness, we imagine grace to be finite. For this reason,

we tremble. Please join us. The meeting is about to begin. Allow me to introduce my younger daughter, Philippa. And this is my elder daughter, Martine.

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. Who is even lovelier without a bonnet.

(YOUNG LOEWENHIELM enters the house, hitting his head on the door frame.)

MARTINE. Is your head all right? That must have hurt.

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. It was wonderful.

PHILIPPA. Sister, we ought to take Lieutenant Loewenhielm's coat.

MARTINE. May I take your coat?

(As he removes his coat, he whispers to MARTINE.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. You may take more than my coat. You may take things I never knew I had, things that live within me, but have never seen the light of—

PHILIPPA. Water?

YOUNG LOWENHIELM. Please. *(To the audience as PLAYER 5.)* He followed her slim figure with adoring eyes, but he loathed and despised the figure which he himself cut in her nearness.

(PHILIPPA pours him a glass of water and places it on the table, where the guests are now seated with prayer books before them.)

DEAN. Mercy and truth, dear brethren, have met together. Righteousness and bliss have kissed one another.

PLAYER 5. And the young man's thoughts were with the moment when Lorens and Martine should be kissing each other.

DEAN. Please open your prayer books to page 311. Lieutenant Loewenhiehm, will you do us the honor of reading this morning?

YOUNG LOEWENHIEHM. I don't ... I'm not very well—

(MARTINE hands him her prayer book.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIEHM *(cont'd)*. Yes.

(He surveys the table, all eyes on him.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIEHM *(cont'd)*. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy ... ”

(YOUNG LOEWENHIEHM is arrested by the word, but struggles to continue.)

MARTINE. “And understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

PLAYER 2. He repeated his visit time after time, and each time seemed to himself to grow smaller and more—

PLAYER 2 & 5. Insignificant and contemptible.

YOUNG LOEWENHIEHM *(rises and heads for the door)*. Where is my coat ... ?

(MARTINE follows him.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIEHM *(cont'd)*. You are a mountain spirit.

(He takes her hand and kisses it.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM (*cont'd*). I am going away forever. I shall never, never see you again. For I've learned here that fate is hard. And in this world, there are things which are impossible.

(He exits.)

DEAN. Mercy and truth, dear brethren, have met together. Righteousness and bliss have kissed one another.

PLAYER 2. When he was once more back in his garrison town he thought his adventure over ...

PLAYER 3. And found that he did not like to think of it at all.

PLAYER 5. While the other young officers talked of their love affairs, he was silent on his.

PLAYER 6. For seen from the officers' mess, it was a pitiful business.

PLAYER 1. How had it come to pass that a lieutenant of the hussars had let himself be defeated by a set of—

ALL. Long-faced sectarians—

PLAYER 1. In the bare-floored rooms of an old dean's house?

PLAYER 5. Then he became afraid.

PLAYER 6. Was it the family madness which made him still carry with him the dream-like picture of a maiden so fair that she made the air round her shine with purity and holiness?

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. He did not want to be a dreamer. He wanted to be like his brother officers. So he pulled himself together and made up his mind to forget what had happened to him in Berlevaag. From now on, he would look forward, not back. He would concentrate on his career. He would cut a brilliant figure in a brilliant world.

(In the yellow house, a meeting has just concluded. MARTINE and PHILIPPA clear glasses from the table.)

PHILIPPA. In the yellow house of Berlevaag, Philippa sometimes turned the talk to the handsome, silent young man who had so suddenly made his appearance, and so suddenly disappeared again.

MARTINE. Her elder sister would then answer her gently, with a still, clear face, and find other things to discuss.

PHILIPPA'S LOVER

PLAYER 5. A year later, an even more distinguished person than Lieutenant Loewenhielm came to Berlevaag.

PLAYER 6. The great singer Achille Papin of Paris had sung for a week at the Royal Opera of Stockholm and carried away his audience there as everywhere.

(PAPIN sings before an audience made up of the ensemble, who are outrageously moved—some fainting, others throwing flowers, etc. After a lengthy curtain call, PAPIN retreats to his dressing room.)

DRESSER. *Monsieur* Papin, you were brilliant, as always.

PAPIN. Only so?

DRESSER. Your singing is perfection itself.

PAPIN. Ah, I see. Slippers. How many were there in the audience tonight?

DRESSER. Oh, hundreds, I should think.

PAPIN. *Hundreds?*

DRESSER. Thousands. Many, many thousands. Here are your slippers, *monsieur*.

PAPIN. I am going to die. And so are you. What shall we do?
Tell me! Tell me now! What is the point of it all?

(There is a knock at the door.

DRESSER opens the door to find a LADY OF THE SWEDISH COURT, an aristocratic woman, flushed with hope.)

LADY OF THE COURT. Where is he? Where is the great Papin? I must see him. I must see him now!

DRESSER. Who shall I say calls?

LADY OF THE COURT. Tell him, a lady of the court and humble worshipper of his great gift.

DRESSER. *Monsieur*, there is a lady of the court and a humble—

LADY OF THE COURT *(forcing her way in)*. You are supreme among artists. No! Among men. Your music—your voice, has rendered me reborn.

PAPIN. I have no doubt, dear lady, that my gifts have touched you. But you are mistaken on one point. I do not know the secret of rebirth. And so I suffer, as I inch, every day, every moment, towards death.

LADY OF THE COURT. My dear, sweet, suffering man. Have you no idea of the gift you have bestowed tonight? You are a genius. An alchemist. A mighty God!

PAPIN. All I know is that life is racing faster than any music I could ever sing. It is only a matter of time before my “gift” is a painful memory—a worthless phantom.

LADY OF THE COURT. *Monsieur*, this melancholy spirit must be remedied. Perhaps your servant would be so kind as to leave us alone.

(She starts to unlace her dress.)

PAPIN. No, no, no!!! I haven't the constitution anymore for pleasures of the flesh. It's gone. All gone! Is this some deliberate form of torture? Some reminder of my slow demise? I am in a nightmare! I must insist that you leave. Leave me to my fate!

LADY OF THE COURT. I—

PAPIN. Go!

LADY OF THE COURT (*backs slowly out of the room while arranging her clothes*). Then I will bid you adieu. Perhaps, on your way back to Paris, you might like to take a tour of our sublime Norwegian coast.

PAPIN. Perhaps.

LADY OF THE COURT. The North is remarkable in its wildness, and the little towns provide a perfect atmosphere for ... rejuvenation. Berlevaag, for example, is at the very edge of the world ...

(*She exits.*)

PAPIN. Pack my bags for Berlevaag!

PLAYER 5. And so the great opera singer Achille Papin set out—

ALL. For Berlevaag.

(*The ensemble forms the marketplace. Life unfolds, and no one pays any mind to the stranger; PAPIN. He finally tries singing a few notes, but no one cares.*)

PAPIN (*to the audience*). I am falling. Falling deeper into melancholy. Tell me the truth: Am I at the end of my career? Am I an old man?

PLAYER 6. He felt strangely small in the sublime surroundings. Then, one Sunday, when he could think of nothing else to do, Papin went to church.

(PHILIPPA is alone, singing. Her clear soprano rings through the space.)

PAPIN. Almighty God! Thy power is without end and thy mercy reacheth unto the clouds. And here is a *prima donna* who will lay Paris at her feet.

(PAPIN knocks at the door of the yellow house. The DEAN answers it.)

PAPIN (*cont'd*). Good afternoon. I am Achille Papin.

DEAN. Good afternoon.

PAPIN. The opera singer.

DEAN. I see.

PAPIN. From Paris.

DEAN. Ah. You are familiar, perhaps, with the work of the great French Lutheran theologian, Lefevre d'Etaples?

PAPIN. Lutheran, *non*. I am a Catholic, *monsieur*.

DEAN. A *Roman* Catholic?

PAPIN. I am staying in Berlevaag for my health. I heard your daughter sing in church today, and I must tell you that her talent is very rare. I would be honored to take her on as a pupil. And you will see that with some instruction she will sing even more gloriously than before.

DEAN. Yes, but to whose glory, sir?

PAPIN. To ... God's of course.

DEAN. Which God?

PAPIN. The God you worship in your fine church. He will be exalted beyond measure when she sings there.

DEAN. But we are—

PAPIN. The God of snowy summits, brilliant wildflowers, and white Nordic nights! I give you my word. I give you more than my word. I give you my life, my future, my hope for mankind. I give you the majesty of the mountains and the mystery of the ocean. I give you ...

(PAPIN continues his spiel sotto voce.)

PLAYER 5. And, as nobody could long resist Achille Papin when he had really set his heart on a matter ...

PLAYER 1. In the end, the father gave his consent.

PLAYERS 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6. Singing lesson number one!

(PAPIN and PHILIPPA are by the piano. PAPIN sings a phrase. PHILIPPA repeats it. They do this again and again, until PAPIN stops, overwhelmed.)

PAPIN. You have the voice of an angel.

PHILIPPA. Thank you. Your jacket is very smart.

PAPIN. Do you have any musical training at all?

PHILIPPA. I sing. I sing for God.

PAPIN. Extraordinary. From where we left off—

(He resumes the exercise, and she repeats as before. Their eyes close.)

PAPIN *(cont'd)*. I have been wrong in believing that I was growing old! The world will once more believe in miracles when you and I sing together!

PHILIPPA. You are a believer, then?

PAPIN. I am.

(PHILIPPA joins her father and MARTINE, who are seated at the dining table in the yellow house.)

DEAN. How was your singing lesson today, my dear?

PHILIPPA. Excellent, Father. *Monsieur* Papin believes my singing will lead to miracles some day.

DEAN. Thank the Lord, my child, for your many gifts.

PLAYERS 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6. Singing lesson number two!

(This time, PHILIPPA and PAPIN sing alternating phrases, but instead of repeating him, she responds, musically, to what she has heard. PAPIN swoons.)

PAPIN. That is enough for today. I need to rest. Dear girl, fate has gotten the best of me. I thought my life was over, but it has only begun. I am thrilled. I am exhausted. I need a warm bath and a nap.

PHILIPPA. I'll go.

PAPIN. Wait! One more exercise. One more before you go.

PHILIPPA. I brought you some cloud berries.

PAPIN. Put them on the desk.

(She does. He launches back into the music. They respond to each other musically, as before, only with more passion and range.)

PAPIN (*cont'd*). You will rise like a star above any diva of the past or present! The emperor and empress, the princes, great ladies and *bels esprits* of Paris will listen to you and shed tears. The common people, too, will worship you, and you will bring consolation and strength to the wronged and oppressed.

PHILIPPA. *Monsieur* Papin, I fear you flatter me.

PAPIN. I would never flatter you. Not if my life were at stake. Not if—

PHILIPPA. Do you think I could serve God with my voice?

PAPIN. I know it. And when you leave the grand opera upon my arm, the crowd will unharness your horses and draw you yourselves to the *Cafe Anglais*, where a magnificent dinner will await you.

PHILIPPA. We could go to Paris together, you and I. And God.

PAPIN. God is most welcome. I would not leave him behind.

PHILIPPA. Father can stay. And sister, too. But the Lord binds me to you. And you to me.

PAPIN. How rare and magnificent you are ...

PHILIPPA. It's dark.

(PHILIPPA starts to leave.)

PAPIN. One moment, my soprano of the snow. Take this and prepare it for next week. It is Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. You will sing the part of Zerlina and I, of course, will sing Don Giovanni. Farewell, until we meet again.

(PHILIPPA, MARTINE and the DEAN are at the dining table again.)

DEAN. How was your singing lesson today, my dear?

PHILIPPA. Very good, Father.

(PHILIPPA rises and begins to clear the table.)

DEAN. Does *Monsieur* Papin still believe that you will sing ever more beautifully to the Glory of God?

PHILIPPA. Philippa did not repeat *Monsieur* Papin's Parisian prospects to her father or her sister. And this was the first time in her life that she had had a secret from them.

(PHILIPPA exits.)

PLAYERS 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6. Singing lesson number three!

(PAPIN and PHILIPPA sing the duet of the first act of Don Giovanni—the “seduction duet.” As the last note dies away, he draws her toward him and kisses her. He lets her go, and they stand in silence for a long moment. PHILIPPA runs home.

PHILIPPA, MARTINE and the DEAN are at the dining table.)

DEAN. How was your—?

PHILIPPA. Father, I will not have any more singing lessons. Please write and tell *Monsieur Papin*.

(Pause.)

DEAN. God's paths run across the sea and snowy mountains, my child, where man's eye sees no track.

(He goes into the next room and writes the letter.)

PHILIPPA. Never a word of him, sister. Understood?

(The DEAN hands the letter to the POSTMAN, who delivers it to PAPIN.)

PAPIN *(reading the letter)*. I have been wrong. My day is over. Never again shall I be the divine Papin. And this poor weedy garden of the world has lost its nightingale.

(Pause.)

PAPIN (*cont'd*). I wonder what is the matter with that hussy? Is it possible that I *kissed* her? I have lost my life for a kiss. And I have no remembrance at all of the kiss. Don Giovanni kissed Zerlina, and Achille Papin pays for it! Such is the fate of the artist.

MARTINE. In the dean's house, Martine felt that the matter was deeper than it looked, and searched her sister's face. For a moment, slightly trembling, she too imagined that the Roman Catholic gentleman might have tried to kiss Philippa. But she did not imagine that her sister might have been surprised and frightened by something in her own nature.

PLAYER 4. Achille Papin took the first boat from Berlevaag.

(A fog horn sounds.)

A LETTER FROM PARIS

PLAYER 3. Many years went by. The dean ...

PLAYER 1. Had died long ago ...

PLAYER 3. And Martine and Philippa ...

MARTINE & PHILIPPA. Faithfully carried on his work.

(The sisters set to work assembling baskets.)

PLAYER 3. One rainy June night ...

PLAYERS 2, 3 & 4. Of 1871 ...

(We hear the sound of rain.)

PLAYER 6. The bellrope of the yellow house ...

PLAYER 6. Was pulled ...

PLAYER 5. Violently ...

PLAYER 6. Three times.

(A bell is rung.

BABETTE, a massive woman, nearly dead with exhaustion, advances onto the stage, carrying a bundle under her arm. The stranger then fumbles in her wet clothes and produces a letter, which she hands to MARTINE. She stands for a moment and then falls down in a faint.)

PHILIPPA. Can you hear us?

(BABETTE revives, barely.)

MARTINE *(opening the letter)*. This has our names on it.

PHILIPPA. Read, sister.

MARTINE. It's in French.

PHILIPPA. Hurry!

MARTINE. "Ladies," exclamation point. "Do you remember me? Will the memory of a Frenchman's devotion bend your hearts to save the life of a Frenchwoman? The bearer of this letter, Madame Babette Hersant, like my beautiful empress herself, has had to flee from Paris. Civil war has raged in our streets. French hands have shed French blood. The noble Communards, standing up for the rights of man, have been crushed and annihilated. Madame Hersant's husband and son have been shot. She herself was arrested as a Pétroleuse and has narrowly escaped the bloodstained hands of General Galliffet. She has lost all she has and dares not remain in France.

(PAPIN appears. He takes the letter from MARTINE.)

PAPIN. "Knowing that I was once a visitor to your magnificent country, she came to me, asked me if there be any good people there and begged me to supply her with a letter to them. The words "good people" immediately brought

before my eyes your picture, sacred to my heart. I send her to you. How she is to get from Christiania to Berlevaag I know not, having forgotten the map of Norway. But she is a Frenchwoman, and you will find that in her misery, she has still got resourcefulness, majesty and true stoicism. I envy her in her despair: she is to see your faces. As you receive her mercifully, send a merciful thought back to France.”

(He approaches PHILIPPA.)

PAPIN *(cont'd)*. “For fifteen years, Miss Philippa, I have grieved that your voice should never fill the Grand Opera of Paris. When tonight I think of you, no doubt surrounded by a gay and loving family, and of myself: gray, lonely, forgotten by those who once applauded and adored me, I feel that you may have chosen the better life. What is fame? What is glory? The grave awaits us all.”

(He comes closer.)

PAPIN *(cont'd)*. And yet my lost Zerlina, and yet, soprano of the snow. As I write this, I feel that the grave is not the end. In paradise, I shall hear your voice again. There you will sing without fears or scruples. There you will be the great artist that God meant you to be. Ah! How you will enchant the angels.

Babette can cook.”

(PAPIN hands the letter back to MARTINE ... and disappears.)

MARTINE. “Your friend, Achille Papin.” And there is a post script.

PHILIPPA. What does it say?

MARTINE. I cannot read it, sister. It's written in a language that I do not speak.

(She gives the letter to PHILIPPA, who sounds out the last two bars of the duet between Don Giovanni and Zerlina.)

MARTINE (*cont'd*). Madame Hersant, we are simple people of simple means. We could not possibly afford the services of an experienced housekeeper such as yourself.

PHILIPPA. You are welcome to rest here for as long as you would like.

BABETTE. I serve *Monsieur* Papin's good people for nothing.

PHILIPPA. But, you see, we couldn't possibly—

BABETTE. I serve nobody else.

MARTINE. Madame Hersant, you are exhausted. I'm sure that after—

BABETTE. If you send me away, I must die.

(BABETTE picks up her carpet bag and walks into the kitchen.)

STILL LIFE

PLAYER 3. Babette had arrived haggard and wild-eyed like a hunted animal, but in her new, friendly surroundings she soon acquired the appearance of a respectable and trusted servant.

PLAYER 1. She had appeared to be a beggar; she turned out to be a conqueror.

(A rooster crows. The sisters wake to find BABETTE standing at attention, wearing her apron.)

MARTINE. Her mistresses had trembled a little at the idea of receiving a papist under their roof. But they did not like to worry a hard-trying fellow-creature with catechization.

PHILIPPA. Neither were they quite sure of their French.

MARTINE. Did you sleep well?

BABETTE. *Oui*, my ladies. *Merci*.

PHILIPPA. We are so glad.

MARTINE. May today be the first of many happy days in our employ.

(ASTRID chases ERNA to the door of the yellow house. Both women, winded, pound on it, ERNA with her fists and ASTRID with her cane.)

ERNA. We'll get this straightened out, goddamn it, once and for all!

ASTRID. You lie, sister. And you slander the Lord in the same breath.

ERNA. Goddamn you to hell!

ASTRID. God forgive her. She knows not what she says.

ERNA *(still banging on the door)*. Open up!

(MARTINE and PHILIPPA answer the door.)

ERNA *(cont'd)*. She's at it again. I have five pounds of sugar missing from the shop. Five pounds of it!

ASTRID. Sisters, you know I can't see a yard in front of my face—

ERNA. Bloody Christ! My sugar is gone!

ASTRID. Listen to her words. The devil has taken up residence there!

PHILIPPA. Ladies, we must ask you to—

ASTRID. Your father would have put this right. He knew sin when he heard it, and he knew what to do.

ERNA. Her Jocham has put on four stone in a month. That's evidence enough!

MARTINE. Sisters we have a visitor.

ASTRID. Visitor?

PHILIPPA. Babette arrived from France last night. And we are honored that she has ... chosen ... to work for us.

ASTRID. Pleased to meet you.

ERNA. We'll leave you be. From France, you say?

ASTRID. That's what she said.

MARTINE. Gentleness, sisters. Trust in each other, and the Lord. Good morning.

ERNA. Good morning.

ASTRID. GOOD MORNING!

ERNA. She's French, not deaf!

(ASTRID and ERNA exit.)

MARTINE. We want to express our deepest condolences for the loss—of your husband and son.

PHILIPPA. What sister means to say is that we want to express our deepest condolences for the ... loss ... of your husband and son. We can only imagine the grief that you carry in your heart.

BABETTE. What will you, ladies. It is fate.

(Pause.)

MARTINE. Well, then. Let us begin.

PLAYER 1. They had distrusted *Monsieur* Papin's assertion that Babette could cook.

PLAYER 3. In France, they knew, people ate frogs.

MARTINE. You will find that French luxury and extravagance have no place in our home or among our brethren. We are poor—

PHILIPPA. Though not in spirit. And luxurious fare is sinful, after all.

(BABETTE stares at them. And waits.)

MARTINE. It is the soup pails and baskets for the needy that are important. They are the essence of our daily life and work.

BABETTE. My ladies. As a girl, I was cook to an old priest who was a saint.

MARTINE. Upon this, the sisters resolved to surpass the French priest in asceticism.

PHILIPPA. Babette, we will need to teach you to cook.

BABETTE. But of course. I am all hearing.

PHILIPPA. It may be difficult at first—

MARTINE. But with practice, it will become second nature.

BABETTE. *Bien sûr.*

MARTINE. We will begin with the bread and ale soup.

PHILIPPA. I think the split cod first, sister. It's simpler. No need to overwhelm.

MARTINE. True, sister. Thank you. So you split the cod, you remove the guts, and you boil it.

(Silence.)

BABETTE. For how long?

(The sisters look at each other, wondering.)

PHILIPPA. Till it is good and cooked.

MARTINE. Agreed.

BABETTE. I understand, my ladies. What then?

PHILIPPA. Then it will be finished and ready to serve. The serving dishes are here ... in a bit of a jumble, I'm afraid.

But you should find what you need.

BABETTE. Indeed.

MARTINE. Do you have any questions?

BABETTE. *Non*.

MARTINE. Then let us move on to the soup. Whatever bread is left from the week gets torn into pieces—

PHILIPPA. Like so.

MARTINE. Then we pour equal parts water and ale over it—

PHILIPPA. Into this bowl.

MARTINE. Let it sit overnight. In the morning, you strain it—

PHILIPPA. Through this sieve—

MARTINE. Until it is soup-like. You may then flavor it with a little salt.

PHILIPPA. Then cook it down. All the way down until it just comes off the spoon.

MARTINE. Nothing goes to waste.

BABETTE. “Nothing goes to waste.”

MARTINE. It will feed ten people—

PHILIPPA. Or more—

MARTINE. A potful of this soup.

ALL. During the demonstration, the Frenchwoman's face became absolutely expressionless.

PLAYER 3. Within a week, Babette cooked a split cod and a bread-and-ale soup as well as anybody—

ALL. Born and bred in Berlevaag.

PLAYER 6. Better!

PLAYER 5. Babette's quiet countenance and her steady, deep gaze had magnetic qualities. Under her eyes, things moved, noiselessly, into their proper places.

(As BABETTE speaks, she ladles soup into jars.)

BABETTE. *Mon cher Richard. Mon petit fils. Ma maison. Mon travail. Chaque jour sans ennui. Le ciel au dessus de Paris. Les parfums dans ma cuisine. Le vin. L'amour. Mon esprit. Dieu. Mon Dieu.*

(PHILIPPA and MARTINE enter and hear BABETTE's recollection.)

PHILIPPA. Do you have anyone left in France?

BABETTE. *Mais, oui!* I have a friend in Paris, a very faithful friend who renews for me my ticket in the French lottery every year. Sometime, I may win the *grand prix* of ten thousand *francs*.

PHILIPPA. At that, they felt that their cook's old carpet bag was made from a magic carpet; at any given moment she might mount it and be carried off, back to Paris.

(The sisters exit the kitchen.)

PHILIPPA (*cont'd*). Do you think it is likely that Babette could win those ten thousand *francs*?

MARTINE. I think it is more likely to snow in August, sister.

PHILIPPA. My heart sank when she said it.

MARTINE. Let us not think of it.

PLAYER 2. The world outside the yellow house also came to acknowledge Babette's excellence.

PLAYER 1. The refugee never learned to speak the language of her new country, but in her broken Norwegian she beat down the prices of Berlevaag's—

ALL. Flintiest tradesman.

PLAYER 5. She was held in awe on the quay and in the marketplace.

(We are in the marketplace. There is an improvised hubbub of buying and selling, trading and gossip all around.)

ESPEN. Miss Babette! *Bonjour!*

BABETTE. *Et a vous, monsieur!* How are you?

ESPEN. Wonderful! Superb! My leg is all healed, if you can believe it. All those years with the gout, and now I'm walking like a young man. I think your miracle baskets have made me well!

(He whispers.)

ESPEN *(cont'd)*. I especially like those buttery biscuits you put in the bottom of the basket.

BABETTE *(whispering back conspiratorially)*. *Les croissants.*

DAGFINN THE FISHMONGER. Get your fresh cod!
Codfish for sale!

ALF. Two cod. Good sized. And take off the scales.

DAGFINN THE FISHMONGER. I don't sell to thieves.

ALF. I'm no thief. I've got money here, and I'm buying my fish.

DAGFINN THE FISHMONGER. If I catch you swiping timber from my shed one more time— *(Attempting to suppress his rage.)* We had an agreement. You got what you paid for. Now go back to your half-built barn.

ALF. I have no idea what you speak of.

DAGFINN THE FISHMONGER. The hell you don't.

ALF. Give me that fish, or I'll take it myself!

BABETTE. Gentlemen. Good morning.

DAGFINN THE FISHMONGER. Miss Babette. That'll be two kroner, brother.

ALF. I'll be getting home.

(ALF exits.)

DAGFINN THE FISHMONGER. I'm at your service, Miss Babette. And let me warn you prices are firm today.

BABETTE. *Ah oui, monsieur*, but is the fish?

(Pause.)

BABETTE *(cont'd)*. The usual, *s'il vous plait*.

DAGFINN THE FISHMONGER. Here you go. With a couple of extra heads for your soup.

BABETTE. That is our little secret, *non*?

(She arrives at the next stall, where the negotiation moves like lightning.)

HENRICK THE BREAD SELLER. A pleasure to see you, Babette.

BABETTE. And you, *monsieur*. I need two loaves of bread. What can you offer for the discount?

HENRICK THE BREAD SELLER. I'm afraid I can't.

BABETTE. They do not need to be fresh.

(Pause.)

BABETTE (*cont'd*). A *petit* discount.

HENRICK THE BREAD SELLER. I've got to make a living, Babette.

BABETTE. My ladies will expect their bread this week.

HENRICK THE BREAD SELLER. If I could, I would.

BABETTE (*starts to leave*). We will do without the bread.

HENRICK THE BREAD SELLER. Perhaps—

BABETTE. I do not mind, but my ladies need their strength.

HENRICK THE BREAD SELLER. Fine. Two. This one, and the one on the end.

BABETTE. Middle left—no, yes, that one. *Bon*.

HENRICK THE BREAD SELLER. You are a wonder, Babette.

BABETTE. *À bientôt*.

(The ensemble forms the church space as PHILIPPA sings a hymn.)

PLAYER 4. In the course of time not a few of the brotherhood included Babette's name in their prayers ...

PLAYER 3. And thanked God for the speechless stranger ...

PLAYER 1. The dark Martha in the house of their two fair Marys.

PLAYER 2. Praise the Lord. sisters, here are three fresh eggs—one for each of you—Babette, too.

PLAYER 3. Now let us pray before God and each other.

PLAYER 5. God bless Aunt Hilda and Uncle Sven.

PLAYER 4. God bless baby Marga, who is ailing still. And the sunshine, of course. And our two new hens.

PLAYER 6. God bless those among us who have sinned.

PLAYER 1. And those who know themselves innocent.

PLAYER 2. God bless Babette. She may be a foreigner, Lord, but bless her, especially when she grieves.

(The sisters arrive home from church. BABETTE is in the kitchen, immersed in a heavy black book. The following lines may be layered or interwoven.)

MARTINE. Babette ...

(Silence.)

PLAYER 5. It happened when Martine and Philippa spoke to Babette that they would get no answer.

PHILIPPA. Babette ...

(Silence.)

PLAYER 3. And would wonder if she had even heard what they said.

BABETTE. *Prenez une tortue; attachez-la par les nageoire de derrière; coupez-lui la tête ...*

PLAYER 1. They would find her in the kitchen, lost in the study of a heavy black book ...

BABETTE. *Coupez la tortue en quatre morceaux.*

PLAYER 6. Or she would sit immovable on the three-legged kitchen chair, her strong hands in her lap and her dark eyes wide open, as enigmatical and fatal as Pythia upon her tripod.

(As BABETTE continues reading the recipe, each PLAYER picks out a word from it and quietly, intermittently explores the word—repeating it, deciphering it, savoring the sound.)

BABETTE. *Séparez-en la chair et la graisse; faites blanchir, ainsi que les nageoires et les ailerons. Le tout blanchi, remettez sur le feu, avec eau, légumes, aromates et un peu de vin blanc ...*

PLAYER 4. At such moments they realized that ...

ALL. Babette was deep ...

PLAYER 4. And that in the soundings of her being there were passions, there were memories and longings of which they knew nothing at all.

BABETTE (*closing the book*). My ladies. The floors are washed, and the ironing, it is complete. I would like, with your permission, to repair the curtain over the sitting room window where it has become ...

(She searches for the word.)

PHILIPPA. Frayed.

BABETTE. Yes. Frayed.

MARTINE. I hadn't noticed. But I suppose it ought to be mended—if you have the time.

BABETTE. I have the time.

PHILIPPA. What a beautiful book.

MARTINE (*takes PHILIPPA aside*). Indeed, sister, that is most likely a religious book.

PLAYER 6. A little cold shiver ran through them, and in their hearts they thought—

PLAYER 1. Perhaps she had indeed been a—

ALL. *Pétroleuse*.

PHILIPPA. Babette, you were remembered today at church. Your husband and son, as well.

BABETTE. What will you, ladies. It is fate. And now I must check on the soup.

PLAYER 2. Babette remained in the house of the dean's daughters for twelve years.

PLAYER 1. Until we tasted forgiveness.

PLAYER 4. Until we banished regret.

PLAYER 3. Until the snow fell and fell.

PLAYER 6. Until the time ...

ALL. Of this tale.

BABETTE'S GOOD LUCK

(The sisters are in the sitting room. PHILIPPA darns socks while MARTINE reads her prayer book. There is a knock at the door of the yellow house. MARTINE answers it.)

POSTMAN. Letter for Madame Babette Hersant.

MARTINE. For Babette?

POSTMAN. Does a Babette Hersant live here?

MARTINE. She does. *(To PHILIPPA.)* Sister—there is a letter for Babette. *(Taking the letter.)* A letter from France!

(PHILIPPA comes to the door and they inspect the letter together.)

PHILIPPA *(to the POSTMAN)*. Has one of her family died?

POSTMAN. Couldn't say.

MARTINE. We thought they had all perished during the war.

PHILIPPA. You see, in twelve years she has received no letters.

POSTMAN. I just deliver them, miss.

MARTINE. It's *mysterious*.

POSTMAN. Fancy that. Well, I'm off.

PHILIPPA. Many thanks to you, sir.

MARTINE. Many thanks.

(The POSTMAN exits.)

MARTINE *(cont'd)*. Sister, this is Babette's letter. It is not for our eyes.

(They go to the kitchen together, holding the letter at a slight distance.)

PHILIPPA. Babette, there is a letter here for you.

(BABETTE slowly puts down her washing, dries her hands, and takes the letter. She opens it with a knife, sits down on a stool, and reads.)

BABETTE. My number has come up in the French lottery. I have won ten thousand *francs*.

(A long silence. Then each sister approaches BABETTE and presses her hand in theirs.)

BABETTE *(cont'd)*. My ladies, you are trembling.

PHILIPPA. Well, we have never pressed the hand—

MARTINE. Nor even been in the presence of—

PHILIPPA. Someone who has just come into possession of ...

PHILIPPA & MARTINE. Ten thousand *francs*.

PLAYER 6. During the following days, the sisters announced the news to their friends with joyous faces. But it did them good to see these friends' faces grow sad as they learned that Babette was now free to return to France.

PLAYER 5. Indeed, indeed, lotteries were ungodly affairs.

(In the dining room of the yellow house, BABETTE, MARTINE and PHILIPPA sit at the long table counting piles of money.)

PHILIPPA. Nine thousand, eight hundred ...

MARTINE. Nine thousand, nine hundred ...

PHILIPPA. Ten thousand *francs*.

BABETTE. *Voila.*

PHILIPPA. You will need a box to keep all of these bills in.

MARTINE. I know the one.

(She exits.)

PHILIPPA. Babette. We are both so pleased for you, and yet—

(MARTINE enters with a box and presents it to BABETTE.)

MARTINE. This belonged to Mother. With sister's permission, we would like you to have it.

(BABETTE places the bills into the box, closes the lid and starts to leave.)

PHILIPPA. Dare we hope that you will remain here for the celebration of our father's one hundredth birthday on the—

MARTINE & PHILIPPA. Fifteenth of December?

PLAYER 1. His daughters had long been looking forward to this day.

PLAYER 2. It had been to them a sad and incomprehensible thing ...

PLAYER 4. That in this last year, discord and dissension had been raising their heads ...

ALL. In his flock.

BABETTE. My ladies, with all the talking in the town, the occasion of your father's birthday has been much in my mind. I will be honored to be present for that great occasion.

PLAYER 3. As the birthday drew nearer, Martine and Philippa felt the responsibility growing heavier. Would their ever-faithful father look down to his daughters and call them—

ALL. Unjust stewards?

PLAYER 5. Between them, they talked matters over and repeated their father's saying ...

PHILIPPA & MARTINE. That God's paths were running even across the salt sea and the snow-clad mountains, where man's eye sees no track.

BABETTE. My dear ladies, I have a humble favor to ask. I would like to cook a celebration dinner on that day.

PHILIPPA. That is kind, Babette. But, in truth, we had not intended to have any dinner at all.

MARTINE. A plain supper with a cup of coffee is the most sumptuous meal to which we have ever asked any guest to sit down.

PHILIPPA. And even that is more than we intended for December fifteenth.

ALL. But Babette's dark eyes were as eager and pleading as a dog's.

MARTINE. They agreed ...

PHILIPPA. To let her have ...

MARTINE. Her way.

BABETTE. And I would like to be allowed to cook a French dinner.

ALL. A real French dinner.

PHILIPPA. French?

MARTINE. I'm afraid we can't.

PLAYER 2. The very strangeness of the request disarmed them.

MARTINE & PHILIPPA. They did not like the idea.

PLAYER 3. They felt that they did not know what it might imply.

PHILIPPA & MARTINE. But they had no arguments wherewith to meet the proposition of cooking a real French dinner.

BABETTE. Thank you! My ladies, I have one final wish. Allow me to pay for the dinner myself.

PHILIPPA & MARTINE. No, Babette!

MARTINE. How could she imagine such a thing? Did she believe that they would allow her to spend her precious money on food and drink?

PHILIPPA. Or on them?

PLAYER 6. Babette took a step forward.

PLAYER 4. There was something formidable in the move ...

PLAYER 5. Like a wave rising.

PLAYER 2. Had she stepped forth like this in 1871, to plant a red flag on a barricade?

BABETTE. Ladies! Have I ever, during this twelve years, asked a favor? *Non!* And why not? Ladies, you who say your prayers every day, can you imagine what it means to a human heart to have no prayer to make? What has Babette had to pray for? Nothing! Tonight she has a prayer to make from the depth of her heart. Do you not feel tonight, my ladies, that it becomes you to grant it her, as God has granted you your own?

(Count to three.)

MARTINE & PHILIPPA. We consent.

PLAYER 1. Their consent in the end completely changed Babette. They saw that as a young woman she had been beautiful. And they wondered whether in this hour they themselves had not, for the very first time, become the “good people” of Achille Papin’s letter.

THE TURTLE

PLAYER 4. In November, Babette went on a journey.

(BABETTE is in the sitting room standing before PHILIPPA and MARTINE. Her carpet bag is at her feet.)

BABETTE. Ladies, I have preparations to make. I must see my nephew. I will need a leave of ten days.

MARTINE. Of course. You must put your affairs in order.

PHILIPPA. You must make plans for your future.

BABETTE. I am your humble servant. Miss Philippa, please do not cry. *À bientôt.*

(BABETTE picks up her carpet bag and exits.)

PLAYER 2. After ten days, Babette came back to the yellow house.

MARTINE. Did you get things arranged as you wished?

BABETTE. Everything is arranged.

PHILIPPA. You saw your nephew?

BABETTE. *Mais oui.* I gave him a list of goods to bring. Excuse me, ladies, I must shake out this cloth. You produced many crumbs while I was gone.

(BABETTE exits with the tablecloth.)

MARTINE. A list of *goods*?

(From a distance, they watch BABETTE shaking out the billowing cloth.)

PHILIPPA. Can you imagine her setting fire to a house?

BABETTE. I can hear you, my ladies!

PLAYER 1. One December day ...

PLAYER 4. Babette.

PLAYER 5. Made.

BABETTE. An announcement.

(The sisters are in the sitting room, knitting and feeding the stove. BABETTE enters.)

BABETTE (*cont'd*). My ladies, I have excellent news. The goods, they have come by boat to Berlevaag from Paris.

PLAYER 4. By this time, Babette, like the bottled demon of the fairy story, had swelled and grown to such dimensions that her mistresses felt small before her.

PLAYER 3. They now saw the French dinner coming upon them ...

PLAYER 1. A thing of incalculable nature and range.

PLAYER 5. But they had never before broken a promise.

PLAYER 6. They gave themselves into their cook's hands.

BABETTE. *Mesdames*, I have engaged a boy with a wheelbarrow to have the goods conveyed from the harbor to the house.

MARTINE. *This* house?

(We hear the sound of a crate of glass bottles being wheeled nearer and nearer the house. There is a knock at the door.)

BABETTE. *J'arrive!*

(BABETTE opens the door. LEIF, a red-haired boy, wheels in a crate, which he unloads. BABETTE takes a bottle out of the crate to inspect it.)

MARTINE. What is in this bottle, Babette? *(In a low voice.)*
Not wine?

BABETTE. Wine, *madame!* No, *madame.* It is a *Clos Vougeot mille neuf cent quarante six!* From Philippe, in—

ALL. *Rue Montorgueil!*

PLAYER 3. Martine had never suspected that wines could have names to them—

ALL. And was put to silence.

(BABETTE leads the ensemble in a COOKING DANCE.

MARTINE crosses all the way downstage and addresses the audience in secret.)

MARTINE. Late in the evening, I opened the door to a ring, and was once more faced with the wheelbarrow. The red-haired boy grinned at me as he lifted a big, undefinable object from the barrow. In the light of the lamp, it looked like some greenish-black stone, but when set down on the kitchen floor it suddenly shot out a snake-like head and moved it slightly from side to side. I had seen pictures of tortoises, and had even as a child owned a pet tortoise, but this thing was monstrous in size and terrible to behold. I dared not tell my sister what I had seen. I passed an almost sleepless night. I thought of my father and felt that on his very birthday we were lending his house to a witches sabbath.

(A rooster crows.)

PLAYER 1. Early in the morning she got up ...

PLAYER 2. Put on her gray cloak ...

PLAYER 3. And went out into the dark street.

PLAYER 4. She walked from house to house, opened her heart to her brothers and sisters, and confessed her guilt.

PLAYER 3. Sister, speak your mind.

PLAYER 1. We have known you since you were a little girl.

MARTINE. We meant no harm. Philippa and I only wanted to grant Babette a prayer.

PLAYER 6. A worthy wish.

MARTINE. But this sin has no escape.

PLAYER 3. What sin, sister?

MARTINE. We have turned our father's birthday into a gluttonous ordeal. We have given Babette permission to cook a French dinner. With wine. And a turtle!

ALL. A turtle?

PLAYER 2. Let us pray.

(They do.)

PLAYER 4. What would the dean say?

PLAYER 6. He would say, "God's paths run across the sea and the snowy mountains, where man's eyes see no track."

MARTINE. I ask your forgiveness for whatever you might encounter at the birthday celebration on December fifteenth. We never meant to lead you into sinfulness. Pray for all of us, including our beloved Babette.

(She exits.)

PLAYER 1. Let us promise one another, for our little sisters' sake, that on the great day we will be silent upon all matters of food and drink.

PLAYER 4. Nothing that might be set before us, be it even frogs or snails, shall wring a word from our lips.

PLAYER 5. But brother, the tongue boasteth great things. The tongue can no man tame.

PLAYER 2. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

PLAYER 6. Listen here. On the fifteenth of December, we will cleanse our tongues of all taste and purify them of all delight or disgust of the senses. We will keep and preserve them for the higher things of praise and thanksgiving.

(They shake each other's hands.)

PREPARATIONS

PLAYER 3. On the morning of the dean's birthday celebration, it began to snow. The white flakes fell fast and thick, and the small windowpanes of the yellow house were pasted with snow.

(MARTINE and PHILIPPA are in the sitting room, kneeling in prayer. BABETTE and her young assistant work in the kitchen.)

BABETTE *(entering, followed closely by the boy)*. Set the chairs in the dining room. Then fetch eleven crystal goblets and the smaller glasses with stems.

LEIF. The very small ones?

BABETTE. With stems.

LEIF. I folded the napkins—the *serviettes*—just like you said.

BABETTE. Good. *Vite, vite!* There is a list a mile long.

(The sound of a horse-drawn carriage is heard. MARTINE looks through the window to see who it is.)

MARTINE. It's old Mrs. Loewenhielm's carriage.

PHILIPPA. But the table's not even set.

(She opens the door to find a shivering young HORSE GROOM standing on the doorstep.)

GROOM. Good morning, miss. I've come from Mrs. Loewenhielm's with a letter for the mistress of the house.

MARTINE & PHILIPPA. We are she.

GROOM *(hands PHILIPPA the letter)*. Mrs. Loewenhielm requests the favor of a reply, if you don't mind, misses. In writing, that is.

PHILIPPA *(reading)*. Mrs. Loewenhielm sends word that—

MRS. LOEWENHIELM. Even at the age of ninety, and having lost all sense of smell and taste, neither her infirmity nor the sledge journey would keep her from doing honor to the dean's memory tonight.

PHILIPPA. It seems that her nephew, General Lorens Loewenhielm, has unexpectedly come to visit.

(She reads more.)

PHILIPPA *(cont'd)*. The general has spoken with veneration of Father—whose teachings he remembers well—and Mrs. Loewenhielm begs permission to bring him with her. It will do him good, she writes, for the “dear boy” seems to be in somewhat low spirits.

MARTINE. He is most welcome.

PHILIPPA. Sister, a written reply is requested. Will you do the honor?

MARTINE. Certainly.

(She goes to the sitting room to write the reply.)

PHILIPPA. Is the general visiting alone?

GROOM. That's right.

PHILIPPA. Are you sure?

GROOM. Very sure, miss. They say his wife don't much like the countryside. And with all the snow we've had, I can't say I blame her. But don't worry, miss. I'll drive the horses through tonight and get the general and Mrs. L. here in time for your party.

MARTINE (*entering with the letter*). It is not a party.

(*She hands it to him, and he exits. BABETTE enters.*)

PHILIPPA. Babette, we will be twelve for dinner tonight.

BABETTE. You do not possess enough dining chairs. So I will transport the sofa into the dining room. Who is the additional guest?

MARTINE. Our friend, General Lorens Loewenhielm, has sent word that he is in town.

BABETTE. A general?

PHILIPPA. Yes, indeed. And he lived in Paris for several years.

BABETTE. I see. My ladies, never worry. There will be food enough.

(*BABETTE exits.*)

PLAYER 2. The hostesses made their little preparations in the sitting room. They dared not set foot in the kitchen, for the dark woman and the red-haired boy, like some witch with her familiar spirit, had taken ...

ALL. Possession of these regions. The ladies could not tell what fires had been burning or what cauldrons bubbling there from before daybreak.

(The sisters sit, hands folded, and wait.)

THE GENERAL DRESSES FOR DINNER

(A room in General LOEWENHIELM's aunt's house. The general, now wearing a scarlet military jacket, looks in the mirror and makes final adjustments to his appearance. There is a knock at the door.)

GROOM. The carriage is ready, general. And your aunt says we should be leaving soon. The snow is falling fast.

LOEWENHIELM. I'll be right down.

(The GROOM exits. LOEWENHIELM returns to the mirror. A young man appears in the mirror, matching the general's gestures as he adjusts his clothes and hair. Finally, the reflection speaks.)

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. You'll be late to dinner. Mustn't be late. Punctuality and all that. Do you mind if I smoke?

LOEWENHIELM. Who are you?

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. I'm young. I'm you. I attract dreams and fancies as a flower attracts bees and butterflies.

LOEWENHIELM. You fled.

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. They followed me.

LOEWENHIELM. The dreams ...

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. And I became you.

LOEWENHIELM. You refused the gift—

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. Of love?

LOEWENHIELM. Of second sight. I fulfilled your wishes—I more than satisfied your ambitions. It might be said that I have gained the whole world. I'm in high favor

with royalty. I've done well in my calling. I have friends everywhere. My wife is a brilliant woman and still good-looking. Yet something, somewhere has been lost.

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. I lose things all the time. I lost my father's gold pocket watch in a bet. I lost a tooth in a drunken brawl over a woman in Amsterdam—remember that? I lost my favorite—

LOEWENHIELM. This is different. I find myself worrying about my immortal soul. It makes no sense. I'm a moral person, loyal to my king, my wife, and my friends, an example to everybody. But there are moments—

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM. Like this one—?

LOEWENHIELM. When it seems the world is not a moral, but a mystic concern.

YOUNG LOEWENHIELM (*reaches out and touches the row of decorations on the general's jacket*). "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity."

(The young man in the mirror disappears.)

LOEWENHIELM. I will settle my account with you, young man, tonight. I will sit at that same table where you sat mute, and I will answer any question posed to me. I will let you prove to me once and for all that thirty-one years ago, I made the right choice.

THE HYMN

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