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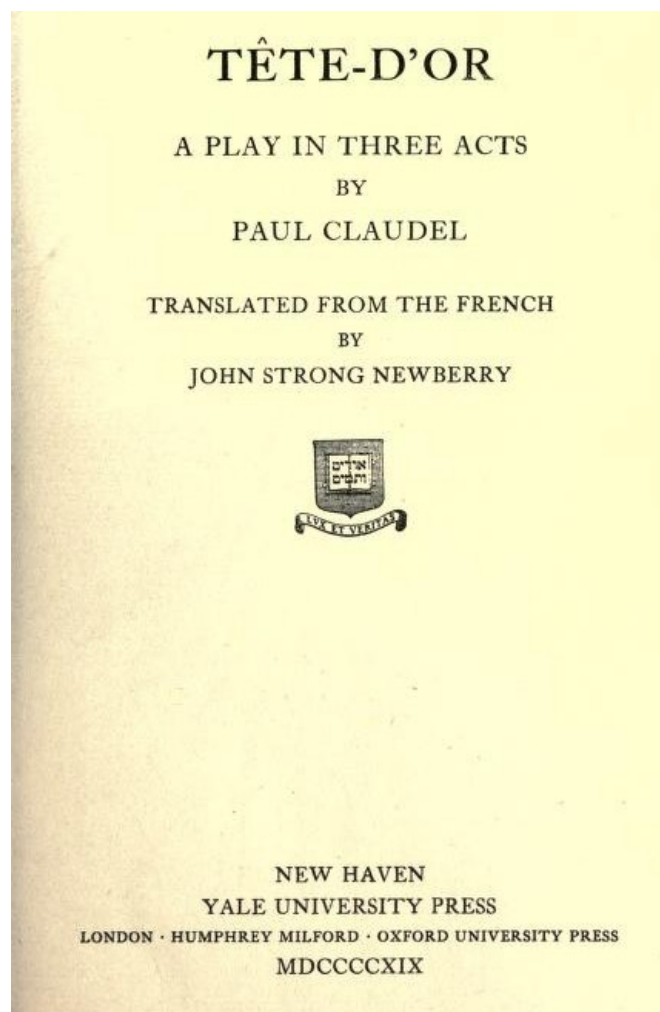
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK *TÊTE-D'OR*: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS ***



TÊTE-D'OR

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS
BY
PAUL CLAUDEL

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY
JOHN STRONG NEWBERRY

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Dedication

*O day! Having felt, like the touch of water upon the head,
The desire to be alone and to weep where none could find me,
Laughing I walked where the fragrance of the riotous garden spread
Its honeyed share, and left the flowers and the trees behind me.*

*And from behind me, borne from the breathing depths, as I went,
With eyes half-closed, there came to fall upon my hair
The holy benediction of things most excellent,
And seeds and shreds of down were softly mingled there.*

*Behind me the eternal woods uplifted leafy domes,
Behind me banks of blossoms, packed to the brim with sweets,
Towards the expectant nose, prepared to breathe their balms,
Like some strong nuptial body upraised their ardent heats.*

*Roses and yellow asphodels that sturdy stems upbear,
In the mellow disarray of their golden panoply,
Shone forth like lamps that gleam through the white and liquid air
When but a single diamond adorns the sleeping sky.*

*For like one who stops and turns and listens to the sea
When to his ear is borne its low, mysterious whisper,
Above the shining earth, beaming resplendently,
I saw that star, First-Born of the dawning Future, Vesper!*

*O only child of the King, among so many slaves!
Pilgrim unique o'er city paths seeking the distant sea!
Planet of morn, re-born in evening's dusky caves!
Star anadyomene in the depth of the garden's greenery!*

*Mysteriously o'er the hour a subtle influence reigns,
Deepening peace, maintaining, with strange and mystic art,
The secret length of the days that are gone where only the honey remains
Of animate life, enhived in this everlasting heart.*

*Feebly the dying breeze stirs in its dark retreat.
O joy supreme, O love beyond what words can say!
Over this sordid world that has so enslaved my feet
Endureth the ineffable unfolding of the day!*

*In such an hour there passes in laughing ecstasy
The poet, sprung from a race obscure, who never shall grow old,
His golden dream fulfills itself in the twilight. Silently
He is merged in the springtime of the gods, the eternal age of gold!*

Gazing into the eye of the world with an eye on fire to see,

*As one gapes for the juicy plums that the topmost branches bear,
As, 'twixt his dusky brides, hard Jacob bowed the knee
To gain from the hand of a father the blessing on an heir,*

*I live! Come, rain and storm! I shall not be unmanned!
Bearing my destiny, aware of the term of Fate's delay,
Laughing I walked beneath the grim and terrifying land
Of burning constellations that cross a milky way.*

Dramatis Personae

SIMON AGNEL, LATER TÊTE-D'OR, AFTERWARDS THE KING
CÈBÈS
THE KING
FIRST WATCHER
SECOND WATCHER
THIRD WATCHER
FOURTH WATCHER
FIFTH WATCHER
THE PRINCESS
CASSIUS, THE MESSENGER
THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE
THE GO-BETWEEN
THE HIGH PREFECT
THE SCHOOLMASTER
THE BROTHER OF THE KING
THE MAN OUT OF OFFICE
THE CHIEF OF STAFF
FIRST CAPTAIN
SECOND CAPTAIN
THIRD CAPTAIN
FOURTH CAPTAIN
THE DESERTER
THE STANDARD-BEARER
FIRST SUBALTERN
SECOND SUBALTERN
THE MESSENGER
THE CENTURION
THE COMMANDER OF THE CAVALRY
THE COMMANDER OF THE SECOND ARMY
CITIZENS, SOLDIERS, OFFICERS

Place

ACT I: THE OPEN FIELDS.
ACT II: A HALL IN THE KING'S PALACE.
ACT III: A WASTE PLACE IN THE CAUCASUS.

Act I

The open fields at the end of winter.

Enter, at the back, SIMON AGNEL, dressed like a peasant. He bears upon his shoulder the body of a woman, and carries a spade.

Enter, in front, CÈBÈS, walking slowly.

CÈBÈS: I stand here,

Untaught, irresolute,
A man new-born confronting things unknown.
I turn my face towards the Future and the lowering arch of the sky. My soul is full of weariness!
I know nothing. There is nothing I can do. What shall I say? What shall I do?
How shall I use these hands that hang at my sides, these feet
That bear me about as in a dream?
Speech is but a noise and books are only paper.
There is no one here but myself. And all that is about me,
The foggy air, the rich fields,
The trees, the low-lying clouds
Seem to speak to me, soundlessly, to ask inarticulate questions.
The ploughman
Turns homeward with his plough. I hear its slow creaking.
It is the time when women bring water from the wells.
It is night.—What am I?
What am I doing? For what do I wait?
And I answer, "I do not know!"
And in my heart there is a wild desire
To weep or to cry aloud
Or to laugh or leap in the air and wave my arms!
"Who am I?"
There are still some patches of snow. I hold in my hand a sprig of pussy-willow.
For March is like a woman blowing a fire of green wood.
—That the Summer
And the dreadful day under the glare of the sun may be forgotten,
O Nature,
Here I offer myself to you!
I know so little!
Look at me! There is something that I need.
But what it is I do not know and I could cry forever
Loud and low like a child that one hears in the distance, like children left alone beside the
glowing embers!
O lowering sky! Trees, earth, darkness, night of rain!
Look upon me! Grant my prayer!

(He sees SIMON.

Who is that?

(He approaches him.

Are you digging a drain? It is getting late.

SIMON (*straightening his back*): Who is there? What do you want?

CÉBÈS: What are you doing there?

SIMON: Does this field belong to you?

CÉBÈS: It is my father's.

SIMON: Suffer me to dig this hole in it.

CÉBÈS (*seeing the body*): What is that?

SIMON (*continuing to dig*): The woman who was with me.

CÉBÈS: Who is she? Oh, I know her! And is she dead!

SIMON: I did not cause her death.

CÉBÈS: Oh! Oh! It is she! It is she!

And is it thus that I find you! Cold and wet!

You that were kind to all, light-hearted, vital!

SIMON: Cébès!

CÉBÈS: What? You know me?

SIMON: What do they call that slate-roofed belfry, Cébès?

What place is this?

CÉBÈS: Agnel! Simon Agnel!

SIMON: Are any of my family still here?

CÉBÈS: No. The house has been sold.

SIMON: Is my father alive?

CÉBÈS: He is dead, and your mother also.

The others have gone away.

SIMON: Is it so!

CÉBÈS: Where have you been, unhappy man? Why did you go?

And what of that woman lying there?

SIMON: Why? Who knows?

A wild and adventurous spirit, shame,

A desire to reach the end of the road, to follow the lure of the plain that stretches towards the horizon,

And I went out from the house and left the old familiar faces.

Dead!

CÉBÈS: Where did you go?

SIMON: I did not know that she loved me.

One day I caught her by the throat, crushing her body against the side of the barn,

For I was a violent man. She came to join me.

I have wandered,

I have dreamed many dreams, I have known

Men and the things that at present exist.

I have seen strange roads, strange cultures, strange cities. One leaves them behind and they are gone.

And the sea that is very far away and further than the sea.

And as I was returning, bringing back the branch of a pine...

CÉBÈS: It was there that she found you?

SIMON: Together

By many mountains and rivers we wandered seeking the South and that other ocean.

Then we returned to this place.

CÉBÈS: Where did you say?

SIMON: There, to that hut. I tried to light a fire but it was too wet.

—I think it is deep enough now.

(He climbs out of the hole.)

CÉBÈS: O that she should be lying there like this!

SIMON: O this place! This place!

Turning hence my unworthy eyes what have I sought among multitudes of men but the testimony of my own soul!

And it was here that, girding up its loins, it came to find me!

Standing in the red of the dawn, the warmth of the rising sun on our hair,

We had re-united our souls through our lips, and with artless arms she clasped me to her breast!

And I brought her here that this place whence I had set out might mock me! There she lies fallen at my feet!

My curse on this country! A murrain on the cattle! May the pigs die of plague!

Ah! Ah! This place! O soil of sticky clay!

I am worthless! What could I do! What was the use! Ah, why should I try to be

Different from what I am? And it is here

That alone and with my feet in the earth I raise my bitter cry,

While the wind masks my face with rain!

O woman, ever faithful

Who followed me, uncomplaining

Like a fairy in thrall, like a queen

Who wraps her bleeding feet in tatters of cloth of gold!

I cried to her, "Come, down into the mud!"

Horror incarnate, shame, infamy teeming with desires, this is the knowledge I have gained at the last!

Listen! When she was dying she pressed my hand against her cheek,

And kissed me, keeping her eyes on mine,

And she said that she could sing me prophecies

Like an old ship that has come to the end of the world.

And at the last when she was dying she tried to speak,

Tears were in her eyes! Who knows what she saw, what she regretted!

CÉBÈS: Alone and so pale!

SIMON: She looked at me and wept and kissed my hands with burning lips!

"Are you in pain?" I said.

She shook her head.

She looked at me and I do not know what she wished to say. Who can understand a woman?

Into the grave with you!

(He lifts the body.)

CÉBÈS: May I help you?

SIMON: Yes. I shall be glad of your help. It shall not be forgotten.

I will take her shoulders, you take her feet.

(They take up the body.)

Not like that! Let her sleep face downward.

(They lower her face downward, into the grave.)

CÉBÈS: May she sleep well!

SIMON: There! Go! Enter, enter into the raw earth! Lie at your ease, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, your mouth pressing against the clay,

As in the days when prone upon our pillows we rushed towards sleep!

And now I shall load a burden of earth on your back!

(He throws the earth into the grave. When it is full he walks on it, stamping it down.)

Fill it up! Room must be found for the earth whose place you have taken.

—So there are none of my family left?

CÉBÈS: Not one. The house is closed. The fields lie fallow.

(Silence.)

Her father is still alive.

SIMON: Would you have me ask him for a night's lodging?

CÉBÈS: He is old. He has known much sorrow.

He lives alone, an object of charity, despised by everyone.

He is bent like a scythe. His hands hang down below his knees. He has never been the same since his daughter went away.

SIMON: I shall come to this place no more.

Can you see where the grave was?

CÉBÈS: There is not a sign of it. How it rains!

SIMON: O gentle Giver of Knowledge,

Twofold teacher who while you spoke held your face before me like a book,

Here take your rest, deeper than the buried grain!

Here, where you cannot hear the noise of the roads or the fields, the sounds of ploughing and sowing,

Remembered only by me, in a place that no one knows,
And let not even this spade nor your staff like the broken oar of a sailor
Remain to mark your grave!

(He throws away the spade.)

And now let us go!

CÉBÈS: May I go with you?

SIMON: Come.

You do not talk, comrade.

(They walk along together.)

CÉBÈS: Oh, I am sad! I am exceedingly sad!

SIMON: Death!

Thoughts,

Actions that sleep, like new-born babes

Drawing up their knees to their bellies reassume

The shape of the maternal mold.

One ceases to live.

Old age obscures the memory. The sick man

Wakes all alone and while the rain drives against the windows, he hears the sound of a falling
silver spoon.

And the smile has mercifully been given to the old.

CÉBÈS: She is dead.

SIMON: A woman has withdrawn her hand from mine, mysteriously veiling her eyes.

And I, her mate, am left alone.

To what pale region of the air shall I raise my yearning mouth?

What shall I repeat in my silence, "I shall find strength, I shall make the effort...."

Ah, where shall I look? Where shall I go? The skies are like iron and I remain here, the woman's
legacy, full of vague menaces and anguished cries.

—What is there left in life? I have travelled. I have seen the world. O worthless calendar of petty
days!

Though the members of my body

Should bristle as thick as fir saplings upon a mountain side,

For what would I employ that multitude?

The woman I loved is no more!

And yet... When she was sleeping yesterday, I went out

Knowing that the next day I should be alone.

It was night and my heart was heavier than a suspended stone.

But, as I walked to and fro, slowly there came to me

A sense of the living force within my soul, the vital essence,

That does not enter into marriage, nor pass through the gates of birth,

The secret purpose of my being.

CÉBÈS: O that I also might...

But no one has ever bothered about me.

SIMON: What did you say?

CÉBÈS: I could tell you...

I could lament in such a fashion that you would comprehend....

SIMON: Some woman already...?

CÉBÈS: No.

SIMON: Indeed the desire

For this being who has the face of a child

Is strange. I do not believe in their laughter.

Age makes them fat like fowls.

But to slip away thus like a handful of sand that runs through the fingers...

Pah! These fancies!

Perhaps some day you will understand.

(They come to the road.)

CÉBÈS: Who is that? *(aside)* It is her father.

(An old man, bent almost double, enters, trundling a wheelbarrow on which is a basket and a hoe.)

SIMON *(aside)*: Speak to him.

CÉBÈS *(to the peasant)*: Good evening.

(THE PEASANT stops and sets down the wheelbarrow.)

(Silence.)

How are things going to-day?

THE PEASANT: Eh, I don't know. I think it can't be more than five o'clock. The days don't get much longer.

SIMON *(shouting in his ear)*: And how is your daughter?

THE PEASANT: I don't know. She is not with me any more.

SIMON: Perhaps she is better off than you are, eh?

THE PEASANT: Ah! She might help me out a bit then.

'Tis a bad business, surely!

Good-night to you, masters.

(He goes out. They remain silent for a moment.)

CÉBÈS *(pointing up the road)*: That way lies the village.

You must spend the night with me.

SIMON: No, my road lies yonder.

There is now no place to receive me. I will not lodge in the house of another.

I have no other wealth than these old clothes. But I shall stretch myself on a stone and be content.

I myself am my table and my bed.

I shall not die, but live!

I shall not die, but live!

I wish not to die, but to live!

For I am not alone.

CÉBÈS: Who is with you?

SIMON: The voice of my living soul!

I have heard men mourn their misfortunes, but what misfortune can there be?

None.

—It grows dark.

CÉBÈS: It is night.

SIMON: Watch the road and speak more softly.

The dry brambles shiver; the branches creak or sway without a sound; the brooks gurgle among the reeds.

We stand in the midst of space, with all about us the blackness,

The melancholy of Earth.

We pass along the road.

And we alone exhale the warm breath of living beings.

Haha! My nerves are unstrung.

You there ... Cébès... Do you hear me?

CÉBÈS: Yes.

SIMON: Speak to me. Had you not something to tell me?

CÉBÈS: I want...

SIMON: What do you want?

CÉBÈS: Nothing!

Only a room when it snows and that no one should know where I am!

SIMON: What did you say?

CÉBÈS: I am only a boy. There has been no one to help me!

I have had to endure much suffering.

I am plagued with bitter fancies. I shrink from the light of the sun.

Why should you force me to speak only to mock at me? SIMON: I will take you by the hair of your head and shake you.

Come, in whom will you confide if not

In the man who at this very moment

Walks at your side through the blackness of night.

I tell you that you are a man and not a child, like some pale seedling pushing its way through the mould.

I am only a little older than you,

Yet I have sworn

To hold myself erect!

To never yield, to have no fear, and to accomplish what I undertake!

Speak! Take my arm

For the night is so dark one can scarcely see.

CÉBÈS: Ah, well! I am very wretched! O that I might set forth clearly things that are obscure!

Where shall I begin?

To express the weariness that has no beginning, but has become a part of one's consciousness like the familiar things of every day?

Thus might the young man speak

Who like an emperor dethroned, his head thrust through a sack, sits motionless with haggard eyes,

While the wind makes free with his hair like a wanton trull,

Vacantly contemplating the dawn of another day

Full of little whisperings like a dead tree;

The multitude of foolish men who interrogate each other, fight, talk, and cast their eyes this way and that,

And then, turning towards us the hairy side of the head, disappear like the Manes;

The catastrophes and the sombre passions;

The clouds that cover the hills with shadows; the cries of beasts, the hum of the villages, the clatter of the highways;

The wood, and the chant of the coursing wind; the carts that are charged with sheaves and flowers;

And the Victories that pass their appointed way like harvesters, with swarthy cheeks,

Veiled and bearing a drum on a golden thigh.

SIMON: Finish. What would he say?

CÉBÈS: Nothing. Are there not men whose eyes

Melt like the broken medlar that scatters abroad its pips,

And women with cancer at work in their bodies, like the amadou in the beech?

And monstrous births, men having the muzzles of oxen?

And children violated and murdered by their fathers,

And old men whose children grudgingly count the days that still are left them?

All the diseases spy upon us, ulcer and abscess, epilepsy and shaking palsy and at the last, comes gout and the gravel that clogs urination.

Phthisis lights its fire; the pudenda grow mouldy like grapes; and the bag of the belly

Breaks and empties out entrails and excrements.

Is it not horrible? But our life,

Spreading a feast, stuffs itself with a banquet of crawling maggots

Till, like a dog who vomits worms and morsels of meat,

The loaded belly revolts and disgorges it all on the table!

I long for happiness!

But I am like a man beneath the earth in a cell no sound can enter.

Who will open the door? Who will descend into the blackness of my dungeon, bearing in his hand the yellow flame?

SIMON: I also lie in that secret place.

I shall arise and burst open the door and I shall appear before men!

Ah! Ah!

CÉBÈS: What is it?

SIMON: Do not speak! Ah!

(He stops.)

CÉBÈS: What ails you? Why do you snuff the air? What do you smell?

SIMON: The air and the earth. Ah!

O the Spring that renews the year and the strong love that triumphs over virginity!

O the ferment of life when the Springtime prepares its nuptials! There is not a thing that grows

But feels the divine delirium entering like a creator, producing the flower and the seed.

CÉBÈS: The wind is warm.

SIMON: I have in my mouth the bitter savor of buds! The block

Of my body

Like a clod of frozen earth

Thaws! O juice of life! Force and acquisition! Strength and the rising sap!

I will open wide my jaws and I will raise my arms and hold them extended like branches!

But come!

CÉBÈS: Where are you taking me? Why have we left the road?

SIMON: Why do we need a road? I know my way. Follow me!

O Cébès in this you were right that not to an older man nor to any one of an age unlike your own did you address yourself so obscurely,

For they could not answer you, not knowing what you ask.

But if one can tell the vintage of a wine by its taste

Why should we not believe that each generation of men

Springing from the maternal furrow in its season

Keeps a common secret, a changeless knot in the hidden texture of its wood?

(Or rather I think of a carpet whose maker disposes the colors one after the other)

—And a baby is weaned at eleven months, but the weaning of the spirit is slower.

And till he learns to forage for himself (the amount being equal to the expenditure) the breast is not taken away, the communication with the source.

—So if you put your ear against my heart—... But I myself am full of sorrow.

CÉBÈS: We are going further and further.

SIMON: As for me, I have never tried to fathom

What lay in the heart of anyone, young or old.

But a tree has been my father and my preceptor.

For often when I was a child

A black and bitter humor overwhelmed me,

Making all company hateful, the air breathed by others a poison,

So that I fled into solitude there to obscurely nourish this grief that I felt unfolding itself within me.

And there I met this tree,

Like some primordial man, surviving antiquity,

And I embraced it, clasping its trunk in my arms.

For it was there before I was born and will be there when we are here no longer,

And the measure of its time is not the same as ours.

How many an afternoon I have passed beneath its shadow, having quieted the clamor of my thoughts.

CÉBÈS: And what has it taught you?

SIMON: Now, in this hour of anguish! Now I must find it again!

(They come to the foot of a huge tree.)

O tree, receive me again! Alone I left the protection of your branches. And now it is alone that I return, O immovable father!

Take me once more beneath your shadow, O son of the Earth! O wood, in this hour of sorrow! O murmuring branches, impart to me

That message which I am and of which I feel within me the terrible striving.

For you yourself are only a ceaseless striving, the unwearied drawing of your body out of inanimate matter.

How you suck the earth, old tree,

Thrusting down, stretching out in every direction your strong and subtile roots! And the sky, how you cling to it! How your whole being breathes it in through one great leaf, Form of Flame!

The inexhaustible earth in the grasp of all the roots of your being

And the infinite sky, with the sun, with the stars in their constellations,

Of which you lay hold with that mouth made of all your arms, with the cluster of your branches, with the clutch of all there is in you that breathes.

All the earth and all the sky, these are what you require that you may hold yourself erect!

Let me also hold myself erect! Let me not lose my soul! That essential sap, that innermost secretion of my ego, that effervescence

Which constitutes my true self, oh let me not squander that to make a useless tuft of leaves and flowers! Let me grow in my unity! Let me remain unique and erect!

But it was not to hear your murmuring that I came, O branches that now are bare mid the air opaque and nebulous!

But it is you that I would question, deep-reaching roots and that primal depth of the earth where you are nourished.

(He stands beneath the tree.—Pause of indefinite duration.)

SIMON (*sighing, like one awakening from a dream*): Let us go.

CÉBÈS: O Simon, you will not leave me so!

Have you learned nothing then, under that tree of knowledge?

SIMON: Nothing that I can tell you.

CÉBÈS: Well, the thing that you cannot tell, that is what I demand.

Oh, if indeed

Some law is graven on your heart, if some commandment

And edict of Nature

Pushes you as from its knee into the midst of us, miserable wretches....

(He kneels before him.)

SIMON: What do you want?

CÉBÈS: Do not forget me!

SIMON: Why do you wish to make me speak?

Leave me, for my spirit smokes and boils, and I am shaken through all my being!

CÉBÈS: I am the first to summon you.

SIMON: What do you seek?

CÉBÈS: Your hands! Let me take them! Do not refuse me!

SIMON: Ah! ah!

CÉBÈS: What is it?

SIMON: A spirit has breathed upon me and I vibrate like a post.

—Cébès, a force has been given to me, stark, savage! It is the fury of the male. There is no woman in me.

CÉBÈS: I implore you.

SIMON: Do not hope to know more than I wish to tell you.

CÉBÈS: Listen to me! I understand and I will not let you go! Was I not there?

Surely to-day I must ask and you must answer!

You shall not go before

You have given me the portion that is due me.

Reply or I will throw myself upon you and constrain you by force!

I implore you!

You have robbed me of the light of my eyes! You have carried away my hope and my joy!

You have taken from me the woman I love and brought her to her death! So now it is to you that I make my cry!

I charge you by the woman we both have loved,

And by the pity, greater than that of a father for his child,

Which you must feel for me who am the image of yourself.

Do not leave me to languish in the depths in which I lie!

O father, O father, for am I not now your child,

By all that I lack, I beseech you!

See, I will not let go your hands,

And as did that woman when she died, I will hold them close against my cheek, thus,

Until you have answered me!

SIMON: I could stay here the whole night through, not stirring from this place,

And I would not say a word and those who passed would not see me.

I am here alone and the multitude of men is about me on every hand, in the fields or in the houses that they have made, beside the lamps that they have lighted.

And standing at this cross-road I will raise my hand,

And I will not be afraid and I will make a vow repeating the words that have been taught me.

(He raises his hand.)

CÉBÈS: O Simon, I will not let go of your other hand.

SIMON: Know that a right has been given to me! Know that a force has been given to me!

Who are you and what do you want?

CÉBÈS: One who appeals to you for help, O young elder brother!

SIMON: In whom do you put your trust! For a terrible thing has been shown to me, to me who was but a child.

And I am weak and in pain.

Take my other hand also, brother!

(He gives him his right hand.)

In the midst of this vast universe we are like two little children who wander in the dark. Yet there is a force in me, and I pity you!

CÉBÈS: Save me!

SIMON: Love me! Understand me! Swear that you will be loyal and put yourself wholly in my hands.

This is a serious matter. Do not decide it too soon.

CÉBÈS: I am ready to do whatever you ask.

SIMON: What you will do for me I will also do for you.

Will you love me? You ask me for words

And I will surrender to you my sovereign self.

CÉBÈS: What did you say?

SIMON: You hold between your hands a living man.

I live and I am here with the mystery of my soul.

O death, O night, there are here two guilty persons, who have found each other.

You lay your hand on my blouse and that which you touch is still yourself.

It is also I and I am only a man!

Understand me! With your hands lay hold upon this sorrow! The irresolute man bereft of

knowledge!

How fine a thing it is that these lips should say "I."

Yet my eyes, those consuls that should always be vigilant,

Close, and he who is standing must take good heed lest he fall.

All things change. I must be strong and resist! I have been a wandering fire, I must rise like a rooted flame!

Do not leave me alone! Trust in me! Tell me I have the power!

CÉBÈS: Hope!

SIMON: Yes, I can do it.

CÉBÈS: Here I, the first, salute you!

SIMON: You have knelt before me, alas!

Yet honor me, since thus we have encountered, since we are here together.

Stay, and that I may serve you as an altar,

Draw near and lay your head against my side.

CÉBÈS: I give you my prayer and my salutation.

SIMON: O pride! you embrace me then!

CÉBÈS: Ah!

What is this that drips on my head!

SIMON: It is my blood; thus man, though he has no breasts, knows how to pour forth his milk!

And now, O Cébès,

You are like a servant who before he departs

Clasps to his breast the cross,

But that crucified thing with its lips of granite draws towards heaven a band of briars,

And a robin is singing on its ruined shoulder.

Receive my blood upon you! Oh, I will stab myself to the heart that my blood may burst forth like a fountain, as you drive in the bung of a cask with a resolute blow!

It is my blood. Thus do we greet each other, you and I, we who walk through the shades with warm blood in our veins.

Like two brothers who, after death, recognise one another in the eternal night, although they cannot see

And throw themselves into each others' arms, the tears streaming down their cheeks.

CÉBÈS: I salute you, O King!

I hold you in my arms, Majesty!

And I have tasted of your blood, like the first wine trod from the wine-press!

(He rises.)

SIMON: Farewell!

CÉBÈS: Farewell!

(He goes out.)

SIMON: And whom have I myself? And whom have I?

(He paces to and fro, for a little, with a hesitating step.)

Two trees and all the night behind!

The mist parts and in places the stars appear!

O equilibrium of things in the night! O energy that acts with unconquerable power, according to its nature!

I also will do my work. Creeping beneath it I will cause the great stone to tremble!

And with a blow I will take the burden upon me, as a butcher takes on his back a side of beef!

Oh, to act! To act! To act! Who will give me the strength to act!

Ah! ah!

(He throws himself flat on the ground.)

O night, my mother!

Crush me or close my eyes with earth!

Mother, why have you cleft through the midst the skin of my eyelid! Mother, I am alone! Mother, why do you force me to live!

Far better it would be for me if to-morrow the dewy earth in the East should not be reddened by the dawn! O night, you seem very beautiful!

I cannot do it! Comfort me, your child!

And you, O Earth, look how I lie on your breast!

O sheltering night, earth! earth!

(He faints.)

Act II

A hall in the KING'S palace, with high windows at the back.

Night. CÉBÈS, sick, lying upon a bed. A little lamp is placed on the floor. Here and there men, stretched out asleep, snoring.

Pantomime—Enter, as if half-crazed, the KING, barefoot, his clothes in disorder. He runs hither and thither about the hall in great agitation.

CÉBÈS (*not seeing the KING*): They are all asleep.

The lamp sputters and smokes.

(He painfully stretches himself on his back.)

THE KING (*groaning, in a low voice*): Ah!

(Pause.)

CÉBÈS (*lowering his voice*): Two, four,

Six, eight, twelve,

Fourteen,

Sixteen, eighteen, thirty-six,

Seventy-two, a hundred and forty-four. I wish that I could sleep, too.

THE KING: Ah!

CÉBÈS: I am thirsty. I would like a drink!

But I will not drink.

I am sick! The night is long. If only I could sleep a little!

(He closes his eyes.)

THE KING: Ah!

CÉBÈS: Who is sighing? Is anyone there?

(He turns his head and sees the KING.)

(Silence.)

THE KING: Ah!

(He catches sight of CÉBÈS.)

Can't you sleep, my child?

CÉBÈS: I cannot sleep.

THE KING: Are you thirsty? Would you like me to get you a drink?

CÉBÈS: Pardon me, Sire. I shall not drink till he returns.

THE KING: Sire! Is there still such a title? Do not call me Sire, my child!

They have left us all alone, my daughter and me, and everyone has fled, for the enemy is at hand.

They did not trouble themselves much about me.

The Prime Minister did it all. He explained to me how matters stood. He was always making me late to dinner. I have a bad digestion; I ought to have my meals at regular hours.

They held a meeting, some ten or twelve of them, and they brought a great pile of papers. One sees strange people nowadays.

Then they all went away. The Prime Minister went away also, taking with him the crown jewels to put them in safe keeping.

Even the servants have gone. Not a single one is left.

(The bells begin to chime midnight.

It is as it is in the city. Only the poor remain and those who have no choice.

(The last strokes sound.

What hour is that?

CÉBÈS: Midnight.

THE KING: There is no one here any longer.

But I cannot sleep and I wander through the palace

From the kitchen to the immense garrets and I seem to hear behind the doors the quiet breathing of sleepers, and the fire upon the hearth sends out a little glow.

These poor folk who arrived yesterday, seeing the palace empty, asked if they might spend the night here. They are visionaries; they wish to watch and pray.

It seems that we have been beaten everywhere. It is a shameful thing!

Our blunders

Surpass our misfortunes, and all is submerged in dishonor. And at will the enemy crosses our frontiers.

—Terror is upon us!

(Silence.—The snores of the WATCHERS are heard.

Hark to these watchers who watch!

They whistle, wheeze and snort, they are so fast asleep! It is a voice, a horn, a leather trumpet!

(Silence.

I tell you that a panic has seized the city

And each man cowers in his home and dares not stir from his door.

O people! O city! O my wretched country, destroyed, devastated, plundered like an unguarded sheep-fold!

Oh! oh!

Will this terrible night never end!

Sight was horrible to me; I went to bed. O Sleep,

Kill me with your leaden dart!

But I cannot sleep and I open my eyes again in the black Nothingness.

It has no knowledge nor any real existence

But the gloom takes weight and stiflingly presses upon us.

Oh! oh!

I shudder from head to foot and I cry aloud in my anguish!

And I leap out of bed and run hither and thither, striking my head against the walls.

And I see again these frightful places and I meet

Only Madness and Horror!

—Am I keeping you awake, my child?

CÉBÈS: I cannot sleep.

THE KING: Well, I will wait here with you.

CÉBÈS: How far away is the enemy?

THE KING: Not more than a day's march.

I think the battle must have already been fought.

—Still five hours till dawn! We shall see. Very soon we shall know.

CÉBÈS: This very morning! It must be so.

THE KING: Where are your parents, Cébès?

CÉBÈS: I do not know, Sire. The war has swept them away.

THE KING: I have only one daughter and I have no male child.

CÉBÈS: Are you speaking to me, Sire?

THE KING: How pale you are, my poor boy! You are very ill. Tête-d'or

Was wise to leave you here. We will look after you, lad.

I look at you! I wish to contemplate

A thing still young, as I myself have been,
And the dawning of power in astonished eyes!
The young man sleeps very tranquilly. He dreams, and in his dream is the morning sun.
The evening has been glorious, a golden day awaits him.
I also have been young. I have been a young man also,
And I have been a little, little child. Now I have lived three score and fifteen years, and I am old
and at the end of my life.
And this is what I am, and this is what I see!

CÉBÈS: I shall be the first to die.

I have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

I have not strength enough to rise and walk.

Yes! What a thing it is to live!

What an astonishing thing it is

Only to live! What a mighty thing it is, only to live!

He who lives

And treads the earth under his feet, what does he envy the gods?

I die,

And only ask to once again behold him.

THE KING: Of what are you dreaming?

CÉBÈS: I dream of the day.

THE KING: Go, die!

CÉBÈS: What did you say?

THE KING (*rising and running about distractedly*): Go, die! We all must die!

O my country! My country! Behold your King wanders alone through his palace and can give you
no aid.

I am weaker than a woman in childbirth.

(He is seized with a fit of coughing.)

A-ha! A-hha! O my country!

You were weary of me. And everyone said that I built too much and did not know what I was
doing and they took the money from me.

But what of that! I loved you, O my realm!

And must I see you thus destroyed and ravaged!

Ah! Ah! Ah! Tremble, you lofty chimneys that tower to the stars and midst the marguerites and
glow-worms are mirrored in the brimming moat.

Uproot yourself,

Ancestral beech whose branches shade the courtyard!

Down to the dust with you, genealogy!

And let the walls be rent asunder from base to battlement!

—Hola! You there! Wake up!

(He jostles against a sleeper, who grunts.)

What are you muttering down there?

(He kicks him.)

THE WATCHER (*asleep*): Oh hum!

THE KING: Wake up there, sack of wool! Wake up, block!

(He kicks him.)

THE WATCHER (*talking indistinctly in his sleep*): Ho! Ho!

Do not push me! I am falling! I am falling!

THE KING (*catching him by the foot and dragging him across the hall*): Will you wake up, or won't
you?

THE WATCHER (*waking and rubbing his eyes*): Eh? Eh?

What's that? What? What? What?

What? What time is it?

Eh?

(He sees the KING.)

(The KING goes to the middle of the hall and strikes furiously on a gong. All awake and look at him, dumbfounded, not moving from their places.)

THE KING: Well, Watchers!

(Silence.)

Behold you sleep, and the first part of the night is not yet spent!
They care for nothing but eating and drinking and talking to each other!
Like brutes, like dogs that wag their tails! And when they cease their chatter, they fall asleep.
Their souls are simple! They are not capable of thinking for themselves.
Do you know where we are? Do you know for what we are waiting?
We must watch and listen! We must listen and wait!

(The song of the nightingale is heard.)

The nightingale is singing. All night he pours out his soul.
All night the tiny bird sings of the marvels of God.
And you, could you not watch? The worries of your wretched trades cannot trouble you now. That care has been taken from you. Could you not watch and wait?
But, like hulking lackeys you sleep!
And it may be that someone has entered and looked at you,
Like the bird that flies and does not alight.
But they sleep and leave me all alone!
And I David, The King, with my white hairs,
I wander through the palace in the pangs and agony of death,
And I tread my mitre under my feet and like an infant or an animal that one clutches to one's breast,
I hold back with my hands my escaping soul!

THE FIRST WATCHER: Pardon us, O King.

THE SECOND WATCHER: O King, why do you waken us and keep us from sleeping?

Go! Put out the light and lie down with us. Pillow your head on my side. All too soon will come the day.

The light troubles my eyes. I am going to sleep.

(He drops his head on his chest. The KING gazes at him and, opening his mouth little by little, begins to yawn.)

THE THIRD WATCHER: O King, you yourself are yawning!

It is weariness. It is the wind, the exhalation of the void within us.

We talked and our words were only an empty sound; and from morning until evening we gave ourselves no rest.

In truth we are dead.

As tired

As a man who comes home drunk in the morning and goes to bed without undressing or taking off his boots.

At first the heart was silent,

And then, like a tom-cat that yowls very softly, it began to voice its lament.

THE SECOND WATCHER: Be still, heart! Be still, poor heart! What would you have?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: And even now they come to extinguish us

As you quench a stinking lamp with a damp cloth.

THE FIRST WATCHER: O night! O chasm of blackness!

O open door through which whistles the wind!

We had come hither and stretched ourselves on your threshold.

But the abyss gave back no words. Who can fathom its secret ways?

So we remained here and the thought has come to me that there is nothing that can be changed.

The night is black and there is no more hope.

THE THIRD WATCHER: They die together. All the people shall be found cold in death, men and women and children and babes at the breast.

Therefore let us lie here and sleep,

Or go, if you have a wife, and lie with her.

And let not the maid-servant make too much noise in the kitchen or the baby in the room below,

Or the mouse in the cupboard or the fly against the pane.

We have begged and it has been in vain. Our sin has found us out. Who can conquer our ignorance?

Why are we born, since now it seems better to die?

What should we do and why should we do it?

We cannot attain to ability and we sway and stagger like a man who stands in a hot bath,

Or one who yawns from the fumes of a reeking opium pipe.

This parish dreams and is like a people who, like a nation of hens

Ranged on the ramparts of the quay, watch how the red sun drops away into a night that knows no day....

(Pause.)

THE FIRST WATCHER: Such is the report that we have to make to you.

THE KING: Wretched nonentities! He is a fool who puts his trust in you!

I knew you and your fathers before you, a broken reed to lean upon!

In my old age and bitter need there is little comfort in you!

My curse upon you, watchers that sleep! My curse upon you, sleepers, dreamers of dreams!

THE FIFTH WATCHER: A curse upon you yourself, old man! Be accursed, crowned carrion, lapdog, clown!

Is it not you who have brought us to this pass?

Curse you, and curse all men who have power in their hands,

Who have power in their hands, O God, and do not know how to use it!

Why do you come to break our sleep and keep our eyes from slumber?

You curse me, do you, old phantom? And I throw back your curse in your teeth!

A curse on your royal race, temporal King, on the office that you hold, on the system that permits your impotent sway!

A curse on all my teachers, from the one who taught me to read to the one who turned me loose with a box on the ear, dazzled and full of words!

For they took me when I was only a child and they gave me dirt to eat.

A curse on my father and on my mother also!

A curse on the food they gave me, and on their ignorance, and on the example they set me!

THE KING: Madman, be still!

THE FIFTH WATCHER: Why did you waken me, old man? Now you shall not silence me!

Whom else shall I curse? I am full of malediction!

My bile pours forth in a flood and boils up even to my eyes!

And so great is the spasm that shakes me

That my ribs are cracking with it and my bones are riven apart!

I will curse myself!

Myself, because I am worthless, lost, dishonored,

Degraded below all beings and cowardly beyond all measure!

And I will bury my teeth in my arms and tear my face with my nails!

Come then, O Death! Come, O Death!

(A scratching is heard at the door. The door creaks. Silence. The scratching comes again.)

THE KING: Who is there?

(Silence.)

Come in!

(The PRINCESS enters, timidly.)

THE KING (*shading his eyes with his hand*): Who are you?

THE PRINCESS: Father, may I come in?

THE KING: Is it you, my daughter? It is so dark here! I did not recognise you. And besides I am so old!

What have you been doing, my child?

THE PRINCESS: Pardon me, father!

I was all alone, for the servants have run away

And I was frightened.

THE KING: We are left alone in this abandoned palace

Around this little light placed on the floor.

THE PRINCESS: Shall I wait here with you, father?

THE KING: Stay.

(She seats herself at some distance from Cébès.)

CÉBÈS (*half-aloud*): I am thirsty!

(She pours some water into a glass and gives it to him.)

CÉBÈS (*shaking his head, without looking at her*): I do not want to drink. It is not worth the trouble any longer.

O God, how long the night is!

(The nightingale sings again suddenly, close to the window.)

THE PRINCESS (*listening, with the glass in her hand*): It is the first nightingale. He is trying out his song again, after the terrible winter.

(The nightingale sings again.)

CÉBÈS: O bird! O voice strong and pure in the night!

But the measure of time will not be changed.

O mystery of the night! And you, O season of the nudity of love when for leaves there are only blossoms on the trees!

What do you say, O bird? But you are only a voice and not a message.

THE PRINCESS: Do you think we shall have tidings soon?

CÉBÈS: With the first hour he will be here,

Bringing the news as a laborer brings his tools.

If only I do not die before he comes!

THE PRINCESS: Do not say such a thing!

CÉBÈS: Such a thing? Do you think I do not know what it means? Go and listen to the rabble who rave in the shadows of the room.

I lie here, and I die before my time through the sin of my parents. The sweat runs down my face.

And if you knew the terror that is in my soul

You would not treat me like a little child who says he cannot sleep.

Woman, you do not comfort me. I have nothing in common with you. I wait until my older brother Comes again.

THE PRINCESS: You speak to me brutally as everyone does nowadays.

You do not want me to console you and perhaps in this you are wrong.

(She moves away for some distance.)

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Well, after all....

That young man with the army he has raised, he may be able to....

THE FIRST WATCHER: What foolishness!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Oh you, you are frozen like a well, and like a well condemned!

But indeed there is a power in him. I could not stand against him when he talked

And at the same time looked at me. For his voice is strong and piercing

And he looked at me in such a way that I felt it in the pit of my stomach,

And the flame of confusion mounted to my cheeks.

Grant that he may return with a glorious victory.

THE FIFTH WATCHER: And then what will you do?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: O I shall live in joy!

Holding my face to the sun, holding my hands to the rain!

THE FIFTH WATCHER: Listen to him! You will live in joy, will you, carrion?

Listen to what he says! And already he has forgotten what he said a moment since and remembers it no more.

You will live in joy? But I tell you that you are already dead and life has departed from you and that you weep because the man is at hand who will drive you from your place!

Do not hope! For I say to you that the sword is loosed against you and it will not rest till it has devoured you, sweeping you from before the face of the sun.

Like the plague upon the poultry, like the pestilence upon the pigs, the sword has come upon you!

This I see and exult. Let me perish beneath the sword!

I do not wish to live in joy. Where is the joy in life?

But I long to die, like a man that has been flayed.

Fools! 'Tis enough for you that cozening life anoints your lips with its greasy thumb.

But nothing will keep me from dying of the malady of death

Unless I lay hold on joy, like a thing that one grasps with one hand and tears with the other,

Making no scrutiny or examination,

And put it in my mouth like an everlasting food, and like a fruit that one crushes between the teeth, so that the juice gushes down the throat!

Alas for me! There is a shadow upon me. And I know that there is something here invisible to my eyes.

For we have come to the end of things.

Man has worked and has not rested from labor; he has worked the livelong day from the morning until the evening, he has worked the whole of the night,

And seven days a week, and his work has taken form.

He pants and perhaps he wishes to rest. But his work is alive under him and it does not wish to stop. And he has become its slave, for he is snared by the feet

And trapped by the hands and no longer can he turn his eyes away.

And at last they loosen him that he may die on the ground,

And, drowned in night and utter wretchedness, alone and stretched in his dung, he gazes upward,

Like the drunkard sprawled in the gutter, staring with bleary eyes at the star of February in the pallid western sky.

And his eyes are like those of a little child and there is surprise in them.

So....

THE FIRST WATCHER: So what?

THE THIRD WATCHER: Let him alone, he is choking.

THE FIFTH WATCHER: I tell you that you are captives who cannot be delivered.

And the stone is sealed above you; it is sealed and firmly cemented and bound with iron bands.

We are shut in this secret place with a flickering lamp in our midst.

Shall I not be permitted to spit against the walls of my prison?

And after that I shall drop my head on my breast and my heart will break of sorrow.

(Silence. The KING makes a sign to the PRINCESS.)

THE PRINCESS: Father, what is it you wish?

(He speaks to her.—She listens, her head bent.)

THE FOURTH WATCHER: O when will the sun come again!

CÉBÈS: O when will the sun come again!

O the golden Marne,

Where the boatman half believes that he rows over hills and vineyards and houses whitewashed to the eaves, and gardens where the wash is hung out to dry!

Yet a few hours,

A few hours and the sun will thrust his splendor from out the Gloom!

O there were years before I had finished growing

When I went for a swim before the break of day, and as I climbed the muddy bank, pushing my way through the reeds,

I saw the Dawn brighten above the woods,

And like one who puts on his shirt, all naked as I was, I raised both arms towards the burning poppies of gold!

O when will the sun come again! Could I but see you once more, sun that makes bright the earth!

Yet I know that never again shall I watch you rise in the East.

THE PRINCESS (*to the KING*): Do not ask this thing of me! I could not do it.

THE KING: It is my will!

THE PRINCESS: Then your will shall be obeyed!

(She goes out. Pause.)

(The princess re-enters. She wears a red robe and a golden mantle that covers her from head to foot. On her head is a sort of mitre and a thick black braid is thrown across her shoulders. She comes forward, her eyes closed, moving rhythmically and very slowly, and stops at the edge of the lamplight. All look at her in silence and with great attention.)

Pause.

One of the bystanders rises and, taking the lamp, he holds it close to the face of the PRINCESS and examines it. Then he replaces the lamp on the floor and returns to his place.

THE FIRST WATCHER (*breaking the silence*): Who is there?

THE SECOND WATCHER: Hush! Listen!

THE PRINCESS (*in a low voice, opening her eyes for an instant*): One with closed eyes who is about to awaken from a long sleep.

(She closes her eyes again.—Silence.)

THE FOURTH WATCHER: What did I say of the sun?

Here in this room there is another sun who gazes upon us in his splendor!

Who is this, clothed in such a garment, with hands hidden beneath a tissue of gold?

Who is this, of the height of a human being,

Who stands in a flowing robe between the lamp and the dark?

Turn towards us and hold your face before us!

Ahhh!

Our unworthiness is bodily present among us! There is not one of us who can escape it! Beautiful and blind,

Do not reopen your eyes! Let us feast on your loveliness

Now that you do not look at us.

THE PRINCESS (*sighing*): Nnn!

THE FIRST WATCHER (*half-aloud*): What does that mean?

THE SECOND WATCHER: Do you not understand?

(Pantomime. The PRINCESS seems to be awakening from sleep, with slow gestures and eyes always closed.)

Look!

THE PRINCESS (*sighing again*): No! ah!

(She slowly shakes her head. Then remains motionless.)

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Will you awake?

THE PRINCESS (*very softly*): Ah!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Come, make an end, if those eyelids still are faithful to one another.

THE PRINCESS: Ah!

Must I leave you, lovely land?

THE FIRST WATCHER: What land?

THE PRINCESS: "I sleep" it is called.

I have fled from life, I am dancing in a dream,

My feet are set among strawberry blossoms and lilies of the valley.

I cannot move from my place.

A dull voice says, "Come!" A clear voice says, "Go!" But I cannot move from my place.

(She opens her eyes.)

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Look and see! Alas, you have ceased to smile.

THE PRINCESS (*stretching out both arms and pointing to the bystanders*): Who are these?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Living men, and I am one also.

THE PRINCESS: And why do they stay here, seated on the floor?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: It is night, and there is no light while it endures.

THE PRINCESS: And what is that lamp?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: *Lampas est expectationis.*

THE PRINCESS: And for what are they waiting?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: For Death, who is on the way, and the door is open for him.

THE PRINCESS: And what dwelling is this?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: It is the house of the King.

THE PRINCESS: And why have they placed the lamp upon the floor?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: I will tell you that. It is so that they can see it.

(Short pause.)

THE FIRST WATCHER: And who are you that question us?

(Short pause.)

THE PRINCESS: I do not know. Indeed I do not know who I am!

And you, do you not know? Oh, who among you will tell me?

THE THIRD WATCHER: *Gaudium nostrum es et dilectio, et jussimus te valere.*

THE PRINCESS: Truly?

THE SECOND WATCHER: Have you come again, O woman?

Your absence has been long, but I have not forgotten, and often I dreamed of you.

THE PRINCESS: Then you have known me before?

THE SECOND WATCHER: Ask me no questions, for I am a surly man.

(Pause.)

THE PRINCESS (*looks pensively from one to another. They lower their eyes*): I see more clearly now. I see you all. Surely the darkness shall not hide you nor the light of the lamp.

It is I. What do you want of me?

You dreamed of me, you say? Well, I am here.

—Why do you keep your eyes lowered? Are you afraid to look at me?

THE THIRD WATCHER: There is nothing that we want,

O woman, and we do not ask you for anything.

THE PRINCESS (*looking at him*): So it is you. I know you now. (*She turns towards the FIRST WATCHER*) And you! (*She turns towards the SECOND WATCHER*) And you! (*She turns towards the THIRD WATCHER*) And you! (*She turns towards the FOURTH WATCHER*)

THE FOURTH WATCHER (*rising hurriedly*): Make way! Let me go!

THE PRINCESS (*stretching her hand towards him*): Stay!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: I understand only your beauty! It is all a play but why does she turn herself towards us

With the face of bygone things and of regret,

Alas! and things that were never to be? I remember the sweetness of love! Do not shame me

before these men!

THE PRINCESS: Shame? And I myself, can I not be ashamed before them,
Like a wise and modest man who stands erect amidst drunkards?
Ah! Ah! I see and I know! Alas! I see! I see and I understand!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: We salute you, O beauty! We salute you, reproach!
O Notary of the dying, now you are drawing near us bearing your book and scroll.

THE PRINCESS: Truly, I pity you!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Be sad, for we are sad.

(The nightingale sings again.)

THE PRINCESS: I am not sad! The nightingale sings and I will also sing! Let him sing and I will sing also!

And my voice shall be uplifted like the piping of a flute,
Higher, louder, enfolding the city and the night.

I will sing and cast away all bounds and all restraint!

The bird sings in the summer and is silent in the winter, but I will sing in the chill and bitter air,
and when all is frozen I will rise, drunk with ecstasy, towards the naked heavens!

For my voice is that of love and in my heart is the fire of youth.

(She opens her mouth as if about to sing.)

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Be silent!

THE PRINCESS: You do not wish me to sing?

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Be silent!

THE PRINCESS: Then I will talk to you and will not sing....

Did you think I had gone away? In truth I was always with you.

And I will not tell you who I am, for you know it and do not forget.

Every woman is only a mother. I am she who rears and nourishes,

And entreating you for yourselves in the sacred name of pity,

Receive from you for her portion

A boundless labor hard to undertake! But because I do not speak with your speech you despise me.

And you did not think to see me; but at last I have shown myself!

THE THIRD WATCHER: Is it you?

THE PRINCESS *(after silently contemplating them)*: O fools!

Fools! What shall I say? What shall I leave unsaid? Did you believe that you could hide from me? I penetrate to the bottom of your souls. Nothing is hidden in obscuring shadow.

And you will not always be able

To steal away from me like a thief of the night.

What have you done? How have you fled from me?

I could call to each of you

By his name and summon him to stand and face me, And one by one I could recount his acts,

Showing his deeds of folly and how he had sinned

Through his own fault and not the fault of another,

So that before me he would be like a man who gives himself up for lost.

O presumptuous fool! O vile and brazen companion! O horrible and ridiculous violence!

You have rebuffed me and have thrust me forth, but to-day I shall call you to account and you shall answer me!

I shall call you to account with a sharp and piercing voice, and it shall pass through your heart like a sword!

And I shall be harder and more bitter to you than a shrew to her husband!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: What could we do?

THE THIRD WATCHER: Shall we shriek before you like mandrakes? Shall we cause the moon to tremble with our cries, more dreadful than the shrieks of the murderer caught in the clutches of the law?

THE FIRST WATCHER: With what does she reproach us?

She is a woman. Have we not known

Women like her? And have we not found them nothing and less than nothing?

THE PRINCESS: And was I then so ugly,

So far from pleasing that no one of you would have looked with favor upon me, and followed after me, and taken me for his mistress?

What have you done for me? And yet what is there that I could not give you?

Sometimes the Muse descends to wander the ways of earth,

And profiting by the evening hour when the townspeople sit at supper,

Passes by, with laurel wreathing her brow; walks, barefoot, beside the flowing stream, singing immortal verses

All alone like a solitary stag.

And I, though I love that calm retreat,

Cannot always remain in the fountains and caves and deserted hollows among the oaks,

But I cry, at the cross-roads, and in the city streets,

In the bustling market-place and by the doors of the dance halls,

"Who will barter handfuls of blackberries for handfuls of heavy gold and give the flesh of his heart in exchange for a lasting love?"

(She goes to each of the bystanders and, forcing him to raise his head and seizing it by the hair and the chin, she looks in his face, her eyes close to his. Then she resumes her former position in silence.)

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Save our souls for us if you have the power!

THE PRINCESS: From this time forth we are strangers!

Let the shadows and the lamp bear witness to our divorce!

Many a time in such dim shades, I have warned you earnestly. But you would give no heed.

Here in this murky light,

Now that your souls are numbered with those that are marked for death, I come to you once more

Not to repair the breach, but to proclaim it!

You invoke me at a moment when you are beyond all aid!

What have you made of me?

It is most fitting that you should taste of death!

But as for me, I suffer an iniquitous punishment and am a reproach to you

Unavailingly!

Alas that I should have met so much stubbornness and ignorance!

Alas, I could cry aloud in my grief and if you could not endure

To hear the cries of your wife in the agony of her travail, how could you bear to hear my grievances against you?

Oh! It is late! And I

Must go away alone like a widow harshly evicted from her home!

You will think of me with regret in the hour of your agony,

But I abandon you and leave this dwelling. And may the spiders weave their webs here!

(Pause. She moves backwards till she is near the bed of Cébès and, bending her head towards him.)

And you, sick man?

(CÉBÈS raises his eyes, sees her, and begins to laugh.)

THE PRINCESS: Why do you laugh?

CÉBÈS: That thing on your head is so queer!

I can't help laughing when I look at it!

THE PRINCESS: Look at me more closely.

Don't you think that I could cure you?

CÉBÈS: What shall I do to be cured, Most Beautiful?

THE PRINCESS: You must believe me and love me, Cébès.

CÉBÈS: I have given my troth to one and to one only, and I will die and will have no other love.

(Silence.)

What more have you to say?

THE PRINCESS *(making a movement)*: Farewell!

CÉBÈS: Do not go! Stay with me!

THE PRINCESS: Take my hand. *(He takes it.)* Listen to my last word.

CÉBÈS: I am listening.

THE PRINCESS: Farewell!

CÉBÈS: Not that! Not that cruel word! Do not go!

THE PRINCESS: Farewell!

The song draws to an end!

And the face of the singer, The Gatherer-of-Flowers,

Fades in the dusk of evening

Till only the eyes remain and the violet ghost of the mouth.

He who loves goes forth to greet The Bride,

And the door is opened by invisible hands.

Farewell, for I am going.

(CÉBÈS half rises and, stretching out his hand towards her, passes it over her face. There is a tense silence.)

THE PRINCESS *(rushing to the middle of the stage)*: O my father,

You commanded me to show myself before you and I am here, a wretched girl decked out in these fantastic robes!

I have spoken, adding what was needful to phrases learned by heart. I suffer! I suffer! My soul is shaken in me!

And you, my father, is it thus I see you, gnawing your beard,

And fixing blood-shot eyes on the ground! Let me go, I beg of you!

The beautiful and illustrious lady who spoke just now is gone

And in her place there is only I myself, an every-day young girl, careful of her nails and her complexion.

Good-bye, father! Good-bye to you all!

For the sadness rises also in me and I must go,

Groping my way through gloomy corridors.

O father! O mother that I never knew!

Soon I shall lie full length on the ground with outspread hands,

Or, with a hidden spring of blood welling up between my breasts, I shall mock the maid who falls asleep in her chair.

—Off with you, heavy and importunate robes!

(She goes out.)

The King *(springing violently to his feet)*: Go! It is well!

No imagined terror! Here is horror itself.

Look at me, me the old man!

By this hoary beard that I tear with both hands, I swear

That disaster incarnate

Stands before you and cries, "*Adsum!*"

You heard the sound of his rage like a battle beneath the horizon,

And now with nodding funereal plumes The Agony of Death strides terribly towards you, like a colossus, with copper cheeks, shaking the flimsy structures you have reared!

"I wandered in, the night with foam as thick as a camel's slaver, dripping from my jaws! I was an outcast! The hounds of hell were gnawing my heart!

Now in the day

I stride before the legions, mid blood and the crackle of fire, like a flaming windmill, brandishing

a flail, clenching between my teeth a sword as big as an oar!"

THE FIFTH WATCHER: I defy you! I fear you not!

—Mangle me, cut me to bits and my severed head shall spring and bite!

Let the thunderbolt flay me and like Ajax voiding lightning and the water of the sea from mouth and nose,

A blinding mass, I shall vomit

Against heaven my malediction like a dart.

THE KING: Ruin! Destruction!

The forest flames! The rivers are choked with wreckage! The belfries full of clanging bells crash into chaos!

O my desolate fields!

O my strong men who strew the roads, like crushed beetles!

O the grocery and the bakery! O villages ill guarded by the Cock of the Cross, O towns devoured by the ravening grave-yard!

Past is the time of ploughing and reaping and peaceful sharing of daily bread!

And we ourselves like dead animals shall rot among weeds and nettles,

Or we shall be forced to take refuge in woods and caves and learn again the language of nymphs and ravens.

O race! O dynasty! Long have I lived! Long has the King been governor of this country.

Solitary, searching for Wisdom, fixing on Duty his arid eyes,

A helmsman made wise by steering in the uncharted sea, practised in deciphering the slow changes of the stars!

That I should cease to see and feel!

Oh, this life

Looks with two faces upon us:

Dawn, her cheeks anointed with honey and honeycomb,

And Care, with swarthy face like an old fisherman, taciturn, shedding tears of pitch!

That I should fall,

Striking the echoing pavement with the head

Of an anointed King!

THE SECOND WATCHER: Peace, peace, O King, and do not speak so loudly! Be still! If you cannot sleep, keep silence!

For this is the dreadful part of the night that was not meant for the eye of man,

And this is a task that was not intended for him. Nevertheless let him sleep his sleep;

For in its splendor the army of the heavens passes above the earth,

And is reflected in the puddles and the open wells in the market-gardens.

Wait patiently and listen to the cock crowing in the night,

And soon it will be the hour when the baker throws the dough on the kneading board with a dull thud, a sign that the dawn is near.

I think that the sun will rise and will strike with a ruddy light the wall overgrown with the ancient royal vine,

And the light and the breeze will enter through the windows vast and high!

I shall think only this and shall keep my eyes upraised. For they are made to see and if they close it is only to open again.

(Prolonged silence.—The sound of cannon.)

THE FIRST WATCHER: It is he! There is news!

(The MESSENGER enters, out of breath.)

THE FIRST WATCHER: Speak! Why do you open your mouth so wide? Why do you nod your head? If

It should be not haste but joy that makes you speechless, if

You only bring us tidings that are not of disaster,

Laugh only; do not keep that ominous air

Cassius!

THE MESSENGER: O

Triumph!

What glory! What human heart will be strong enough to bear

This!

And you, my brothers that I now behold again,

Listen to this resplendent news!

THE THIRD WATCHER: Speak! What? You say....

THE MESSENGER: ... That we have gained the victory? Yes.

THE THIRD WATCHER: That this Kingdom is saved? That we live once more? That this land

Is still intact with its people in its length and in its breadth?

I listen trembling! How,

How is it possible?

You do not say that we are victorious, we?

THE MESSENGER: Yes. That is what I said!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: My hair stands on end and my tears pour forth like the melting snow!

And I will utter such a cry

That one would think that a dead man had risen from his tomb, sending the stone flying!

What!

That armed horde that fell upon us terribly arrayed, those successive lines, those strong columns that, marching like one man, advanced across the valleys and the plains, that interminable line of cannon....

THE MESSENGER: I said that we had conquered.

Did you not understand? I said that we had won the battle.

THE FOURTH WATCHER: What is a single battle? The menace is always there.

THE MESSENGER: The enemy is retreating, struck with terror. Halted as though he had seen The Angel of Death!

THE THIRD WATCHER: Of course! He was here! He has shown himself in their path.

THE SECOND WATCHER: You say that the enemy is retreating?

THE MESSENGER: Retreating! Routed! Fleeing!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: You bring warmth into a frozen place and into a pitch black night a dazzling brightness.

Be patient with me! Repeat it yet again! Nourish my heart with that sustaining word!

THE MESSENGER: We have conquered! We have driven them before us! Our strength has prevailed!

THE FOURTH WATCHER: Triumph!

THE FIRST WATCHER: Do you say nothing, Sire?

THE KING: O my children!

I cannot speak,

For an hour better than I have deserved

Has come upon me,

On me, the incapable, useless governor of this country!

O Messenger, you have restored their taste to bread and wine.

Let the bells ring out till all the air resounds,

Let the round brazen throats beneath the bell-ringer's feet fill with our jubilation,

The circle of the earth and the height of heaven!

Let the singers of our triumph stand forth together,

And let their mouths exhaling

A song of benediction, eat of the sun till evening!

Wine! Wine! I wish to drink with you, O Messenger,

Even as two carters do who meet in a roadside inn!

(Wine is brought.)

O fortune, I drink to you with this trembling hand! Accept this toast!

O fortune, since you have given us this hour, conduct us where you will! (*He drinks.*) Excellent glass of wine!

THE MESSENGER: I cannot

Put wine between my teeth till that excessive joy
Which buoyed me upon my horse as I galloped towards you
Has spoken.

I say that the kingdom has been saved by handfuls of gold and jewels!

He was not ashamed to beg, on the bridges, at the cross-roads,
Stretching out his princely hands,
Burying in the mud his armored knees....

THE THIRD WATCHER: We have seen him!

THE MESSENGER: ... Fixing before him his sparkling eyes, like an Andromeda with horse's mane,
more proud than the god of the wind when at the water's edge

He kneels, stretching out his hands to the chains on the rocks of Occismor,
Till he was buried up to the thighs in alms!

For each man looked at him with astonishment, and struck with a vague shame, he gave in
silence all that he had and placed it on the ground before him.

He had come, our king, unique in his beauty, adorned with marvellous deeds!

And, full of a secret sadness, we recalled his face, shy and terrible.

THE FIRST WATCHER: It is thus that....

THE MESSENGER: If anyone dared to speak to him, unaddressed, saying, "Who are you?"

He looked at him a moment, and answered, "I am what I seem to be. You are not mistaken."

"Oh!" one said to him, "Oh, war!

When shall we have peace?"

"You wish to live in peace?"

"Surely," he answered, "Yes, indeed."

"Coward, you cannot! Even now they come to rob you of your goods

And the man is at hand who will take you, caught by the scruff of the neck, and geld you like a
domestic animal."

And the questioner said, "What can I do?"

"Fight!" he answered, "Resist!"

"And conquer also, perhaps?" "You can do it," he replied and he looked at him fixedly.

"O man insulted and outraged,

To-day you can wash away your shame and rise from your baseness and give the lie to the name
they have bestowed upon you!"

These words were repeated and often he who heard them

Did not forget them, but, leaving his wife alone in her bed to weep,

He paced all night the floor of his room, pondering this question,

"If I try, why cannot I?"

Until a little phrase, full of a sense of strength,

Impinged upon his consciousness: "I can!"

THE FIRST WATCHER: It is astonishing! It is utterly astonishing! I did not believe what they told
me.

THE MESSENGER: Then it was

That in the unhappy soul was born the fury of the captive!

Renouncing life and crying "Forward!", they flocked to where the bugle sounded the assembly.

Still not sure of themselves,

When, like a superintendent among his workmen, he walked among them, looking at them all,
assuring himself

That everything was according to his command.

They turned to him their ranks of eyes of every kind and hue, and they were comforted again.

To a man they gladly left their families and their work.

There was on the slope a mighty growth of broom, tree of yellow flowers, dear to the bees.

He had it cut down and, having kissed it, he bade them bear it before him. Then he mounted his horse.

And the soldiers waiting their turn to set out,
Heard behind them the rustling of the flag, cock of the war, song of sails!

ALL: Come! Speak! Speak!

THE MESSENGER: But when they came to the field where they had to die or conquer,
They knew another flag.

THE FIRST WATCHER: What flag?

THE MESSENGER: What flag? Not a tatter of silk, not a woman's shirt that a child waves about on the end of a bean-pole!

But like some old gibbet that creaks beneath its burden of corpses, like a mast with its sinister yardarms,

The monstrous standard of our wretchedness, enormous, charged with chains!

They saw it while they set their feet on a soil enriched by the flesh

Of their fathers and mothers, like fallen leaves!

At first they kept their ranks, fighting shoulder to shoulder, and thus it was for some time.

But finally full of a rage like the lust for gold,

They rushed forward all together, raising discordant cries.

And then a sudden panic

Arose as if all at once, though it was day, the Night

Rearing up her giant head with its diadem of stars,

Confounded the sense with the blast of her prodigious horn.

They were astounded, those others, and they trembled, and suddenly the serried ranks of our foes,

Like colts stampeded by a clanking chain,

Turned tail and fled!

Thus did we raise that army, having gotten under it,

Thus did we tilt it backward like a cask,

Spilling a great tumult of men

On the earth and in the reedy beds of streams.

Think of it! That innumerable horde turned their backs, and ran before us! Zounds!

Oh who has seen such a massacre, the piles of wounded and dying

Gasping like a catch of fish in the bottom of a boat!

ALL: Triumph!

THE MESSENGER: Sharp cries resounded on the bleeding air, and the mad galloping of horsemen, and cannon whose flashes glared through the pall of smoke!

God!

We chased them with a shoe like rats!

Doddering gray beards with a gesture

Put to flight battalions, and children whose voices broke,

Catching him by the bridle, led away the horse and his rider.

This I saw.

I saw the captured flags brought in like fagots!

I remember soldiers, black-bearded, or with chins

Bristling with white hairs,

Who in the evening, while the soup was cooking,

Stood, their feet in the heather, like smiths worn out with toil,

Red like the arbute-berry in the ruddy gloaming,

Contemplating through the branches the scarlet sky from which comes life.

—As for him,

Those who stood by his stirrups, taking his orders,

Listening with parted lips to what he said, for the first time saw on his face,

Like that of a man who, in the midst of a crowd, mocks at an absurd misfortune,

The inconstant smile of a young girl!

ALL: Triumph! Triumph!

THE MESSENGER: Now let these eyes which have seen such a spectacle

Cover themselves with a film, and let this vase

That has contained such an image dash itself to pieces!

To think that I, I should have lived to see such a day!

Rejoice! Victory whinnying like a virgin mare

Rolls on the battlefield,

Lashing out with shining hooves, turning her trout's belly to the sky!

CÉBÈS: O messenger!

THE MESSENGER: Who calls me?

CÉBÈS: Is that all that Tête-d'or said to you? Won't he be coming soon?

THE MESSENGER: Are you he whom he calls Cébès?

CÉBÈS: Well?

THE MESSENGER: In that case, Tête-d'or gave me a message for you.

CÉBÈS: What? Did he think of me?

THE MESSENGER: He told me to say that he will soon be here. Listen, all of you!

These are his words, "Say that I shall be there.

I am coming, I myself."

CÉBÈS: He is coming?

THE MESSENGER: He is hard upon my heels.

(Trumpet without.

THE FIRST WATCHER: Hark!

THE THIRD WATCHER: I hear the voice of the trumpet.

(Pause. Noise of arms without.

THE FOURTH WATCHER: He is here.

(TÊTE-D'OR enters.

THE KING (*advancing to meet him*): You have preserved this kingdom,

The men that work, the women that bear children, and the fields that yield food.

You have given a second birth to everything.

Young man, I greet you with the name of Father.

May blessings gather on your beloved head.

Enter, conquering hero,

Welcome to this hearth and to this shadowy hall almost bereft of light,

And first I salute you as is fitting.

(He bows before him.

(All come and one after the other bow before him.

Hail!

TÊTE-D'OR: I thank you, Sire.

I thank you all. Who am I? What have I done?

That which must be already exists. From whom is this knowledge hidden?

(*To CÉBÈS*) And you, will you not give me a word of welcome, thus happily returned?

CÉBÈS: O Tête-d'or!

TÊTE-D'OR: Find an excuse! Pretend that you still are sick!

CÉBÈS: Stay here with me. I want to talk to you.

TÊTE-D'OR: He wants to talk to me.

THE KING: Do you wish us to withdraw?

TÊTE-D'OR: Do this for me.

Do this for me, my friends! I ask your pardon.

You shall hear what I have to say to you presently.

(They all go out.)

TÊTE-D'OR: Well, Cébès, here I am! The same as ever!

I come again, having conquered!

CÉBÈS: By these victorious hands, dear friend!

TÊTE-D'OR: Give me a brotherly welcome.

(They embrace.)

CÉBÈS: O man with the power to conquer!

TÊTE-D'OR: I bayed at their heels! I made them rise from the dung in which they sat.

Then I saw that what I wished for was.

CÉBÈS: But how?

TÊTE-D'OR: I am telling you! I was more firm on my horse than on a rock.

—But I wanted to talk with you and there you are still in your bed.

CÉBÈS: Do not pity me.

TÊTE-D'OR: Are you feeling better?

CÉBÈS: Because I am not worth your trouble, hero!

TÊTE-D'OR: You do not render me a true account.

Am I not your tutor? Do you think that all I have done can go for naught? Was it in vain, that adoption that bound us so close together on that night of sorrow?

And are you not mine?

(Silence.)

Eh?

CÉBÈS: Well?

TÊTE-D'OR: What?

CÉBÈS: Nothing.

TÊTE-D'OR: You twist the chain of my sword but do not speak.

CÉBÈS: Tête-d'or....

TÊTE-D'OR: Well?

(Silence.)

CÉBÈS: Did you bring back your army with you?

TÊTE-D'OR: Yes, it is close behind me.

CÉBÈS: You have gained the victory! You knew how to command all these men according to their corps and their battalion, and they obeyed you!

TÊTE-D'OR: Yes, for I saw and knew.

CÉBÈS: What?

TÊTE-D'OR: My opportunity and how to seize it.

The eyes and the brain cry at the selfsame instant:

"This thing must be!" I take that which is due me.

CÉBÈS: And I, I do not see and do not know!

What could I have done?

Yet I am wise though in one thing only.

TÊTE-D'OR: Which is?

CÉBÈS: Will it bore you if I tell you everything? Or shall I speak freely

As to the man in whom

I have put my trust?

TÊTE-D'OR: In what thing?

CÉBÈS (*very low*): To give

Myself.

But to give myself to whom? Not

To one as weak as I am.

Nothing imperfect can satisfy me for I do not satisfy myself.

So I seek a man who is perfectly just and true,

That he may be perfectly good and I may love him.

I am only a child, Tête-d'or, but I tell you I have within me

A thing older than I,

And it has its own secret source and seeks its own end, in spite of my sodden intellect and unsure senses, and it makes my life bitter.

But I open my eyes and see the sun as it rises and sets,

And nature, and I find no happiness there. And I see other men and they are like myself.

To which of them shall I speak? I shall speak to him and he will make reply.

Each cries, "Like us you must pay for the right to be alive!" But as I say I have no handicraft,

I can only pay with myself.

And all men are full of faults,

—But you, do you think that such a man exists?

TÊTE-D'OR: You lay your hand on an old wound!—He exists.

CÉBÈS: He exists then.

But which of us speaks and is not understood?

Has he rejected me, or am I in any way to blame?

I bear witness to the Truth

That there is nothing here I am not ready to leave behind as one rises from a chair.

But I see a fly, a plant, a stone, yet him I do not see.

And if I do not find him why have my eyes been dowered with the faculty of seeing, and my hands with fingers as if they saw!

For I raise my hands and move them here and there!

And will someone speak of self-control and of works of betterment by which the noble man consecrates himself like a temple?

I do not care to be loved. But I know how to love and I would see and have!

And against these sure desires there is only a vague perhaps.

And why will it later be otherwise? For I am made of flesh and blood, as my mother made me.

TÊTE-D'OR: What is it? You look at me strangely and there is something in you that I do not recognise.

CÉBÈS: You have come, O Conqueror,

To all the rest like the promise of a future of happy days!

For me alone you bring no rescue!

TÊTE-D'OR: What do you mean?

CÉBÈS (*lying down again*): I am dying.

TÊTE-D'OR: What did you say?

CÉBÈS: What the doctors told me, and it is the truth.

TÊTE-D'OR: No!

CÉBÈS: I shall not live through another night. I shall not live till noon.

TÊTE-D'OR: No! No!

CÉBÈS: It is not the pain that I fear, and the cramps, and the horrible struggle to vomit,

When my mouth is filled with bile and blood and the sweat pours out of my body like water from a sponge.

This I can bear, for my heart is stout, and I shall look in your face, my brother, in the hour of my torture.

Why was I born? For I die and then I shall exist no more.

The shadows had closed about me so that I slept in darkness and woke in darkness. And I saw nothing; and I was deaf and heard no sound.

For I am like a man buried alive, and I am confined as in an oven!

Give me light! Give me light! Give me light! Give me light! For I would see!

Give me air, for I stifle!

Give me to drink, for I do not want the water that they bring me.

But you, give me water to drink, that I may die in peace, for I am consumed with thirst!

O brother! I have put my trust in you! Will you not help me? I beg you, soldier, head of gold, O my bright-haired brother!

TÊTE-D'OR: Oh! That I could do as does the eagle,

Who, letting fall a useless prey, perishes in his ravaged eyrie!

Why did you cross my path?

Why, like pride, having kneeled before me, did you clasp me in your arms like a tree or a fountain?

On my heart, he pressed his face against this throbbing regret!

And again he asks my help in the hour of his death!

I do not understand! I have done my best

And I have turned my steps towards that house of sin,

And I thought that, having renounced all selfish hope,

To-day I would work with my hands.

You speak of desire, the necessity of the present hour constrains me!

The rapacious desire drags me forward through this place of horror.

And he asks, and I cannot reply to this poor luckless child, and he is dying before my eyes!

CÉBÈS: You weep? Is that your only answer?

TÊTE-D'OR: I beg you

To leave me alone and not to question me. What do you want of me? Shall I hide you in my belly and give birth to you again?

It is most horrible

That you should draw these woman's tear-drops from me.

You question me and, like a brutish thing,

I can reply only by these vain waters!

CÉBÈS: You shall not escape me thus. Answer and I will question you. For you are my teacher and must answer me.

Answer! When a man dies does something still survive?

TÊTE-D'OR: Be still, and try me no more.

CÉBÈS: Answer! Is there an end of the personality? For as for the bodily form we know that it disappears.

TÊTE-D'OR: I answer that man has been conceived according to the flesh.

CÉBÈS: And to die is not to escape?

TÊTE-D'OR: This world was made for man and a limit was set about him,

That he might not escape and that no one might enter in.

CÉBÈS: Then I shall die and shall no longer exist?

TÊTE-D'OR: I will tell you what I know when I do not know it.

And my answer is silence, and the breath that blows from the open and black abyss.

You did not breathe in the days when you lay in the womb of your mother,

But her blood entered into your body and flowed in you and your heart was moored to her heart through the middle of your belly,

And having come out of her you breathed and uttered a cry!

I also have uttered a cry,

A cry like a babe new-born, and I have drawn the keen and burning sword, and have beheld

Humanity divide before me like the separation of the waters!

And now I return to you and find you in the lassitude of death!

Must everyone that I love die and leave me alone?

Must you wither in my hands like a flower of the stream before I had asked "Who are you?" and you had answered me?

Pit of weariness! Horror in which I stand! Is there someone here?

Is there something stable here? Who will carve a letter upon the face of the Mountain?

We can eat; we can lay a dish before ourselves and feed;

But the gravel sets our teeth on edge and ever from our eyes there flow invisible tears.

Then go to the common home! And now I say to you,

Hope not to still survive, being dead,

For how can any man see without his eyes, and how else will he be able

To grasp than with his hands?

CÉBÈS: If this is so,

O my body you have been of little worth,

For you die and I must die along with you.

I shall die like a four-footed beast, and shall exist no more.

Why then has it been given to me to know this?

(He begins to scream.) Ah! Ah!

TÊTE-D'OR: Yes, cry!

CÉBÈS: Night! O Night!

TÊTE-D'OR: The night is vast and wide, and the sun is lost in it,

And the silence, that no voice breaks nor any word, endures.

CÉBÈS: Forever and ever!

TÊTE-D'OR: Cry! Cry!

CÉBÈS: As for you, you live. You live and you watch me dying at your feet! Oh! Oh!

O Tête-d'or, can't you do anything for me? For I suffer!

TÊTE-D'OR *(changing his tone)*: Do not be afraid! I am here! Do not be afraid

To die. All is vanity and nothingness.

CÉBÈS: Do not go! Be my nurse! Stay here. Let me be with you

A little longer. Do not be disgusted with me because I die.

TÊTE-D'OR: Look, I hold your hand. What was it I said just now?

Come! Death is nothing. Smile! Won't you smile for me?

CÉBÈS: Alone!

TÊTE-D'OR: What's that?

CÉBÈS: Alone....

TÊTE-D'OR: Alone? What are you saying?

CÉBÈS: ... I die!

TÊTE-D'OR: Am I not with you?

CÉBÈS: Alone I die!

For I do not know who I am and I flee away and vanish like a spring that disappears!

Then why do you say that you love me? Why do you lie?

For who can love me

Since I cease to be when my body dies?

A bitter indignation boils within me!

My bowels bloat! I am racked with fearful retchings

That strive to rive apart the fastening of my bones!

Alone I die! And I pant in vain for breath and there is something in me that is not satisfied;

More alone than the strangled babe that its murderous mother buries at the bottom of a dunghill,

Among the broken dishes and dead cats, in earth that is full of fat pink worms!

(He tries to get up.)

TÊTE-D'OR: What are you doing? Stay where you are!

Come, you cannot get out of bed!

(He holds him back.)

CÉBÈS: I want to get up, to walk again! Oh! I can live!

Leave me alone! Let go of me!

TÊTE-D'OR: Stay where you are! Are you mad? Don't you recognise me?

What would you do?

CÉBÈS: Will you not let me go, wretched man! O coward!

I hate you—O the great beast, he holds me!

—Will you not let me go!

(He bites his hand, frees himself, struggles to his feet and falls, TÊTE-D'OR puts him back on his bed.)

TÊTE-D'OR: You see!

CÉBÈS (*screaming*): Ho, ho, ho!

TÊTE-D'OR: Be quiet! Calm yourself!

CÉBÈS (*screaming*): Ho!

TÊTE-D'OR: You turn my heart to ice! Do not howl like a wolf in this unholy night!

CÉBÈS: Oh! O God!

TÊTE-D'OR: Cébès!

CÉBÈS: Let me alone!

TÊTE-D'OR: Have you forgotten....

CÉBÈS: Leave me!

(His mouth still open, he slowly lays his head on his pillow. Then he begins to smile. Pause.)

Tête-d'or, there are many kinds of men, the weak and the strong, the sick and the well.

I pity them; the incompetent and the stammering, the poor of spirit and those that ask for alms
With the deprecating smile that masks the shudder of shame behind.

And those that are mocked and cannot make reply, and cowards,

And those who from the darkness of their souls exhale a prayer devoid of savor!

And you, do you not also pity me?

And I say to you like that woman

When she lay at the roadside in the shadow of death;

"Why do you let me die?"

TÊTE-D'OR: Take me with you if you wish! Do you think that I am not weary?

Groaning, I strove to tear myself from those strong and bony hands.

And now you weep and would bring me again to that terrible repose!

The wind ruffles my hair and the heartbreak of the earth lies stark and bare before my despairing
eyes! And I look and am filled with shame!

O the fate of the bee and the fly whose life lasts only a season and endures but a single day!

And the birds of the wood are also alive; and the caterpillar that crawls on the leaf and the broom
that roots in the sand,

And the ravening beast and the thistle with purple flowers!

And you, who are dying, you counsel me to die!

I cannot loose my limbs from these tough ligatures!

O world! O self! O shameful destiny!

Let me be iron and like a thing of wood!

CÉBÈS: What hope....

TÊTE-D'OR: I look at you and is it thus you lie!

CÉBÈS: Come, let's not talk of it. Things are better than you think. But, tell me....

I do not understand ... you follow me ... eh? What inner pride, what secret flame....

TÊTE-D'OR: Neither do I, I do not understand! I am tired!

You speak of hidden things that the thick tongue shudders to say,

Tales with no basis of reason, blood that flows like saliva!

A little word of consolation watches beneath all wretchedness,

Sweet forget-me-not of fire that lights us mournfully with its faithful gleam!

—Beyond the silence a voice like the human voice

Spoke to my soul and it melted and flowed like iron in the foundry!
Still it resounds! That fervent hope warms us again like coffee!
O glowing geranium! O clot of sunlight! It throbs! It bleeds like a fragment of living flesh!
For there is a force and a spirit in me
Like the bellows blowing on iron in the fire.
I beg of you, do not ask me anything more!

CÉBÈS: Yet it must be.

—Mother, my brother! O nurse with sides caparisoned in steel!

TÊTE-D'OR: Well?

CÉBÈS: O brother, so at the last you have found no word to tell me! Ah well,
I, I have something to tell to you.

TÊTE-D'OR: What?

CÉBÈS: It has not been permitted that I should die in such despair! And now I am beyond all pain,
And it troubles me no more. Tête-d'or!

TÊTE-D'OR: What, brother?

CÉBÈS: Take me in your arms and hold me, for there is no longer any strength in me. And put me
on your shoulder like an armful of leafy branches.

O Tête-d'or! you have baptised me with your blood. Now like a babe I lie upon your breast and
pour forth on your bosom all myself,

For every tie is dissolved and I am like a severed branch.

(TÊTE-D'OR takes CÉBÈS in his arms.)

TÊTE-D'OR: Thus in my turn I take you in my arms.

CÉBÈS: They say

That if in the midst of his path through a dreary solitude,
Of a sudden the wanderer halts at the summons of his heart,
It is love, that locks the man and woman in agonised embrace.

They do not recognise themselves and the lover feels a pang like the stab of a knife beneath his
ribs,

And invents those phrases that begin with O,

Imitating the piercing cries of sea-birds, for their silence is like the peace of the waters.

TÊTE-D'OR: What have you to say to me?

CÉBÈS: O Tête-d'or! I am not a woman and neither am I a man,

For I am not of age, and I am already as if I were no more.

TÊTE-D'OR: Who are you then?

CÉBÈS: O Tête-d'or, all pain is past!

The snare is broken and I am free! I am the plant that has been uprooted from the earth!

There is a joy that comes with man's last hour. That joy am I and the secret that can no longer be
told.

O Tête-d'or, I give myself to you and deliver myself into your hands! So hold me while I am with
you.

TÊTE-D'OR: O Cébès, whom thus I have taken in my arms, I will question you in my turn. Hand
yearns to hand

And mouth to mouth, yet never do they meet, for an invisible barrier lies between.

That is the pang of love through which it is like the water that boils and disappears.

CÉBÈS: Then love me more for I scarcely can be called a living man.

And I am like a bird that one seizes on the wing.

TÊTE-D'OR: O brother, I have jealously taken from you the woman you loved. And you would have
been happy with her. But it was destined that your love should be given to none but me.

Brother! Child!

O all the tenderness of my heart, I have taken you between my hands!

O burden! O sacrifice that I bear in my arms like a sheep whose feet are bound together!

Shall I call you my child or my brother? For I am more mindful of you

Than a father would have been of that pallid little face. And my heart is attached to yours by a stronger and sweeter tie

Than that which binds a brother to his little brother in the nursery when he plays with him in the evening, and lulls him to sleep with stories and helps in taking off his shoes.

O my friend that I have found in the gloom, are you going to abandon me and leave me all alone?

CÉBÈS: O Tête-d'or, as you gave yourself to me

Even so I give myself to you,

And as you did not trust your secret to me,

Neither shall I entrust to you mine.

I am strangely light and like a thing that can no longer be held.

(He kisses him on the cheek.)

Good-bye!

And now put me back on my bed.

(Meanwhile the first faint signs of dawn appear.)

TÊTE-D'OR: The day!

CÉBÈS: The chilly violet of dawn

Glances across the distant plains, tinting each track and rut with its glamor!

And in the silent farms the roosters cry

Cock-a-doodle-doo!

It is the hour when the traveller, huddled among the cushions of his coach,

Awakes, and peers through the pane, and coughs, and sighs,

And souls new-born in the shadows of walls and forests,

Uttering feeble cries like little naked birds,

Fly back again, guided by flaring meteors, into the regions of obscurity.

—What is the hour?

TÊTE-D'OR: The night is over.

CÉBÈS: It is over!—And the daybreak that kindles the sea to flame and with far-reaching fires

Colors the roofs and the towered gateways once again is born.

I feel the freshness of the breeze. Open the window!

(TÊTE-D'OR opens it.)

(Prolonged silence.)

TÊTE-D'OR: Can you hear me?

(Pause, CÉBÈS turns his eyes towards him and faintly smiles.)

TÊTE-D'OR: Can you hear me still?

"Put the table under the tree for we shall eat out of doors."—How beautiful the night is!

O Cébès, everything is hushed and there is no voice to break the stillness.

And like the smell of the cupboard in which the bread is kept and like the breath of the oven when the door of it is opened,

There lies before us the plenty of the fields.

It is night. The meadow is thick with harvest and far away one can almost hear

The swish of the scythe in the lush grass.

Already the fires of the routed stars are paling.

And the nightingale who sings at intervals

When the ascension of the starry heavens above the earth begins....

(He stops.—CÉBÈS is dead.)

(TÊTE-D'OR remains motionless for an instant, then he lays down the body, shuddering.)

Oh, horrible!

(He sits down.)

I am alone. I am cold.

What difference does it make?

Indeed it matters little that he is dead.

Why should we mourn? Why should we be disconcerted by anything that may happen?

What man of sense would lend himself to such buffoonery?

He who bursts into tears and whose head is bowed with his sobbing

Will pucker his face into the same wrinkles when he is roaring with laughter. Thus they bawl and contort their mouths. Puppets!

—He is dead and I am alone.—

Am I of stone? The leaves of the trees seem made of cloth or iron

And all outdoors is a painted scene to be looked at or not at one's pleasure.

And this sun, whose earliest rays formerly made me resound

Like a stone that clangs against bronze, why, let it rise!

I would as soon see the lung of a cow that floats at the door of a slaughter-house!

Yes, and like an insensible trunk of coral,

I could see my limbs drop from me.

Why should I live? I have no concern with life. I find no pleasure in existence. This is not good for me!

(He rises.)

To-day!

To-day has come and I must show who I am! There is myself to think of! It must be done!

Alone against them all! I will march forward and I will maim with the blow of an armored fist the slimy muzzle of bestiality!

I will speak before this assembly of slovens and cowards. And either I will perish at their hands or I will found my appointed empire!

Hola! Hola! Hola!

(He leans against the wall.)

(Tremendous hubbub outside. Slamming of doors. Calls on the stairs. Enter a great crowd of people. Prominent among them is the TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE. Three or four women accompany him. He is surrounded with people who jostle him and shake hands with him. Beside him, carrying his overcoat, is the GO-BETWEEN. In the group are the HIGH PREFECT, the SCHOOLMASTER, and other public officials. Also the BROTHER OF THE KING. Among the others is the KING to whom no one pays the slightest attention. Those representing the people are dumb actors. Enter after everyone else the MAN OUT OF OFFICE. He holds himself apart with three or four ill-dressed people. No one appears to notice the presence of TÊTE-D'OR, although all keep a certain distance away from him.)

(The hall is filled in a moment and through the open door one can see people crowding the vestibule and lining the stairs and climbing on benches to see better. All talk at once. Noise of many feet.)

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE (*speaking and laughing very loudly, in sudden outbursts*): Ah, well, yes, it is I, here I am.—Good morning, old fellow.—Eh?—Good morning.—Perfectly mad about me, aren't you! Just can't get along without me! Oh! Oh! Oh!—What's that, my dear?—Good morning, —Yes, sir!—Don't eat me. There is something for everyone! Ouf! Good morning!—Make room for me, I am far from small!

THE MAN OUT OF OFFICE (*in his group, feverishly*): Pig!...

That's right! Go on! Keep it up! Play with your good moment!

Hmmm! We shall see! We shall see!

(He rubs his hands.)

What has he done with the funds of the commissariat?

And how about the automatic guns? I shall attack him before the assembly. We shall see!

Look how he plumes himself! See how he struts among those nanny-goats!

SOMEONE (*of his following, in a low voice*): Do you know the story about him and the wife of the High Prefect? He had set up an establishment with the wife of the Paymaster-General,

And the other trollop came to join them. Such scenes as they had!

A CITIZEN (*loudly to the tribune of the people*): Sir, you have saved the State!

(He presses his hand.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Don't say that! I love my country, Sir! (*Very loudly*) I did not despair of my country!

The people did it all.

THE CITIZEN: All the same I say it was you! You did the organizing!

It isn't the soldiers who win the battles. You did the organizing.

All the Women (*together*): It is true!

(Nodding of heads.

MURMUR (*in the crowd, spreading to the stairways*): It is true.

(Uproar outside.

What is that?

THE GO-BETWEEN (*excitedly*): The whole city is roused. They are all clamoring for you. You must speak to them from the balcony.

(He talks to him in a low voice.

(Someone passes a paper to the TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE. the GO-BETWEEN reads it over his shoulder.

CLAMOR (*outside*). Jacquot! Jacquot! Jacquot! Jacquot! Jacquot! Hurrah!

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Say that I am going to speak to them!

(The GO-BETWEEN goes out on to the balcony. He can be seen bending over the rail and waving his arms. The TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE takes the arm of the HIGH PREFECT and walks across the hall with him, talking and gesturing.

THE MAN OUT OF OFFICE: See them! Not him!

His Excellency the High Prefect! Serious as a tethered ass!

Did you know that he writes verses in secret?

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE (*pointing sideways at TÊTE-D'OR with his chin*): Eh?

THE HIGH PREFECT (*authoritatively*): Don't alarm yourself!

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Tell me, Albert....

THE HIGH PREFECT: Don't alarm yourself. All this is absurd!

He has profited by the....

Shall I say the enervation? in which we were. One does not like that, once the panic is past.

He has overtaxed the people outrageously!

He is an adventurer,

A fellow picked off the streets! And as haughty as a god!

None are allowed to touch him and if any approach too near,

Men or women, he fetches them a rap on the head with his stick.

The people know their friends.

THE GO-BETWEEN (*making a gesture with his arm*): This way!

(The TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE goes out on the balcony and is seen speaking in the glow of the dawn.

(Bursts of applause from time to time. Uproar in the hall. Groups form here and there, one of them around the bed of CÈBÈS. Noise of a breaking pane in the upper story.

(The GO-BETWEEN speaks excitedly to the MAN OUT OF OFFICE and his group.

A CITIZEN (*all alone in the midst of the hall, contemplating the TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE*): What a man! What a bag of wind!

(The TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE, smiling, re-enters the hall, and looking about for the KING, he finds him and leads him out on to the balcony. He is seen to speak, patting the KING on the shoulder.)

THE GO-BETWEEN (*who stands near the HIGH PREFECT, glancing quickly and furtively in all directions, and especially towards TÊTE-D'OR*) (*to the HIGH PREFECT in a low voice*): What do you think of him, eh?

THE HIGH PREFECT: Hmm! He has the army back of him!

(The TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE re-enters the hall with the king.)

(Little by little a silence falls.)

SOMEONE (*in a low voice*): Why are there no lights? The dawn makes us look hideous.

(The silence has become complete. All keep their eyes fixed on TÊTE-D'OR.)

(Pause.)

Someone (*near CÈBÈS*): He is dead.

TÊTE-D'OR (*turning towards the assembly*): Who says that he is dead?

SOMEONE: He is paler than any of us and his lips are discolored.

(The crowd recoils, leaving the KING, with his brother beside him, in front, opposite TÊTE-D'OR. To the right and behind the KING, the HIGH PREFECT, the SCHOOLMASTER and the other officials of the Government, to the left the TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE, the MAN OUT OF OFFICE. A young man, with the group of women, stands close to TÊTE-D'OR.)

TÊTE-D'OR: Is it yet day?

THE YOUNG MAN: Day?

A WOMAN: The sun is rising.

TÊTE-D'OR: It rises!

—The pallid morn illumines the mud of the roads, And under the hedges the cabbage leaves and the flowers

Pour on the tawny earth their burden of rain.

Those who are dead depart, and those who are living

Must stand before the world and confess their o'er burdened souls.

I stand alone and wounded.

THE KING: This child is dead?

TÊTE-D'OR: He is dead.

(The KING drops his head on his breast.)

Yes, that sight is bitterer than sourest herbs! Oh!

I was for him as Athens was for Argos,

Yet I shall bear this also and my patient heart shall not be shaken

For now I must proclaim myself to all.

—O soul, farewell, enter before us into the splendor of Noon!

(Pause.)

A FAT WOMAN (*of about fifty standing near TÊTE-D'OR, in a loud voice*): Speak, general, what have you to say?

TÊTE-D'OR: What is this woman doing here? Clear the hall of these females!

Who let loose these mares upon me! Out! Off with you! Begone!

(The women go out.)

As for you, I scarcely know who you are or what is the meaning of this assembly.

O King, is it thus you grant access to your presence?

But it is well. I will speak before this rabble and they shall hear what I have to say.

(He stands silent, with downcast eyes.)

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Speak! What have you to say?

TÊTE-D'OR: You have seen what I have done.

Nevertheless I shall tell it again that you may contradict me.

I say that this land was like an estate without a master, like a building that robbers themselves have abandoned, taking even the locks and bolts.

O King! they left you alone in your palace and old women brought their goats to pasture in your garden.

Everything was piled in a heap, and like cowards, the citizens lifted their impotent hands in air.

I appeared in the market-place! I appeared in that land made desolate, bringing the force of hope to a perishing people,

And I spoke with the voice of command. And those who slumbered

Heard, and thrilled at the call of the leader,

Like the blast of the trumpet, like the creating word!

Thus I gathered an army about me. I conceived and I executed.

I hurled the enemy to the ground and tore the sword from his hand. I killed the lion that sprang upon you to devour you.

That is what I did. Has anyone anything to say?

THE KING: That is what you did, Tête-d'or.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Well and good. But you didn't do it alone.

TÊTE-D'OR: I say that I did it all alone,

I alone! I did it! I alone! Not another, but I!

—What will you give me, then, as a proper recompense?

—What will you give me

That you have not received from my hands?

(The HIGH PREFECT breathes through his nose as if he wished to speak.)

THE SCHOOLMASTER: You only did your duty.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: You have only done your duty to your country.

TÊTE-D'OR: What duty? What country?

What have you done for me? I wandered your roads like a vagabond. My bed was the breast of the earth.

And I know how you welcome the man with swarthy cheeks

When he takes off his cap uncovering a forehead that still can redden.

I was hungry and you offered me no bread. I am hungry!

And behold I stand at your door!

THE KING: Ask then, that we may know what you wish.

TÊTE-D'OR: Examine me well and inspect me from every standpoint.

Weigh me, measure me. Study each foot as you would with a horse, and put my teeth to the test.

And considering everything, calculate

If

The buyable bulk of myself comprises the profit

Winnowed out by your wisdom's sieve.

SOMEONE: What does all this mean?

ANOTHER: His voice is strange. It strikes the heart so that it vibrates like a plucked string and gives out notes.

TÊTE-D'OR: Hear me, men that are here!

Listen to me, O you that hear through the ear and the hole that pierces the skull!

Up to this time, O grass, you have only heard the murmuring of yourself.

Listen to the command, listen to the word that ordains, hearken to intelligence!

I am the strength of the voice and the power of the living word!

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Then what do you ask?

TÊTE-D'OR: I ask for everything.

I ask you for everything that you may give it to me.

That supreme power may be mine to do everything and to have everything.

For who shall fix the limits of the intelligence and the place where it is stayed, and who shall set a bound to the power of its arm?

Let nothing in the world escape me when I pronounce the sacred word!

And as that burning king, the heart,

Is throned in the midst of the lungs that envelop him,

Receiving all the blood in himself and sending it out again through his gates,

Even so it is that the contemplation of my intellect was made

To establish itself on a royal seat, on the throne of the memory and the will. It is my wish

To reign.

(Murmur. Exclamations. The sound of words whispered from one to another.)

THE KING: Tête-d'or...

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Let me! I will reply to him.

(The MAN OUT OF OFFICE makes an exclamation. The GO-BETWEEN seems disturbed and agitated and looks to left and right.)

THE SCHOOLMASTER (*with a grimace*): This young man is utterly mad!

THE HIGH PREFECT: Hmm! He has the army back of him.

(The TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE looks at them out of the corner of his eye.)

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE (*to TÊTE-D'OR*): If I have rightly understood what you just said, young man, you are asking for absolute power.

TÊTE-D'OR: Yes. You have understood rightly.

(Murmur.)

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: You heard! It was not I who put the words in his mouth!

Listen to me, young man, your success has destroyed your sense of proportion.

Gently!

You yourself have informed us of all that you imagine

You have done (*very loudly*) for your native land,

And that it was not done through any love you bore her,

And thus you doubly spare us

The trouble of thanking you.

You have done it all

Alone! I take you to witness, gentlemen!

Alone! But science declares, young man,

That no one can do anything alone.

(He claps his hat on his head with an air of defiance.)

If one of those brave soldiers who have won the day were here,

If one of those thousands and thousands of heroes

Who have saved this land were here,

Perhaps he would say that you were not your country's sole defender and we should hear the true account of how these events occurred.

And if, sir, following your example,

We advertised broadcast all that we had done according to the measure of the power with which in that hour of peril the people honored us,

We should see to whom in actual fact belonged

The greater part of the credit for our glorious victory.

But at least, my friends,

(He slowly lifts his right hand) Here I swear it to you! *(he holds it uplifted)* and I ask you all to join me in the oath!

In the darkest hour we kept our faith in our country!

CRIES: True! It was he! He did it all!

(Loud applause.)

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: No,

No, my friends! Your pardon! Not that! A man is only a man. Do not say that I did it all, I alone.

Do you know who did it all? I will tell you.

The people, my friends. The noble people of our native land! They did it all!

(Silence.)

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE *(slowly and impressively)*: My friends, honor to the people of our country!

(He solemnly bares his head.)

(Loud clapping, hurrahs, uproar.)

SOMEONE *(in the crowd)*: Very good indeed!

ANOTHER: No more the one than the other!

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: As for you, sir, we shall recognise what you were able to do

According as we find it good.

I do not know what dark designs you cherish. But if you tamper with our liberty

You will find, sir, that you have to deal with me!

(He crosses his arms and plants himself opposite TÊTE-D'OR.)

THE MAN OUT OF OFFICE: You are not by yourself in that, Jacquot.

(He likewise crosses his arms and plants himself beside the TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE, confronting TÊTE-D'OR.)

(To TÊTE-D'OR.)

Don't imagine yourself the least bit bigger than anybody else.

TÊTE-D'OR: Another? Who is this?

A VOICE *(in the crowd)*: I am Envy!

THE MAN OUT OF OFFICE: Hah! Who do you think that you are, sir? All men are equal!

(He makes a horizontal gesture.)

One is no greater than another.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Don't flatter yourself that the people will consent to renounce their rights!

TÊTE-D'OR: Kill me then, for I shall not renounce mine!

THE MAN OUT OF OFFICE: They will cling to their liberty.

TÊTE-D'OR: I also would be free.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Are you not free, then, madman?

TÊTE-D'OR: While there is something not beneath my sway I am not free.

(Murmur.)

I say to you, kill me while there still is time! You are a cityful and I am all alone. Kill me, then!

For if you do not kill me I will put my hand upon you with power.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: Tête-d'or....

TÊTE-D'OR: Let me speak in my turn!

Listen, noise! Listen, nothing!

And listen, flocks dispersed in your folds and pastures, and you

Dogs that believe yourselves the shepherd!

(He shakes his head violently. His helmet drops off and his long yellow hair falls down on to his

shoulders. He becomes very red. All are silent and stare at him open-mouthed.

A VOICE: Look at that woman!

TÊTE-D'OR: Who says that I am a woman?

Truly I am a savage virgin on whom you will not easily lay your hand!

Indeed I am a woman! Behold what manner of woman I am!

I bear a longing in me

Like the seduction of fire

Unconquerable. And I say to you that there is no one here, however vile, that I do not wish

To seize, that I do not desire

To lay hold on like roaring flame

That is not nice in choosing the fuel with which it burns!

Let not my day be disputed!

The Phœnix

Finds her nest in the furnace, aflame with blistering light;

The enraptured lark soars upward towards the sky,

Yes, and the infinite fields of shining air

Overflow with the passionate cry of that throbbing cluster of plumes!

And it is thus I also rise, not like a little bird,

But like the Sphinx, shrilling momentous cries, the flying horse, woman-breasted, eagle-taloned!

—I shall not live for you, but you must live for me.

And that is why I stand alone before you like a virgin.

(Pause.

(the TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE, the MAN OUT OF OFFICE and the others withdraw a little leaving in front the group of the KING and his officials.

THE SCHOOLMASTER: But what does all this mean?

THE HIGH PREFECT: Sire, will you make no answer? Why do you stand there motionless and mute, like a man who does not hear or one who has nothing at stake?

THE KING: Say what you have to say. The King will be the last to speak.

THE HIGH PREFECT: Maker of Demands, you are exorbitant in what you ask.

For he who demands must give an equivalent return, And you offer us nothing but stand before us with dishevelled hair,

And say that you wish to be Master and he who speaks unchallenged, and that you would seat yourself

Like a sovereign on the consecrated throne,

And not to administer

With prudent thrift for the common good of all,

But like a man at his desk to whom his tenants bring their money

That he may spend it in another place.

TÊTE-D'OR: I have saved you all! Like a man who takes another in his arms.

THE HIGH PREFECT: All society, Tête-d'or,

Exists for the common advantage.

And each one has his place that he may serve the rest.

And the Sovereign, if one is needed, is he who serves everyone,

With his officials, according to their functions.

TÊTE-D'OR: And what is the good that they seek in living together?

THE SCHOOLMASTER: And you, what good have you to promise us, seducer?

But they seek for peace and to live in peace by the fruits of their daily toil.

TÊTE-D'OR: You have not answered well, Schoolmaster. You think you are very wise and in truth you are only an ignoramus.

Man is like the insatiable fire which at the last will consume the world,

And at present sleeps beneath the ashes and is used for cooking food.

But behold I appear before you like roaring flame

Mightily rearing itself under the mouth of the wind!

THE SCHOOLMASTER: There is no other good than that which I have named.

And that is why society exists. Men join together that each may serve his neighbor.

TÊTE-D'OR: Serve?

And what is the function for which they fashioned me? What implement am I?

I am not the spade nor the bag nor the scales. But I am the fire and the sword!

I have no place among you but now I shall make myself one,

And I present myself before you

Like the Bear who puts his paw in the hive and takes the honey and honeycomb.

I shall beat upon the drum and the sound shall be heard in the four corners of the earth, and I shall reunite all that is male about me.

Woman, your son is no longer your son! I shall take the peasant from his plough, I shall take the man from his trade, and I shall bid the bridegroom rise from the bed of his bride, and I shall divide the flesh from the flesh!

And I shall bear him with me

Into the heart of the hurricane, into war.

That is why, O King,

Shadow, sign, you must disappear, thing that is and is not!

Clear the path to the throne, such as it is, and I shall mount on a table to speak to the multitude, and I shall tread it under my feet.

THE KING: My son, listen to what the king has to say.

TÊTE-D'OR: What have you to say, old man?

THE KING: O young man, the old man is the man of the present time.

Respect that which is mine. Respect the possessions of the father of the family.

This kingdom was made by my fathers and I am its rightful monarch according to the law of inheritance.

And I am like a man who goes about his estate, saying, "These trees were planted by my father.

And that broad field

Belonged to his cousin, who died, leaving no children, and it was gotten after a lengthy lawsuit.

The higher levels are good but nothing will grow on the flats.

And yonder farm was part of my grandmother's wedding portion; her marriage is still remembered."

Thus my fathers sat, throned in their wooden armchairs, ruling honestly, giving ear to the needs of their people and settling their differences.

And the people held them in reverence although often they were harsh and unjust and gluttonous and overfond of women.

And me they have found too old and they have set me aside, like an old man who remains wherever they place his chair.

But the creaking of the great door still is dear to my heart

When it opens wide to receive the carts, piled high with the harvest, that the horses straining their utmost can barely draw.

Do not take what is mine; do not despoil my daughter. For where will be the blessing that you will earn among men

If you tread the hallowed law of inheritance under your feet?

TÊTE-D'OR: Father of the family, I shall not respect you.

For I am like a first-born son forced from his heritage, whose place the steward has taken, the son of a favored slave.

O miserly old man who would keep what you cannot use,

Slothful monarch, most like the pitiful king of the chess-board

Shut in by the castle, guarded by pawns, and assaulted by the knight.

You are the man of the present hour, but already that hour is over.

Your right, I do not know what it is. But as for me, despised by all, I have sworn in my misfortune and in my solitude

By the air and by the earth,
That I would rise above the will of others.
And as for what my right is, listen all!
I did not gain that victory, but a beggar, a man unknown,
I enter here and claim the book and crown!
Out of my way, old man!

THE KING: I will not let you pass.

TÊTE-D'OR: Out of my way, old man! For your hour is over and the night is past and another day is born.

Out, for there cannot be two kings in the hive! One of the two must vanish.

THE KING: I will not let you pass.

TÊTE-D'OR: You will not stand aside?

(The KING shakes his head.)

Then die!

(He draws his sword and kills him.)

(Stir of horror in the crowd and tremendous confusion, spreading and increasing to the furthest recesses of the hall and to the lower story. Then a sort of silence.)

(A great noise, the uproar commencing below and spreading to the back of the hall. The spectators of the front rows are very pale and stand as if fascinated, staring with an expression of horror and curiosity at the blood, which pours forth on the floor in a great stream, TÊTE-D'OR laughs.)

A VOICE *(at the back of the hall)*: Death to him!

FIVE OR SIX VOICES *(at the back)*: Kill him! Seize him!

(They surge forward.)

TÊTE-D'OR: Back!

Vile scum, who of you will venture to defy me and confront me face to face!

Here is your King!

And as for this contract, if there is anyone who putting his hand upon you has made you convey yourselves to this ancient shadow,

I tear it to pieces and throw the bits in your face, as I throw you

This!

(With a violent movement he tears of his sword and throws it into the midst of the crowd.)

Listen to me, you that are gathered here!

(Murmur in the hall. Tremendous uproar below.)

Listen to me, you that are under my feet!

(He stamps his foot violently. He casts his eyes about the hall with a savage glare, then bringing them back to the king, who is stretched at his feet, he laughs, and, raising his hand to his face, smears it with blood.)

O King!

You asked me what right I had to reign. Will you deny the right of blood?

Look, with this I emblazon the title upon my face, like a light!

You have watered me with your blood and I am covered with it like one who sacrifices,

And I glory in that purple.

(He goes up to the throne and kicks it over.)

Thus I overthrow you, throne of a day!

For I shall stand and not be seated.

CRIES *(in the crowd)*: Kill him! Seize him!

TÊTE-D'OR: Now the moment has come between you and me
When either you must kill me or I must become your master.
Look, I am alone and unarmed!

(Pause.

Do you say nothing now? I say to you that you have no power to act and this is the reason why.
Because you are cowards, because you bear the brand of a threefold degradation.
And the first is ignorance through which you cannot answer yes or no, but stand open-mouthed
like men bereft of their wits.
And the second is the woman, on whom there hangs a curse; and she was made to remain at
home and submit to the strong and capable hand; but you have taken the woman to be your
mistress.
And the third is the spirit of the word and of speech.
But I shall let loose upon you a speech that you do not know,
Insatiable, irresistible,
I shall establish over you the empire of the sword,
The sword that pierces and divides, the sword that penetrates and pursues!
O imbecility! O inertia! Enormous burden of ignorant men! Behold I have risen,
Like a nurse that overlies a child you lay upon me; but I have risen and dashed you to the earth.
And the world is crushing me, but I shall prevail against it.

*(He marches across the hall with an ominous air,
then halting, he turns towards them.*

In the name of the infinite ocean!
By the tragic birth of this day!
By the tempest
With which the peaks and pyramids that loom over desolated cities
Arm the South, assaulting the bleeding sky!
By the echoing crash of the thunder, by the sulphurous lung of ruddy lightning!
By the team of the winds that drag their roller over the tossing mass of roaring forests! By the
winter
With its wind that bends the pines, routs the battalions of clouds, and riddles with sand the
withered potato leaves; and with its blinding snow;
And with its flooding rain that bombards the roads and the bushes and the windmills and the
ploughed fields!
By the tranquillity of the murky air!
By armed apparitions in the blackness of the pines!
By the dreadful force of conflagration and irresistible flood,
By the whirlwind! By silence!
And by all terrible things!
Will not you that are here recognise at last who I am?

(Silence; then a lamentable VOICE in the crowd.

Tête-d'or! Tête-d'or!

SOMEONE *(his eyes fixed on the blood)*: I have never seen the shedding of human blood!

TÊTE-D'OR: I have not come like the humble god of the soup,

Benevolent, blinking his eyes in the steam of meat and cabbage.

—Utter a bitter cry, my soul, rush forward! Men, I propose to wash away your shame and to lift
you from your baseness.

Here you are pinched for room, I propose to lead you forth

And, having drawn you up in lines and columns, to advance with you against the whole world,

That you may become acquainted with all the earth, and indeed that you may make it yours

By force and by possession.

*(Murmur in the crowd. Four groups form. In the
first the TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE and his
adherents. In the second the MAN OUT OF OFFICE.
In the third, the OFFICIALS OF THE STATE. In the
fourth, the BROTHER OF THE KING.*

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE (*shouting*): Never! I will not permit the setting up of a tyrant.

THE GO-BETWEEN: He has us in his hand. In an hour the army will be here.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: I will show the daughter of the King to the people.

(The air is filled with the clamor of bells. Cannon in the distance.

THE GO-BETWEEN: Do you hear?

(He goes to the Second Group. To the man OUT OF OFFICE, pointing to the TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE.

He is going to fetch the King's daughter and show her to the people.

THE MAN OUT OF OFFICE: Does he plan to make himself dictator? I shall oppose him in that. I prefer the other one.

THE GO-BETWEEN (*to the BROTHER OF THE KING*): He says that he wants to have them crown the daughter of the King.

THE BROTHER OF THE KING: Her?

It is to me that the crown reverts. What does Tête-d'or intend to make of this little kingdom here?

THE GO-BETWEEN (*in the group of the officials*): Well? Which? What do you say? The daughter or the brother?

THE CHIEF JUSTICE: The brother? Never. A thoroughly impractical theorist. A man unstable as water. And he would always be close at hand watching whatever we do. I prefer the ruler that's far away.

And no women!

SOMEONE (*aside*): His wife hates the Princess.

TÊTE-D'OR: Tribune of the People, my sword is close beside you. Pick it up and bring it to me.

(The TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE brings him the sword.

TÊTE-D'OR: Take it!

(He hands him the sword in its sheath.

You are the ruler, do what you please. You are like a man with a knife in his hand before a loaf of bread.

(The TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE shakes his head and gives him back the sword.

I said, "Do what you please." Can you not keep it yourself?

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE: I ... I am the ... the....

The clamor of the yelling crowd.

TÊTE-D'OR: Who would like my sword?

(He holds the sword in his hands. No one answers.

Then I will draw you myself, O sword disdained that no one cares to take! O how you rest in your sheath!

Sword! Sword!

Gage, unfailing hope, you

That have already conquered once!

I will lift you up like a torch, sign of immortal victory that I hold!

O people whose tongues stutter and stammer, here is a searching question between my hands!

You are plunged in indescribable ignorance, but the illusion lies where he who does not know declares that he knows.

Man lives in illusion and piles up books around himself like straw.

But now I will devour all! I hold you, uplifted sword!

I stand in the midst of animals and I will not be seated.

And anger rises in me!

(He throws away the scabbard.

I defy you, arid country! You that refuse me any joy,

I will make you my domain!

Shine bare, bright blade, till this enterprise is ended!

And if anyone is tired of this scurvy tailor's life, let him come and follow me! If there is anyone Dissatisfied with this vile, monotonous afternoon devoted to the process of digestion, let him come and follow me!

If you fancy that you are men, and if your blood

Boils at the badges of your servitude,

Vent your pent rage! Oh cry,

And end your infamy!

Come! Let us set out!

And I will march before you, holding the sword in my hand, and already there is blood upon its blade.

SOMEONE: Tête-d'or, what can we do?

TÊTE-D'OR: And I, I say to you, "Who will dare to dare,

And, stamping the earth, cry 'I can' in the silence of Nothingness?"

THE SAME: Will you dare, yourself?

(Silence.)

TÊTE-D'OR: Time that moves and disposes all things

Withdraws from us like the sea,

And now on the solid earth there stands

For the first time a king.

(He picks up the crown from the floor.)

Vanish, like wreaths of smoke, dreams, prestige, past, and you

Who look at me, I bid you dare

To contemplate with new eyes a new day!

In the name of everything, and not

Of the appearances that the dream of custom brings,

But of everything as it actually is, and in the name of truth and reason,

I place this crown on my head.

(He puts the crown on his head.)

To-day for the first time the king of men uplifts a head encircled with gold!

Yes, and thereat eternity may take a voice and lament. She shall not shake my royal heart.

For what can chaos itself and the night of creation avail

Against the man whose soul in the uttermost depths of shadow, in the crowning horror of silence, stands firm

And fears neither pain nor death?

MURMUR (*in the crowd*): He has put the crown on his head.

(Silence.)

TÊTE-D'OR (*shouting*): Search my heart and if you find there

Anything save an immortal desire, take it and cast it on the dunghill for a hen to carry away in her beak!

I do not come here with an unworthy thought.

Cassius (*rushing forward*): Will none of you speak? Who dares to say "What shall we do?"

Shall he be the only one to speak of this? Will you be silent forever?

As for me I shall follow you, O King! Here you are again, O King, like a rose preserved in honey! Hail!

I have listened to you and I have understood, and also

I fought at your side when you gained the victory,

And it was I, all unworthy, my breast distended with an intolerable joy, who bore the tidings hither.

Like a runner carrying in his mouth a draught of water to one that thirsts!

Now that this air has fanned my martial cheek

And my eyes have been dazzled an instant by this miracle of suns,

I will fight, I will march in the place from whence it blows and shines.

And now I see another thing, O King!
You, who like a beggar before a prince,
Were not afraid to tear your veil before this shadowy country and to reveal yourself!
And I kneel before you! Remember that I was the first to kneel.

SIGH, *then* CRY (*among the onlookers*): We kneel before you, O King!

(All except the leaders, kneel.

TÊTE-D'OR: Rise! Rise!

VOICE: We kneel before you.

TÊTE-D'OR: Rise! Do not humble yourselves before me.

(They rise.

VOICE: Then we will rise and now we stand at our full stature. Hail, O King!

TÊTE-D'OR: I, the King! Ah!

What did you say?

Who am I? What have I said? What have I done?

VOICE: Did you not stand before us and did you not....

TÊTE-D'OR: Alas!

Who am I?

Alas! I myself am weak!

VOICE: ... say

That you would make all force recoil before your face?

TÊTE-D'OR: I am only a beggar! I cannot do it! Come!

If anyone knows another course to follow

Let him announce it and I will live in the grass of the field like an ox.

VOICE: We do not know of one.

TÊTE-D'OR: "I wish. I know. It shall be."

That word

Is sure. If the earth

Were only a quicksand, I would not be deceived.

VOICE: Do you hesitate, now?

TÊTE-D'OR (*he shakes and spreads out his hair*)

—By this hair,

Splendid, saturate with Aurora, fleece imbrued with the blood of the Mother, token of freedom,
Golden veil that I raise with my hands!

I will dare! I will turn my steps to a place where never a leaf nor tinkling spring
Imparts its counsel of peace.

Oh!

Is it not sure and visible, this thing?

Unafraid shall I go forth, like a flaming tree! And like the sun I shall descend to drink.

See where I stand in your midst like a candelabrum.

—Bind up my hair, Cassius, and braid it like the tail of a horse.

(While Cassius binds up his hair.

THE BROTHER OF THE KING (*advancing*): O Tête-d'or, you have killed my brother!

And you have taken his crown, despoiling his daughter and me, and in the place of the ancient
right you put a right that is new.

But you have placed the crown upon your head. And that it is to which I am attached, and I am as
it were a witness of this new wedding.

My brother is no longer my brother and his daughter is my niece no more, and if occasion
demands I will give you my aid against her and against your enemies.

I salute you, O King.

(He takes his bloody hand.

TÊTE-D'OR: Thank you, sir!

THE OFFICERS OF STATE (*coming forward according to their rank and taking his hand*): We salute you,

O King!

TÊTE-D'OR: Do your duty, you who are like the senses of the King and like his memory.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE (*from where he stands*):

I also salute you.

(TÊTE-D'OR makes no answer.)

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE (*coming forward and raising his hand*): I salute you, O King.

TÊTE-D'OR: Salute also, voice of the streets, clamor of the markets.

Do your duty and cry! Cry and I will try to understand.

THE MAN OUT OF OFFICE (*hastily following this example*): I salute you, O King!

Do not trust that man nor the others.... I will watch your enemies and keep an eye on all.

TÊTE-D'OR: Thanks, dog of the gardener! Be active and vigilant and I will give you your part.

(All have trodden in the blood of the KING. The whole stage is covered with footprints and there are the marks of bloody hands on the walls.)

(Silence.)

(CASSIUS, who was behind TÊTE-D'OR, now steps in front of him and kneels again. TÊTE-D'OR slowly lowers his eyes till their glances meet and they stare at each other with a certain wildness in their gaze.)

CASSIUS: O golden hope, most cherished violence, arriving at the end of our dreary day

As the sunlight gains an added sweetness

When it inundates old roofs after centuries of soot!

Suffer this hand to touch you! O effulgent Autumn, guide us!

(He rises.)

And now I stand again.

And my cry is Forward! Let every man arise! Bring forth the chariots and the cannon!

And let us go out from this wearisome ravine, that the wind of the open sky and the warmth of the sun may strike upon our faces!

Space is free! The earth is flat like a field of beets in October,

The world shall behold! And it shall be astonished!

And like a perjured judge

Passing sentence against itself, shall fall from its rotten judgment seat,

While our trumpets through the fields shall blare so loudly

That never from that day forth shall the clang of copper and bronze

Be thought sonorous.

TÊTE-D'OR: In the midst of the Earth there is a field

And he who, from spurs to crest

Wreathes himself with the fumiter and bluets that flower there,

—By the plains and the amphitheatre of mountains,

By the seas, by the swollen rivers and by the murmuring forests,

Shall be hailed as King, Father,

Stem of Justice, Throne of Thrift!

—I turn my steps to a region where the drum is never silent, where the baldric is never turned,

To a road that is bordered with fire, a place of brutal acts and terrible cries!

I shall not fear! But I shall fare forth like the famine and the cyclone!

Hate and Anger

And Vengeance and the frenzied Image of Pain

March before me, and Hope unveils its solemn face!

Come! the time commands and the road will no longer be denied.

I shall march! I shall fight! I shall crush the barrier beneath my conquering feet! I shall break the

vain resistance like rotten wood!

(Enter the PRINCESS veiled in black.

What woman's shape is this that stands before me! Unveil!

THE PRINCESS: O Father, are you here?

TÊTE-D'OR: He is here.

THE PRINCESS: Victorious Tête-d'or! My father bade me come to give you greeting!

And if you ask why I wear this mourning veil that prevents my seeing you

It is to honor you, like my native land

Who has come before you and from whose darkened face you have removed the sombre veil.

And I have learned that Cébès is no more.

I salute you, victorious head!

(She removes her veil and looks at him.

(TÊTE-D'OR stands, sword in hand and crowned, his feet on the wide robe of the KING. To his right, the BROTHER OF THE KING and the Magistrates of the republic. To his left the Representatives of the people. The bystanders make a hedge on both sides leaving a free passage to the door.

(The PRINCESS slowly stretches out her arms and kneeling she kisses the ground, where she remains prostrate.

(Two women lift her up clasping her under the arms and she stands before TÊTE-D'OR, her head bowed on her breast.

(Silence.

THE SCHOOLMASTER (*weeping, to TÊTE-D'OR*): Behold her, O King, and have pity!

I was her tutor and when she was but a child I held her on my knee,

When in her picture book I showed her the images of the creation.

And on her fête-day, according to ancient custom,

When the women came to cure their baby's spasms,

At mid-day when in her cymar of flowered silk she appeared on the topmost step

In the glory of youth and beauty, like a sunflower upturning its beaming face to the sun,

All the people were like a man on whom there suddenly falls

The healing shadow of whispering branches,

So much upon the air, like a sweet and gracious breeze,

Poured forth the fragrant smell of the ancient, royal vine!

And now, poor child, you are like a shattered blossom, like the sunflower stripped from its stalk, turning its drooping face to the earth!

Behold her, O King! Like a purchased ewe she is here beneath your hand.

(Silence.

THE PRINCESS: Will you not kill me also?

(She slowly raises her head and looks about her.

I knew you all by your names, I have grown up among you and now you have betrayed me.

Not a friend is left me and everyone turns towards me a hostile face.

O you in whom my father trusted as in a son, putting his arm about your neck! And you! And you!
O teacher that taught me from childhood, you also are ranked with my foes!

And you, my father's brother, stand at his murderer's right hand!

THE BROTHER OF THE KING: Young girl, I do not know you! But I am he who stands at the right hand of the Prince.

THE PRINCESS: O Father! O Father!

O King of this country, august as the ascension of the hand when it begins the sign of the cross,

It is thus that they have wearied of allegiance and thrown you to the earth,

They have thrown you aside like a worthless thing, like a bone that one tosses to dogs!

And they bear your blood on the soles of their shoes, and upon the sides of their den

Are stains like those on the walls of a slaughter-house!

(She tears her mantle in two.

Treason! Treason!

Sun, behold this impious act!

Listen to me, O you who are gathered here about this pool of blood. The thought of your pernicious hearts is laid bare!

You have had enough of me,

You do not want me to be your queen! And I renounce you also and will trouble you no more.

I will go out from the midst of you, O iniquitous and fraudulent hearts!

I strip you from me like these vain adornments!

(She tears off her ornaments and throws them down.

All! All! Take all again! O vanities, I divest myself of you, and I shall go forth naked from this place!

And now permit me to depart if I am free to go,

For I cannot endure the glance of yonder basilisk!

TÊTE-D'OR: Do you think to astonish me, young girl, do you think that I am afraid of you?

Behold this hand, behold me, young girl, it is I who killed your father!

I offered him as a fitting sacrifice

And his blood spurted upon me, and he tumbled at my feet, writhing in the agony of death.

For I saved this land with my sword, and turning upon its incapable master,

I put him to death as was just, and the punishment meted out did not exceed the crime.

THE PRINCESS: Father! Father!

TÊTE-D'OR: Cry! Call him!

"Father! Father!" See, doubtless he hears. Call louder!

What is a man that is dead? And who exists beyond the grave to still be mindful of us?

And you, where were you before you were born, work of the womb?

So, having lived, we return to the same nameless nothingness

A human soul inflated with love and malediction!

That is why I shall do my part here and shall rise like a lofty tree.

THE PRINCESS: The blood of my father is on you. It has fallen upon you like rain,

And your own shall flow like a spring.

TÊTE-D'OR: Joyfully, joyfully, I accept the omen! So be it! So be it! I long to see that day!

Let it flow, let it submerge the world!

Let the vein of my heart be pierced, let my blood leap forth like a lion, let it gush like a subterranean sea beneath the iron of the drill.

—And now,

And now, depart! There is no place for you here.

THE PRINCESS: Let me carry my father with me.

TÊTE-D'OR: Take him! Carry away the fallen.

THE PRINCESS (*kneeling before the body*): Sire!

O sacred dead, let me touch you and be not angry thereat, for these are the hands of your daughter.

And as you carried me here and there in your arms when I was already grown,

Even so I shall bear you away, O sole remaining possession, O my dead and fallen race.

(With difficulty she puts the body on her shoulders and goes out, carrying it thus on her back.

TÊTE-D'OR: Though every heart should glut itself with anguish it shall not shake me for mine is full to the brim!

I killed him scarcely seeing him, like a partridge shot in a dream,

Or as the hurrying traveller pulls up an importunate fern.

—I have said what I had to say and soon

I shall announce to you what we shall undertake.

My time is at hand.

Like the arch of the rainbow my glory shall rise above the world,

Announcing to those who see it the birth of a new day!

I breathe you again! I worship you, sweet perfume of victory!

Rose, give me your scent! Sun, cover your face in your bed of celestial down!

And bury this child.

For it is not fitting that I should soil by commerce with the dead the Majesty of Empire.

This dead child! The dawn of my future glory!

(He goes out with a convulsive sob.

(Pause.

(Enter the group of Mourners who take their places around the body of CÉBÈS.

(Drum-beats. They raise the body on their shoulders and sombrely go out.

(Increasing murmur outside. Confused noise of bells and voices. Discharge of cannon at regular intervals. All go out except CASSIUS. Military music is heard approaching amid a tremendous hubbub. All at once it breaks off and loud cries are heard, which draw nearer, and the noise of an armed crowd running.

(They enter the palace. Frightful clamor. The soldiers, some of them carrying their standards, crowd into the hall. Others enter through the windows. Rattle of sabres on the stairs. The discharge of firearms. Scene of confusion through which can be heard only the cry, "Tête-d'or!"

CASSIUS (*to an officer*): What is the matter?

THE OFFICER: They say that he has been assassinated.

(CASSIUS mounts upon the throne and draws his sword.

(He vainly tries many times to make himself heard. At last there is a kind of silence.

CASSIUS (*shouting at the top of his voice*): He is not dead, but has made himself our King!

CLAMOR: Tête-d'or!

(The soldiers form in ranks, around the flags, and march about the hall.

(Discharge of artillery in the court. The hall fills with smoke through which largely enters the light of the sun.

Act III

The Caucasus. A natural terrace in a lofty place, opening toward the North and the East and surrounded by colossal trees. A formidable vertical trench is open towards the West, cutting through the mountain like a street.

Night. All the upper part of the scene is occupied by the constellation of the Great Bear, distinguishable through the mist. From below at a great depth the rumble of wheels and the jingling of harness, suggesting the passing of troops.

The PRINCESS, clothed in leaves and the skins of animals, is stretched on the ground.

THE PRINCESS: I am cold! I am hungry!

Will this dreadful night never end? And yet already I see the stars of morning, and Mars, ruddy and golden, gleams above my head.

O constellations bending over man, O shining city in the skies of night, take pity on me!

(Silence. Rustling in the trees.)

I listen! What do you whisper, trees that know everything?
You are arguing endlessly, like men that are fettered by the leg.
And I, I lie on the earth at your feet in this abyss of the earth!
I had withdrawn to the desert places, to this extremity
Of the world, protecting my body with leaves and the skins of beasts,
Fleeing from men, like an animal, for fear they should catch me and kill me.
But now the mountain is full of unaccountable noises and I do not know whither to go.
And I am so weak that I cannot stir.
Alas! Why should I wish for the sun when he will reveal me to all?
And here like a ewe with a broken leg I lie at the mercy of anyone that passes.

(A long pause. Daybreak.)

THE PRINCESS: I am cold! I am hungry!

(Pause. The sun rises.)

(Hoof-beats without. Enter on horseback CASSIUS bearing the Sword. He rides to an eminence from which he can observe the whole country.)

(Enter on horseback TÊTE-D'OR surrounded by his staff.)

THE CHIEF OF STAFF: What do you see, Cassius?

CASSIUS: Nothing. The mist rises.

FIRST CAPTAIN: What is that on the ground there?

SECOND CAPTAIN: The skull of a man!

THIRD CAPTAIN: The skeleton of a cow!

FOURTH CAPTAIN: And look! A whole heap of them! Bones of men and beasts!

TÊTE-D'OR: What do they call this place?

THE CHIEF OF STAFF: It is called "The Door," for the ultimate door is here.
This is the threshold that opens on the everlasting North and the regions of the sunrise.
Here is the rampart; the slanting joint through which Europe is bound to the Earth of the Earth.
And here it is that they fettered the ancient Thief of Fire
When the Eagle, falling like a thunderbolt,
Fastened upon him and tore the liver from his body.
—What do you see, Cassius?

CASSIUS (*shouting*): Space!

THE CHIEF OF STAFF: Look North. What do you see?

CASSIUS: I see the expanse of the Earth!

THE CHIEF OF STAFF: Turn to the sacred East!

CASSIUS: The earth is unrolled like a carpet. And the distance is veiled in mist.

(He returns towards them.)

(The CHIEF OF STAFF and another Captain dismount and taking TÊTE-D'OR'S horse by the bridle they lead him to the place where cassius stood.)

THE CHIEF OF STAFF: Look, O King, and take, for all that you see is yours.
And the earth is yours like a field of which the extent has been measured.
Look! Yonder the ocean lies, flat and enclosed, a round mirror. For here
Toiling upwards we have reached the level of the world and here the ascent is over.
"The Door" this place is called, for here in ancient times, the wandering peoples of the Plain, at
this high pass,
Halted to sacrifice, as the bones will testify, offering fire to the gods of Space,
Before they crossed the dark defile and began the perilous descent,
Forming nations according to the hollows of the earth.

Now after the lapse of centuries it is we that appear from the other side
Presenting to the descendants of those who remained behind a new sceptre.
See, O King, we have rediscovered Space!
Then advance, O King, and cross the gigantic plain,
That we may ascend the final step and conquer
The enormous altar of Asia.

(Silence.

*(TÊTE-D'OR without speaking points out the
PRINCESS lying in the bushes.*

A CAPTAIN: What is that?

*(He touches her with the point of his lance. She
groans.*

THE CAPTAIN: It lives. But I do not know whether it is a beast or a woman.

*(He dismounts and taking her in his arms, lifts
her from the ground.*

ANOTHER CAPTAIN: Strange beings inhabit this mountain. This has the hide of a beast, the hair of a woman.

TÊTE-D'OR: It is a woman, dying of thirst, poor creature! Give her my gourd.

*(He hands them his gourd. They put it to her lips.
She drinks and indicates by gestures that she can
stand alone.*

TÊTE-D'OR: Who are you, young girl?

*(She shakes her head, indicating by gestures that
she does not understand.*

A CAPTAIN: Doubtless she does not understand any language.

*(She opens her mouth, indicating by gestures
that she is hungry.*

TÊTE-D'OR: She is hungry. *(He gives her a bit of black bread.)*

Take my bread. Eat, innocent creature!

THE CAPTAIN: Sire, will you not keep this bread for yourself? For the day will be long and hard.

TÊTE-D'OR: I am not hungry. And see how she is clothed against the chills of the night in this bleak place.

Take my cloak also, young girl.

(He puts his cloak around her shoulders.

Forward!

A CAPTAIN: Go before us, Cassius.

—O herald, your armor mirrors the red disk of the sun, and you are all agleam!

(They go out.

(The PRINCESS eats the bread.

THE DESERTER *(starting up from the thicket where he had been lying in wait)*: Give me your bread!

*(He throws himself upon her and snatches the
bread away from her.*

THE PRINCESS *(crying out)*: Leave me a little of the bread!

THE DESERTER: What's this? You speak my language?

Wait! Wait a little!

*(He stares at her long and attentively, then he
begins to laugh.*

A-a-a-h!

*(He doffs his hat and awkwardly makes a
pretence of bowing, in mockery. Then he stares
at her chuckling without saying anything.*

A-a-a-h!

Oh, this is good!

How does it happen that you are here?

Don't pretend that you can't understand what I say. See, the red is creeping to your cheeks. Ah! Ah!

Answer!

Do you think I don't know you? Others perhaps might not recognise you, but I, I recognise you!

THE PRINCESS: I think you do not know me.

THE DESERTER: Ha! (*He wags his head and winks knowingly.*)

You are the daughter of the old King.

THE PRINCESS: Since you know it, be ashamed!

THE DESERTER: Ashamed?

See if I am ashamed! Take that for yourself for your "ashamed"!

(He strikes her with all his strength. She falls to the ground, then, rising, she stands before him, motionless.)

THE DESERTER: None of your fine airs with me!

We are alone in this place, we two! You are my dog, I can kill you if I choose,

One by one I can cut off your limbs with my knife if such should be my humor. Do you hear?

Now it is my turn!

Ah! Ah! So you do not recognise me? I had a place in the palace, in the kitchens! Eh? You didn't trouble your pretty head about the likes of me! It was I who seasoned the dishes to suit your gullet.

And you thought of me no more than if I had been a rat, or a snake in the cranny of a wall.

But I, I knew you well and I hated you, believe me! Oh!

And here you are in my hands and I can do with you as I will.

THE PRINCESS: What have I done?

THE DESERTER: Why was your father, old scamp that he was, made king instead of me?

If I had had education I should have been as good a king.

What is the reason that some have more than others?

Why is it that some have all they want, as much as they wish to drink and eat, and that others have nothing at all?

Perhaps you think I can live on bricks, eh?

I am a married man and I had children dependent on me, yet I had to work in the fields. I was not made for that sort of labor, I have my certificate.

And these rascal landlords leave you nothing at all.

And they took me away to the war! What has their war to do with me?

Does one murder women when they are with child?

Why have they taken me? Why are my children both of them lying dead?

Answer, trull, can one live without eating?

THE PRINCESS: You can answer that yourself, you that took the bread that I had.

THE DESERTER: That bread? What is it, bread? With what is it made, bread?

THE PRINCESS: With barley or rye.

THE DESERTER: You know that, eh? Who is it that grows the barley or the rye?

Who reaps it? Who threshes it? Who grinds it? Who makes it into bread?

If the bread were turned to someone who had a nose and a mouth and it commanded you to do its will

Would you not have to obey?

And the maker of the bread, is he not the bread itself?

Yet he has not even the right to keep it for himself, but here I take it from you again, by force.

—So come here! Here, I say!

THE PRINCESS: Since you are my master, I am here. You can kill me if you wish.

THE DESERTER (*taking her by the hand*): Come.

THE PRINCESS: What do you mean to do with me? Why do you take me beneath this gloomy tree?

THE DESERTER: There is a hawk that someone has fastened by the wings to the trunk of this pine

with two nails. See how its head droops.

THE PRINCESS: It is a very barbarous custom.

THE DESERTER: Presently you will replace that bird.

THE PRINCESS: What did you say? You are not thinking of doing what you say?

Ah! Ah!

You will not fasten me to that tree like a bird that one nails by the wings!

THE DESERTER (*pulling out the nails*): They do not hold firmly.—They can be used again. That stone will be my hammer.

THE PRINCESS: Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!

THE DESERTER: Give me your hands.

The Princess (*hiding her hands and smiling with terror*): No! No!

THE DESERTER: You do not wish it? Of what use are they?

THE PRINCESS: I tell you this, my friend. These hands that do not know how to work

Could bring a better nourishment than bread,

Although I know how to make bread as well.

And you, what prompts you to devour me?

And those who saw me took no thought of food and, young or old, their hearts burned within them.

Alas, my beauty has abandoned me! If it were otherwise you would not wish to kill me nor would you have humiliated me in such rude fashion, striking me in the face.

What have I done?

Do not kill me! Merely because I cannot work like you

Do I deserve this horrible punishment,

Dying so slowly, my two hands pierced with nails?

Do not do it, lest those that love me

Should not accept the excuse that you did not know who I am and your name should be a thing accursed forever.

For I was the honor of our native land and there is no more beauty there since I am there no longer.

And what will they say if they learn that it was you who killed me, nailing me thus?

THE DESERTER (*sharpening the nails on a stone*): What use are all these words?

THE PRINCESS: Clod, I am a queen!

The highest dignity

To which humanity can attain was mine, nor can you take it away.

Who am I? Who are you? Look me in the eyes.

Will you dare to raise your hand against me? What common ground can there be between me and you?

THE DESERTER: You will know it through your hands.

(The PRINCESS raises her hands and places them against the trunk of the tree.)

THE PRINCESS: Very well. Where shall I place them?

THE DESERTER: Here. Raise your hands.

I am not tall enough. Stay where you are.

(He finds a large stone and mounts on it. Seizing the right arm of the PRINCESS he fastens it to the tree with a cord; then spreading out the fingers he manages with much difficulty to drive a nail through the hand.)

THE PRINCESS (*shrieking*): Ah! Ah!

Ah! ah!

Ah! ah!

O heavens!

THE DESERTER: The left hand.

THE PRINCESS: Here it is.

(He nails the left hand in the same way, then descends from the stone.)

THE DESERTER: You did not cry that time, eh?

THE PRINCESS *(spitting in his face)*:

I despise you, gross brute!

The blood jets from my hands! But in spite of these arms made fast above my head, I remain what I have been.

THE DESERTER: Take care that I do not kill you before your time!

THE PRINCESS: Go!

THE DESERTER: Won't you bid me good-bye? Won't you clasp me by the hand?

THE PRINCESS: I am fastened to this post, but my royal soul

Is unimpaired and therefore

This place has all the honor of a throne.

THE DESERTER: Now I can eat my bread.

(He slowly eats his bread to the last mouthful, without removing his eyes from her, and, picking up the crumbs, he swallows them.)

THE DESERTER: Fasten the pelt more closely around your shoulders for it exposes the flesh beneath the arm, and it is not fitting you should uncover yourself so before a man.

Ah! Ah! The tears are flowing from your eyes! Now I can die, for I have seen you weep!

Stay where you are. With night the wolves will come

And, rearing up, they will rend you piece-meal and tear your limbs from your body,

And the ravens will pluck out your eyes.

Stay there and die.

(He goes out.)

THE PRINCESS *(shrieking suddenly)*: Ahh! Ahh! Ahh!

Oh! *(She stops as if stifled.)*

O hands by which I am fixed as the vine is fastened to the wall!

—O light that fills all space! O sun that makes the day, like a judge considering everything!

See me pinioned thus, and these nails that are buried up to the head in my hands.

It is morning still and I shall remain till noon,

And till evening and till I am dead.

But this is as it should be and I shall not complain.

I shall die erect

As is most fitting for one of a kingly race.

O hands, I had dreamed that some day I should bring you both to my husband

That he might bind you with the bonds of wedlock,

But these nails are more suitable.

My blood jets on high and it falls upon my head and runs down my body!

Ah! Ah!

My arms are heavy as lead!

O God! My feet are free and I can only stamp on the earth.

And if I remain, resting so on both feet,

I pull on the nails and stifle and suffer intolerable pain!

But if I stand on tiptoe, my strength is soon gone.

O God, have pity on me!

(Long silence which is supposed, to last many hours and during which the stage remains empty.)

(Enter from the left the STANDARD BEARER on horseback with the SUBALTERNS and the Escort. The FIRST SUBALTERN mounts upon a rock.)

THE STANDARD BEARER: What do you see?

THE SUBALTERN: Nothing. The mountain shuts off the view on this side.

THE SECOND SUBALTERN: Why is it that the King did not take his standard with him?

THE STANDARD BEARER: I do not know for till to-day I always stood at his side, when, at the crisis of the battle, he mounted on his horse,

Holding the banner on which is shown the black and terrible eagle

That soars towards the sun with the corpse of a man in his talons.

And the sun one does not see, but all the banner is of the color of gold.

But to-day he bade me remain behind at the place that commands the deep defile

And wait till he returned or gave the signal.

THE FIRST SUBALTERN: The standard hangs without movement upon its staff.

THE STANDARD BEARER: And we also remain motionless at this threshold of the world.

By what a path we have come, rising out of the West like a bird!

O young man new to the army,

Assuredly you will see the King of the world reigning, but you have not seen what we have seen!

Terror and bewilderment march before him, and, as if they did not know how to use them,

Armies lay down their arms upon the ground.

He has appeared in the midst of cowards,

He has rushed among the multitudes like a lion attacking a drove of pigs!

And they have arisen against him like the sea, and they have subsided and lapped the dust at his feet.

And now we appear at the door, confronting ancient Asia!

(Gust of wind. Confused clamor in the distance.)

THE FIRST SUBALTERN: Do you hear?

THE SECOND SUBALTERN: At this very moment the battle is being fought.

(Pause.)

And what are we going to do now?

THE STANDARD BEARER: First for a long time

We must march across the level plain.

THE FIRST SUBALTERN: And then they say we shall come upon a mountain

So high that it touches heaven, and out of heaven itself

Four rivers, as white as milk, descend to earth.

And passing on we shall behold again

The sea, like a brimming cup.

A land of gold is there and its fragrance alone is so sweet

That it seems as if the soul were drawn from the body as in a dream

And in the exultation of the woman who conceives.

The monkeys hide in flowering trees and the sand has the scent of olives

And the submarine volcanoes appear like sunken lotus flowers and like fountains of gushing wine!

THE STANDARD BEARER: All's one!

My will is to do the will of the King and to take my stand at his side

Holding the Standard, and such is my portion of the earth.

Assuredly it is just that we should adore like a god one who commands with wisdom.

His heart is profound and he has been given the knowledge of how to rule.

Thus his power increases, image of boldness divine and of justice that cannot be moved,

Like a tree above a well where men and herds come to drink.

And his spirit is like a marvellous fig tree

Together disclosing the flowers and the fruit.

THE FIRST SUBALTERN: As for the army that he has brought to this place—

THE STANDARD BEARER: Never has such an army been seen! And one would think it was led by Love himself.

All see it from afar like a golden flower in the grass.

And, dearer than the face of his wife, each one of these gross men
Bears graven on his heart the holy image of the King.
And there is no question of officers and soldiers, but each one
Takes his part like a musician and they form a single body,
And death has lost its meaning.

(Pause. Vague clamor in the distance. All keep their eyes fixed on the Standard.)

THE FIRST SUBALTERN: He has left behind the ancient flag.

THE STANDARD BEARER: The Standard of the Empire is here, but they march under various ensigns.

Many bear the image of the Sun

Who embraces the Heaven and the Earth, and arms go out from his radiance.

Fishermen in a bark are throwing their net about him, spurred foresters are mounting towards him through the spreading oaks.

And those who have come from the place where the earth, comes to an end

Hoist ocean weeds or the lead of the sounding-line, and floating above them one sees

The Sword-fish with scarlet fins, or the god of the Sea, with eyes of horn, disgorging his tongue like a stone,

Or the salutary sign of the cross with equal branches:

And such are the signs of those who live on the brink of the deep abyss.

Other flags are green like a field, and grass is fastened there and the hair of animals and bones and sacks of earth.

The image of the wheat arises from the furrow amidst a flight of pigeons with outspread wings; and words come out of the mouth,

And the vine like a woman is bound upon the wine-press;

And something also recalls the Sun

When in September, after the harvest is gathered,

Like a pontiff who prostrates himself, he piously kisses the naked earth.

Others still! And they represent nothing defined, but are like a field of flowering buckwheat,

Or the shimmering azure, full of the leaves of peartrees, when seen through the fringe of drooping lashes,

Or an irruption of bees, or the seducing sea!

And others, stiff with embroidery, embody curious legends,

A reaper plies his scythe; a naked man

Grasping a whip in both hands is fighting a four-winged eagle of silver.

And others portray strange dreams; the disk of the moon,

Dragons, panthers that eat the gods,

Or roses, and an embroidered briar.

But I could not tell you all the signs though I were to speak forever.

THE SECOND SUBALTERN: There is one that you did not mention.

(A great square of silk is hoisted above one of the mountains to the East.)

THE FIRST SUBALTERN: Eh?

THE STANDARD BEARER: I do not know what it is! I do not know what this means!

(A trumpet is heard sounding clearly as if it announced something.)

THE FIRST SUBALTERN (*shouting*): Listen!

THE STANDARD BEARER: I hear and I do not understand!

But I am struck with horror and my soul putrefies within me.

THE FIRST SUBALTERN: How that ominous flag flaps in the wind.

(Pause.)

VOICE (*calling from below*): Ho!

(Echo.)

THE SECOND SUBALTERN (*bending over the precipice*): There is someone below who signals that

he wishes to come up.

THE STANDARD BEARER: Make fast the tackle.

Lower away the cord.

(They do as he says. The cord runs out. Then the soldiers pull it up and after a time an armed man appears hanging from the rope. He comes to the ground.)

THE STANDARD BEARER: Who are you, O man that rises from the depths?

THE MESSENGER: Prostrate yourselves before me, for on my tongue sits death!

I will tell you what I saw, and why I fled and could not stay where I was, and called to you to draw me up to this place and not to leave me below.

THE STANDARD BEARER: Say no more!

THE MESSENGER: I will announce the accursed thing
That you may fall to the earth like men deprived of life,
For the King of men is dead.

ALL (*crying aloud*): Ho! ho!

THE MESSENGER: At least I will tell what I know, for our detail was on guard at the crest of the mountain yonder,

And we saw our army advance in good order across the plain, and the men were like tiny specks.
And at noon they stopped to eat, and then resumed their march, and always we followed them.

THE STANDARD BEARER: Well? Well?

THE MESSENGER: Then a smoke arose from the earth and a thick dust blown by a violent wind, blotting out the army,

And for long it hung above them so that we saw them no more.

But when it was dissipated we perceived
An infinite army advancing to oppose them.

THE STANDARD BEARER: It is impossible! From whence would it come?

THE MESSENGER: I do not know. Perhaps the wind brought them like lice.

But still we looked and, listen well to this,
We saw our army fleeing.

THE STANDARD BEARER: What tale is this?

Surely the dust was in your eyes.

THE MESSENGER: I say that they fled! And not one of them remained

But we saw them run as fast as they were able.

And one man only remained, alone in the midst of the plain and we recognised who it was

And then it was that I also

Fled, wishing to see no more.

(Profound silence. Pause.)

THE FIRST SUBALTERN (*bending over the precipice*): I see a crowd of men approaching at a gallop.

MANY VOICES (*calling from below*): Ho!

(Echo.)

(They let down the rope after having fastened a large plank to it by means of chains.)

(The soldiers hoist the tackle. And soon over the brink of the precipice, on the plank where lies the body of TÊTE-D'OR, emerges the group of Captains, so crowded that some dangle their legs in the void, and others are clinging to the chains.)

(The group rises almost to the height of the sun, which it obscures, then the tackle turns and the plank slowly descends to the earth. They alight.)

A CAPTAIN (*shouting and indicating the Standard with a gesture*): Rend the silk from the ensign and tear the banner in two!

And take the staff and break it over your knee!

For now the eagle returns from a dolorous flight

Bearing the corpse of a man in its talons.

See what we bring, as we rise to this bleak and lofty place,

That here we may hold the rites of burial, on this portal of the world, at this place whence all the earth is visible.

Thus about this dead body we re-assemble like birds.

Begone from us, O sun!

SECOND: O Tête-d'or! O master! O King! O King!

We have soared to this place, all your eaglets, bearing you back with us.

O dead body!

Let the woman weep over her first-born son! The man shall cry, mourning the death of his King, and tears shall appear on his face,

And he shall not be comforted.

THIRD: Begone from us, O sun! Leave us alone and insult us no longer.

Now the earth turns its face towards night, and you, who stood in your place like a mountain, disappear! You see this, Father!

Look, we reveal him to you, that you may put your mouth on our misery!

Now leave us alone that we may mourn this prey that we hold between our hands.

O King! O King!

Like the Angel that bears the seal of life you rose towards the Unchanging!

And now we bring you back with us, having lifted you from the ground.

Gaze upon this! Behold it, mountains, and you O forests, that sprang from the fraternal tree!

Let a shudder run through the roots of all that grows because the King of men is dead!

O malediction on man! O death! O condemnation!

O prisoning place! O horror of the place in which we are!

O King! O King!

You are dead and it is death we are holding in our hands!

THE STANDARD BEARER: Stop! Put an end to this fury!—You force me to speak.

Grief, arises within me like the longing to vomit felt by a woman with child,

And the tears that I would shed

Freeze, as when Christmas time prevents the winter from weeping!

—Here! Lay him here, with funereal pomp expose the royal body

On this square rock employed in ancient rites,

That the form of the bleeding man may there appear once more

In the eyes of the heavens and the earth!

(They raise the body.)

So your army was defeated?

THE CAPTAIN: Know that we were victorious. All is ended.

(The body is laid upon the rock.)

THE STANDARD BEARER: Behold it! See!

Head! Hands! O body defiled and stained! Is it thus he is stretched supine!

He lies

Bleeding, eyes closed, teeth showing,

His cheeks all crusted with sand!

Fetch water! Wash him! Let one of you become his serving-maid!

Here we are one beside the other

Like heirs in the empty house of a dead man.

(They remove his helmet and loosen his hair.)

CASSIUS (*howling*): O hair!

O master! Master! Who will give Cassius another pang to satisfy his passion!

(He tears his face.)

Oh! that my nails would fill themselves with foulness!
That my limbs, that this frame
Would grow old and like the charred log cover itself with scales of ash!
That this snout

Would grow the tusks of a boar and dig the earth like a ploughshare!
Our leader is dead. O beasts, my brothers, hail!

THE STANDARD BEARER (*to one of these who is caring for TÊTE-D'OR*): You hold his hair on your arm and you bury there the comb.

And also the comb buries itself in my soul and I see this as though it were in a dream.

O soldiers, what has happened?

THE CENTURION: What do you wish to know?

Is not this enough? What more do you wish to learn?

Cursed be this country into which we have come!

CASSIUS: It is I who will speak and tell you everything.

And as it was I who announced victory so now shall I proclaim death!

Certainly death was our guide

When counter to the course of the sun we advanced across the infinite plain

And, looking back, beheld the mountains behind us.

At noon we sat and ate, then we took up our march again.

But know that the heat was intolerable

And under the weight of their packs and arms the soldiers died like flies,

For the sun consumed us and we could find no shelter.

And at two o'clock the wind arose, blowing the sand,

And we remained there swallowed up like men engulfed in the earth,

And when we emerged from the dust,

We saw the red sun burning above our heads like a Moloch,

And before us there lay an army.

THE STANDARD BEARER: But what army?

CASSIUS: Be still and do not uselessly interrupt me.

Assuredly antique humanity had come before its sister.

And as of old on the day of the separation we carefully considered one another.

Their faces are nearer than ours to the color of the earth,

And we saw in their hands the primitive arms and tools, and in their midst were set the kings and the chieftains, and above their heads the ancient idols swayed,

The squatting, three-faced monsters, each brandishing six pairs of arms,

And camels also were there and ranks of elephants, and tigers in wooden cages,

And we heard the hollow thunder of gongs.

Thus we gazed at each other,

For our forebears descended on Europe, who like a man with outstretched arms lies upon the bosom of the waters,

And theirs remained to multiply in the place in which they were.

And we had lived our life in war and in tears, beset

By the spirits of turbulence and wrath that rise from the restless and uninhabited sea.

And over them with hangman's hands had been securely established the domination

Of Brahma, Prince of Error, and Buddha, the demon of Peace,

And above us burned the inflamed face of the sun.

VOICE: O!

CASSIUS: There we were,

Hair full of sand, wading in sand up to the fleshy part of the leg,

And seeing that multitude confronting us,

Fear entered into us and a distaste for fighting, and for going forward forever on the face of that desert land.

And we saw that we were few and dispersed and our cannon were sunk in the sand.

And the King exhorted us, stretching out his arms,

And he pushed his horse here and there, but we did not listen to him,

And we did not turn our eyes away from the foe,

And from their ranks.

As the nomads of the caravans are wont to cry to each other with an enormous perforated shell, we heard the blowing of a conch or horn!

O but the sound was sad and harsh!

VOICE: O!

CASSIUS: Thus did this primal people speak to us.

And nothing could longer restrain us, but the army like one man irresistibly recoiled.

And, O shame, they began to flee!

VOICE: O! O!

CASSIUS: This the King saw and he did not try to prevent it, and he alone remained.

Then he threw his sword to the ground, and dismounting from his horse he unbridled it.

And alone he advanced against the opposing army, holding the bit to heaven,

Thus we saw him advance

Like a wrathful pigeon that leaps towards the female dragging its wings.

VOICE: O!

CASSIUS: This we saw! And they threw themselves upon him tooth and nail like savage rats.

And there were some who took him by the arms and others by the legs and others caught at his head from behind,

And we, unhappy wretches, we saw him towering out of the midst of them, engulfed as far as the girdle.

And he struggled like a horse that dogs have gripped by the ears

Crying out in a dreadful voice, and with his loins dragging his living prison this way and that!

And there was one who, holding his sword in both hands,

Sought for the joint of the armor, like a cook who opens a crab with the point of a knife.

VOICE: O!

CASSIUS: O!

What a clear and poignant cry we heard him give, like mighty Pallas feeling the grasp of the Satyr,

Such that the memory of it made

Our bones vibrate like instruments!

And we recognised the voice as the woman knows the cry of her mate,

And we also cried aloud and in frantic haste rushed forward.

Three times we charged that multitude, and in the end, yielding beneath our despair, they scattered like a flock.

And as the affrighted Hindu

Turns in his course

To watch the wounded elephant, mad with pain,

Who pursues him like a mountain across the dazzling ricefields, thus they saw our army charging close at their heels.

And we found our king again, lying upon the ground,

Like a sack of gold that robbers had abandoned,

Dead, bereft of breath.

And now we return bearing away this spoil.

VOICE: O! Alas! O King, O King!

CASSIUS: Cry louder! Let the earth be broken in two!

Let the revelation of the sun be quenched!

Let the Tree of Eternity, that like oranges bears the worlds

And like apples and like sugared figs and grapes,

Crash down its roots in air!

For man has terminated here his greatest enterprise. Now all is ended.

And he did not prevail

Against the power that holds things in place.

Cry louder!

Let your tears pour forth in floods! Go to your homes and throw yourselves on the ground!

As for me, O King, I loved you.

You were my life and with wonder I looked upon you, King of men!

And your herald goes before you!

Hark to the voice of the herald! Everything is ended.

All effort has come to its vain conclusion.

—And I, Cassius, having proclaimed these tidings,

I disappear.

(He throws himself over the precipice.

(Pause.

(Someone approaches and bends over the body of

TÊTE-D'OR.

THE CENTURION: What is he doing?

A CAPTAIN: It is the surgeon.

THE CENTURION: At what is he looking? The King is dead.

ANOTHER: No, for the body is not yet rigid.

ANOTHER: What did you say? Have we brought him back with us alive?

(The SURGEON signs to them to stop talking.

(Silence.

ONE OF THE BYSTANDERS: Well?

THE SURGEON: Give me the sponge. Help me. Remove his cuirass.

Gently!

Loosen his clothes at the throat.

(They do as he says.

A CAPTAIN: O reddened body! O mutilated body!

ANOTHER: The bleeding has stopped.

(The SURGEON puts his ear to the chest of TÊTE-D'OR.—Silence.

THE CENTURION *(aside)*: For what does he still search?

FIRST CAPTAIN: He is clever. He has the ear of a maker of clocks.

He listens like a mole.

THE SURGEON *(rising)*: He lives.

THE CENTURION: He lives? Will he recover?

THE SURGEON: No. *(He buries a finger in one of the wounds.)*

The King *(uttering a cry)*: Ah!

THE CENTURION: He is coming to himself.

(Pause. The KING regains consciousness and looks about him.

THE KING: Is there a surgeon here?

THE SURGEON: I am a surgeon, Sire.

THE KING: Shall I die?

(The surgeon, who is washing his hands, nods his head.

THE KING: Who will stand before me and gnash his teeth in my face, and swear

That I am only a sabre of wood and that, like some ridiculous baby,

I have brought my host to this desert, confounding marches and battles with things in story

books.

Cowards!

Cowards,

Cowards! A plague upon me for having trusted you, cowards!

I have been thrown to the ground and the mob has stamped on my body,

And here I lie struck down and brought to nought!

Come, do not be afraid! See, I am weak and defenceless! Throw yourselves upon me like animals!

Beat out my brains with your clubs! Strike! Kick me to death with your boots!

THE SURGEON: Take care. You have started the bleeding again.

THE KING: Let each of these new eyes

Pour forth its sap like tears! And let me become as red as Mars, and let me be resplendent with your shame

Like a mirror!

—But were you conquerors?

THE CENTURION: We were, Sire.

THE KING: I have no strength. I can do nothing more.

O stout limbs now broken, I, I,

I lie here at your mercy, more feeble than a debauched old man,

Than some vile candle-end whose liquorous eye pours forth its flame! This wretched body, this ignoble thing,

Refuses to my soul its proper speech!

What force is failing me? You abandon me, Royal Power!

You are a doctor?

THE SURGEON: Yes.

THE KING: Bring me health to drink in a cup and hold it to my lips! Restore my strength again!

I have no more power! I myself cannot be born again!

There, there,—

THE SURGEON: What is it that you want?

THE KING: There, there, all about me, here,

These clothes I still have on, these plates of iron. Quickly!

Rid me of these rags. Let me wholly reveal myself

As on the day the maternal habitation put the male out of doors! Let me be naked!

O healing brews, O balms!

Linen fresh and white, envelop me in linen!

Wrap me in a napkin like a loaf of bread!

(They do as he says.)

THE SURGEON: You are feeling better now?

THE KING: Bound in swaddling bands like a baby.

(Pause.)

THE CENTURION: Simon!

THE KING: What name do I hear? Who calls me?

THE CENTURION: Agnel! Simon Agnel!

THE KING: Who dares to call me so?

THE CENTURION: I, I dare! Let me weep above you, my royal brother!

Here you lie and you touch the earth with your head.

Arise, stand erect and draw the sword, uplift in your hand the sceptre!

O my royal brother, prone you lie on the ground and I am bending above you!

THE STANDARD BEARER: Alas, O King!

THE COMMANDER OF THE CAVALRY: Alas!

A CAPTAIN: Alas!

ANOTHER: Master, master! Do you, our ruler, abandon us?

THE KING: What do you wish of me? Devour me!

THE CENTURION: Ruined stature of our hope! Image bloody and wasted!

Open your arms at the moment of your death, and press to your breast in farewell, the sheaf of your geniuses with their sublime faces!

Whence have you drawn your courage and your strength?

Here instruct us, lest we despair! O

Noble effort, you disappear whelmed in the holocaust!

(Pause.

THE KING *(crying out)*: Ah! Ah! Ah!

FIRST CAPTAIN: What convulsion seizes him?

The King *(crying out)*: Ah, ah, alas! Ah, ah, alas! Ah, alas!

SECOND CAPTAIN: He remembers! He remembers! Wrath enters into him and he rears himself up like a half-killed cat!

THIRD: The soul in such crises will forget

The death of the body, even as a woman forgets that she is naked.

THE KING: My dream! My dream!

My hope torn from my jaws, and wholly lost!

Ah! ah!

Why

Was this force given to me when I still could stand erect? Why this desire

Voracious, obstinate, insatiable?

O passion!

O soul for which nothing existed too great! And see, these hands

Clasp the void and take hold on nothing!

O vanquished soul! O futile thing that I am!

Miserably, O miserably have I been cast to the earth and slain!

THE CENTURION: Answer us, Tête-d'or! Who will establish justice among the people? The justice that rests on force?

THE KING: Certainly I have failed in my promises.

But it matters little.—I wish, I wish—

THE CENTURION: You have not received, having given.

THE KING: I could not do it! I could not do it, I am not a god.

In what have I been lacking? Where do you find my fault?

(He tears off the bandages) Rend me, hiccough! Off with you, rag! And let each spring

Burst forth with a bubble as large as the eye-ball of a horse!

Creatures who revel in omnipotence, behold me, lying in this cursed place, a wretched man pouring forth streams of blood!

Ah! ah! Sparks of fire, the tide of battle!

And the troating warrior, like a tower, the shaggy horse with hands of horn! Ah! ah!

Charge! Forward! Forward!

—Redness, hole, mouth, gullet of glory, insupportable gate! O you mighty Beings,

Let them cut off my hands and my feet, and to you I will stretch the stumps, and on my bones

I will march to you! To you!

FIRST CAPTAIN: What a sight to see!

SECOND: Hold his feet, wipe the foam from his mouth.

THIRD: Horror! More than horror! Spectacle

Lamentable, detestable, terrible, pitiable! And we have

Two eyes to see this, stupidly ranged about him, like cattle that gather around a watering-place!

THE CENTURION: Calm yourself, O King!

THE STANDARD BEARER: How the blood jets out of him!

How the mare shakes her mane in the breeze! What life
Like that of a tiger is taken in his bones! How he roars, how he
Writhes, smearing the altar with blood, till it trickles down in rills,
And all about him the earth drinks.

(The KING calms himself.

FIRST CAPTAIN (*to another who has turned his head towards the West*):

—What is it that you see?

SECOND CAPTAIN: What a conflagration flares in the sky!

(All turn their eyes towards the West.

THIRD CAPTAIN: A street

Is opened through the stony breast of the earth.

And the wall is so high that the trees that cling there appear like tufts of laurel.

And here and there, detaching themselves from the ancient rock, the forms of monsters watch on the cornices, and what might be the ruins of bygone cities.

And the Sun stands at the end in his magnificence and in a dreadful splendor.

Everything is full of gold and we stand confronting a blinding glory.

THE KING: He founders! He founders! He falls!

He sinks towards the nether abyss.

It is not the Sun, it is the dreadfully flaming citadel of our hope!

And man will not make a higher ascent lest together his path and he plunge headlong!

You, springs, tomb of the forests where I have lived so long, branches charged with malediction, paths, deep-sunken roads,

See what injustice I suffer!

To-day I try in vain to escape from an innocent sepulchre!

And you, like an everlasting face,

Infinite riches of the year, world abounding in fruits,

I shall not possess you, crowned like the mother of Zeus!

And I shall not kiss you like a King, O Peace!

King not by chance but by force and truth,

O earth! O earth that I cannot conquer!

(He throws himself on the ground.

(They raise him and replace him on the rock.

(Confused clamor below.

A CAPTAIN (*leaning over the precipice*): It is the army returning.

ANOTHER: They draw themselves up at the foot of this precipice.

THE CENTURION: Is he still alive?

THE SURGEON: He lives. I cannot understand how.

FIRST CAPTAIN: Let us go! What do we still await?

(The CENTURION raises his hand.

SECOND CAPTAIN: He is coming to himself. His eyes re-open.

THE CENTURION: Sire, how is it with you?

THE KING: How long has it been

Since I

Was living?

FIRST CAPTAIN: You were unconscious some minutes.

THE KING: Death has surrendered me. Some minutes?

THE FIRST CAPTAIN: Yes.

THE KING: I lay there during centuries of matter. A slumber—

SECOND CAPTAIN: What does he say?

THIRD: He speaks of slumber.

THE KING:—A slumber vile, inert, constraining. A detestable oblivion. There only the soul exists.

I have touched the bottom and now like a diver I rise again.

I have lived.

Ah!

Who would try to make me believe

That I have been different from other men?

A man of fantastic dreams!

No! For I have been a man of strong desires.

—What could I do? Reply!

I have striven with agony. In what have I fallen short of what I might have done? All, all failed!

And I remained alone and I did not despair, but still believed.

And I die. But the royal sign

Shall not be effaced from my brow.

FIRST CAPTAIN: Yes, Tête-d'or.

THE KING: If I have been impure in anything,

I ask for pardon. My desire

Has been for mighty things.

—If you love me, do not let me succumb to this horrible feebleness! Ah!

Ah! Things not attained!

Cut me to pieces! Wrench my limbs from their sockets!

Dismember me and fix my quarters above the gates of cities,

That cowards may be shamed and infants in the wombs of their mothers may be given ferocious souls!

(Clamor below.)

THE CENTURION: O King, your army is there drawn up in the depths below,

And they call us, pressing against the base of the cliff, for they think that you are dead.

THE KING: Certainly I am dead.

Throw them my clothes! Throw them the spoils of my body!

For I strip myself since they have abandoned me. And to them revert the effects of the deceased.

Throw them the standard also. All the sky is my standard!

(They kneel all around him.)

THE CENTURION: O King, pardon us!

FIRST CAPTAIN: Pardon us, O King! And do not keep your anger against us, but pardon!

SECOND: Pardon us.

THE KING (*stretching out his hand*): Farewell, my friends!

THE CENTURION: Farewell, King of men!

Let me kiss you, royal hand! O fist more precious than a draught of water!

THE KING: Farewell to you! Men, farewell!

Gestures, the sound of steps in withered leaves, stumbled phrases

Repeated with an idiot's stubborn fury, a confusion of faces and words. All this for a moment.

And yet with attentive ears they hearken to the rustle of laurel leaves or, with wide eyes regarding the holy redness,

Of the evening of the seasons, they wish to be content.

As for me I have made you rise from your idleness,

And I have summoned you out of the shade in which you sat,

And I brought you an order, and this is the order I gave you, I commanded you to go forth!

Neither the world nor the multitude of men has prevailed against us.

And I led you up to this empty space. For here is the place where it has been ordained that I should die.

Then leave me now. Farewell to you, my comrades!

I will die alone!

A CAPTAIN: Alas!

THE KING: Why, alas? Farewell, my comrades. It was destined that this should be.
Farewell, I love you all.

What place is this, Centurion?

THE CENTURION: It is the upper pass. More rugged and difficult than the lower.

THE KING: Destroy the roads! Block the approaches with stones and the trunks of trees
That men may not trouble me: for I do not wish to go down into the earth again.

This will suffice. Do not lament. And do not order my army to display some emphatic sign of grief.
Go, nor look behind.

The matter is between myself and oblivion.

—I see above me the air that envelops all, and these gigantic trees,
Like half-burned piles in the rivers of air, thrusting up devastated boughs
To the silent call of this wall of conflagration,
Giving back, as they sway together, a muffled bleating.
Here I lie to rot, to lose my face like a veil,
Grinning at the moon through knots of crawling worms.

THE STANDARD BEARER: Do you think that man, being dead, is born again?

THE KING: I do not believe in the fables of old women;
Nor that the sooth-sayer, urging on his plough, sees Tagus sprout from the furrow;
Nor that there exists in this temple of the world
Any god other than ignorant man,
Nor that this child of the woman,
When he has rendered up his mortal form,
Shall be born again from the womb of Isis.

A CAPTAIN: What did you say?

THE KING: Here I swear it to you and call the black Night to witness....
Nothing. It is a matter of no importance. I care but little about that Afterwards
Which makes up all the song ... one single word.
And in truth I should also care but little about what comes Before! And yet
I can say that unsatisfied I go from the theatre. I die and I am living!
—But for the strongest bulls this life is naught but a dandelion in the wind!
Why should we wish to fortify our eyes
Against the continual fatigue of sleep
—Yet—Listen to me!—while you live—

A CAPTAIN: We are listening.

THE KING: Listen to these last words that I can say! And first
I desire for you a soaring mind, a courage with shoes of fire,
As the young man chafes with impatience at the prisoning walls of his home
When he has put on his boots, and dashing out, skims over the mud as if he were on wings!
I bid you beware of compromise and of altering yourselves,
But keep your heart immovable like a millstone, like the holy bonds of your inheritance!
Take a resolution and steadfastly follow it! Tread everything under your feet, your wife and your
house and yourself, as you would tread on a garment. Beware of any change! For aside from
yourself what is there, can you tell me? And you yourself are something.—Lay your foundations
there.

Of yourselves alone are you surely masters. Beware of being dispossessed.

And I,

I have believed myself a power more than human, an elemental force! I have appeared in the
midst of your monotonous week.

I can speak no longer. God! I die anew. Shall I reappear again?

Farewell!

I have come to the furthest verge of life, and now once more

I sink in a sea of shadows.

(He faints.)

THE STANDARD BEARER: Reverently wipe the foam from his lips!

We must go and leave him alone! Let him repose in his place; Tête-d'or,

Who, never knowing human incertitude, held to his one inextinguishable desire, is now no more.

FIRST CAPTAIN: The future is only a landscape reflected in the water, the past is of less account than a beechnut and the present is nothing at all.

THE MASTER OF THE CAVALRY: See, it is time for us to return, for yonder beyond the mountain,

Leaving a road piled high with sorrow, the sun is engulfed in mist!

It is the moment when in summer at the time when cherries are ripe and the air is filled with a universal song

And the children bathe above the mills and naked eat their lunches, while a blanched half-moon is suspended in the sky;

Trees, waters, the borders of ditches, the expanse of ripening fields flame beneath the mysterious splendor of the hour of Saturn.

—Now that it is Autumn perhaps some old woman at home, mother or servant-maid,

Thinks of us as she gathers in the washing from the line or sits in the courtyard working at her sewing.

The air still sweet grows fresher; the towering walnut trees

Cover the church with shade and the rooks are drowsing upon the cross!

THE CENTURION: A gorgonian lamentation fills the mountains and the valleys,

The Bear of night has seized the sun between his paws

And the spacious forests of oaks and pines have shuddered at the sight.

Birds, that pass in the desert day, flee more swiftly, far away, wild geese and herons!

And bearing this news

Arrest with a long and piercing cry the traveller on his road, so that he says to himself, "What has it seen?"

"Whence does it come? What does it mean, this mournful cry in the distance?"

What furnace fires these cantons of gold? What chase leads the wind in the desert and the country of infinite trees? What lament is this that rises?

Certainly someone great is going to die and that is why the wind is raised,

That it may bear away the flame of his soul, and that the oak may be shaken to its base.

It is Nature who demands that she should receive again her illustrious child!

She has lent him to us long enough to perform the task ordained,

And now she takes him back again, the cycle being completed.

And we, insensible and stupid,

We have let him slip from our hands like flashing gold that falls and sinks in the stream!

—O days sublime!

(They all go out at the back, except one of the captains who goes in another direction.)

(Silence. Then rolling of funeral drums below.)

THE PRINCESS: No! No!

I do not wish to re-open my eyes!

Ah! ah! I suffer! Ho! ho!

I am alive—

Rending pain pierces me!

I am still alive!

(She opens her eyes and tries to walk and lower her arms.)

Ah!

—O

God!—

O hands! O, O arms! I am fastened here by the hands!

And racked, I fell into a dream, unhappy girl that I am!

I see again! The troubled day brings the arduous end of life.

How long must I remain here? The day draws to its end.

—Who is there? What man is that?

Ah! It is he! Yes,

He of whom they spoke when the violence

Of the pain made me swoon towards death.—Dead!

O Tête-d'or!

You are dead before me and soon I shall follow you.

(The KING stirs and sighs.)

He is not dead.

THE KING: Ah!

THE PRINCESS: His soul returns to him. He has been wounded in some combat. He is covered with blood.

But why have they left him thus dishevelled and unclesed?

THE KING: Ah!

THE PRINCESS: I will not speak. Thus do we die together!

(She sobs.) But truly this pain is unbearable!

My God!

My bones! My arms! Ah! ah!

(She utters a sharp cry.)

THE KING: What cry is that? Who is there?

THE PRINCESS: He heard me. What have I done?

THE KING: Someone uttered a cry. Is there anyone here?

(Silence.)

THE PRINCESS *(in a very low voice)*: It is I.

THE KING: Is there anyone here? I seem to hear a voice that says, "It is I."

THE PRINCESS *(more loudly)*: It is I.

THE KING: Who are you?

THE PRINCESS: I am the one to whom you gave your bread

This morning, and your mantle also.

THE KING: This morning? So now you speak? You speak my language?

Yet that cry that I heard ... I know that voice.

THE PRINCESS: The Queen.

(Silence.)

THE KING: You are not that till I am dead.

Are you glad to see me?

THE PRINCESS: Yes, I am content.

THE KING: What did you say? Draw nearer. I have robbed you of everything. Come and avenge yourself upon my body with the malice only known by women who hate. *(He laughs.)*

THE PRINCESS: Are you wounded

Mortally?

THE KING: Yes.

THE PRINCESS: I cannot come to you.

THE KING: Why not?

THE PRINCESS: I am fastened by the hands.

THE KING: What did you say?

THE PRINCESS: When you usurped my father's place

And had me driven away,

I became a wanderer,

And no one wished to take me in for they were afraid of you.
And at last I found a refuge in the mountains, among the trees and shrubs,
And savage animals, far from the eyes of men.
And this morning after you had given me your bread....
—And so you did not recognise me?

THE KING: No.

THE PRINCESS: Am I so changed? I know that my beauty is gone.

—... A man threw himself upon me and took it from me,
—And that did not satisfy his evil soul. But he has, ah! ah!

THE KING: Well?

THE PRINCESS: ... By the hands, ah!

THE KING: Well?

THE PRINCESS: He has nailed me to a tree.

I have been here many hours.

Why I die, I do not know.

But as for you, I have called to you

To tell you that you die justly,

Because I ought to be the Queen and you ought not to be the King.

And to-day we are both dying in the same place.

THE KING: You are nailed by the hands!

THE PRINCESS: Yes. What is that to you?

I am weak. I shall be the first to die.

THE KING: How is it you have not been seen?

THE PRINCESS: I am fastened to a pine

Whose branches make a roof that descends to the ground in front of me.

THE KING: Where is this tree?

THE PRINCESS: I am just behind you.

THE KING: Now

When it is more difficult to stir one foot than the whole mass of an empire

I must rise

From the lazy bed of death.

(He struggles to his feet and walks toward her, reeling.)

THE PRINCESS: What are you doing?

THE KING: This way?

THE PRINCESS: Leave me! What are you doing?

Why do you come?

THE KING: Is it you that I hold? I can no longer see distinctly. Let me

Lean upon you till I can get my breath. I can do no more!

I need your help to keep myself on my feet.

(Pause.)

Where are your hands?

THE PRINCESS: What can you do?

THE KING: Where are your hands? I tell you that now I cannot see distinctly.

Quickly, before I fall.

I feel your hair. Your arms are here.

I cannot raise my arms. My hands are dead

Like those of a man who has stayed too long in cold water.

But there is still strength in my head. My teeth shall serve for pincers.

(He pulls the nail out of the left hand.)

One hand—the other.

(He pulls out the other nail.)

Ah!

(He reels violently.)

THE PRINCESS: You are falling! Take care!

THE KING: I plunge my thighs in the void! Death shakes me violently!

I am falling! I am falling!

Do not forget that I have drawn out the nails from your hands.

(He falls before her.)

(The PRINCESS sways and falls to her knees and remains crouching beside him.)

THE PRINCESS: It is not just that he should die stretched on the ground here. I must carry him back.

(She tries to raise him.)

How heavy he is! I cannot do it! And yet it must be done!

With these maimed hands, these arms that are weaker than tendrils of ivy, this body that cannot even support its own weight.

(She carries him with difficulty to the funeral bier where she replaces him.)

I have done it! I have rivalled the black ant that drags a burden greater than itself.

(She puts her ear to the breast of the KING.)

But who would have believed

That he could still be alive! I hear the beating of his heart.

Here I will wait until it is silent

Or until mine has stopped.

—No. He awakes.

THE KING (*he looks at her with friendly eyes*): Behold the courage of the wounded, the strength that sustains the weak,

The fellowship of the dying. She could carry me here with these bleeding and dislocated hands.

Through this same meek courage with which you have dragged me here, through this naive endurance,

The woman in her sphere is the image of an inspired resignation, teaching good will to men,

As formerly, servant of the house, she became servant of God.

And it is you

Who join me once more in this place where I must perish!

Do not be ashamed because you see me naked.

It is needful at times that the woman, wife or nurse,

Should contemplate man in his virility.

Consider it! I was man! And through me the strength of the man has satisfied his will,

And suddenly I have been broken! I have been thrown, like carrion, under the shadow of a tree!

Those others, I did not wish to have them see me die. But we cannot hide ourselves

From the eyes of the woman who bears us children. Stay, if this pleases you,

My enemy! What do you say? Do you think that our obstinate souls

Do not wish to keep their grievance?

Mine still preserves a savor of ancient rancour against you,

For you come of a race of enemies.—And yet

I thank you.

THE PRINCESS: I do not wish

To have you thank me.

THE KING (*scrutinising her*): Your face is beautiful and in itself sets forth your sovereignty.

—You hate me with reason. For it seems

That we must hate those who have done us wrong.

And you

Have much to lay at my door. Avenge yourself
On these pitiabile remains!
But I beg you to do one of two things,
Either kill me, if such is your will, upon the instant,
Or let me die and do not trouble me with your importunate cries.
It is the moment in which I would meditate alone.

THE PRINCESS: I do not hate you.

THE KING: I am glad. Farewell, young girl.

(He smiles at her.

(Pause.

THE PRINCESS: O Tête-d'or!

I do not regret that you killed my father!

How happy I am! It is you

Who took my royal throne, and it is through your doing

That I have walked the roads with weary feet, in shame and poverty, despised, insulted, denied,
and that I have come to this place and that I die!

And I could wish that it had been you

Who nailed me to that tree,

And I would have closed my eyes to feel the better,

And loving you I would have died in silence.

My very dear! O my most precious one!

You see, this injury that you did me was not in vain.

I die indeed like you! This last, this lingering suffering has frozen me to death.

O let me be like the gathered flower that smells the sweeter, and like the new-mown grass!

O I am happy to think that there is not one of my many sufferings but had its source in you,

And that now I can breathe them back to you, like a perfume, O my master!

THE KING: O Pity with hands transpierced!

Sweet as the last of the sun!

Happy is he who can take this rapture in his arms and kiss it on the softness of its cheek!

I am overjoyed to see you, Benediction!

As the supreme sun

Dyes golden the saliva on the lips and the tears in the eyes and the dew in its rose-leaf cradle,

And makes a multitude happy in the mist....

I do not see clearly! Listen to what I have to say to you.

Death presses me!

THE PRINCESS: Do not die yet, I beg of you!

THE KING: Death is nothing; but here, here is the final throe!

On what a breast do you lay your head, Compassion!

The vintage is wholly trodden, and from my wounds there oozes only water.

I did not wish to weep, but to arise and walk.

But man goes only forward and he must halt at last.

And from his eyes gush forth the waters

Of that sea whose tide is the same for every breast.

It has been given to you to charm all hearts, august shoot of the cedar!

THE PRINCESS: I give you all that I have.

THE KING: And I also was not destitute of glory.

Ha! ha!

THE PRINCESS: Do not laugh thus with that contorted mouth!

THE KING: Shadows! Shadows!

Call back the army that I may solemnly address them,

Call back the army that I may explain to them everything, having woefully arisen.

Shadows on every man!

Wretched men, most wretched among you all is the person of the King that lies here.

O earth, receive my body! O death, accept my mysterious soul!

THE PRINCESS: O Tête-d'or, do not die so desolate!

THE KING: Ah! Ah!

THE PRINCESS: Listen, my brother!

THE KING: Ah!

THE PRINCESS (*putting her hand on his head*): Hush! Hush!

—You were able

To resurrect the ruin of your body,

And, in despite of death,

Incarnate suffering, to make your way to me, emerging from the tomb like a man that had been flayed!

O sight to wring the heart,

That, royal both, we should encounter thus!

You, robed in blood, and I,

A tortured thing, transfixed against a tree,

Sunk in a stupor, blind, like a wretched caterpillar!

You have delivered me!

And I,

I shall not permit you to die in such despair.

No, do not think that you can do it!

She will not abandon you, she whom you have delivered,

Pressing your mouth against the palms of her bleeding hands!

Behold you have delivered one who is stronger than yourself!

THE KING: No, woman! You cannot

Take this life in your hair.

Live! Be queen! All that I have I leave to you.

Mortal man,

As a traveller benighted in bitter cold takes refuge in the entrails of his horse,

Comforts himself with his woman, seizing her by the breast.

But as for me, I do not desire you.

Let me die alone!

Once more

Like a flame there rolls

In my breast the great desire.

Ah!

The child of my mother

Has been enmeshed in a whirling fury, as his face is enmeshed by the soft and terrestrial flame of his hair;

But now I, a better mother, I myself like a rigid son, shall give birth to a hairy soul!

I hope! I hope! I aspire.

You cannot undo this tough soul with your woman's nails.

Again it fills its iron harness.

—Ah! I see again! Ah! ah!

(The sun near its setting fills all the scene with an immense redness.)

O sun! You, my

Only love! O gulf and fire! O abyss! O blood!

O blood! O

Door! Gold! Gold! Absorb me, anger!

THE PRINCESS: How his thirst upraises him.

THE KING: I see.

—An odor of violets excites my soul to undo it.

THE PRINCESS: Tête-d'or, think of me!

THE KING: O Father,

Come! O Smile, recline upon me.

As the folk of the vintage before the vats

Go out from the house of the wine-press by all the doors like a torrent,

My blood by all these wounds goes out to meet you in triumph.

I die. Who shall relate

That dying, arms outstretched, I held the sun on my breast like a wheel?

O Prince, clothed with glory,

Breast against breast you mingle yourself in my terrestrial blood! Drink the slave!

O lion, you overwhelm me! O eagle, you grasp me in your talons!

THE PRINCESS: He is dead.

O body, you repose in incorruptible gold.

(Silence.)

I remember everything, the winter, the days of feasting,

The people I knew, the times of rejoicing and of mourning, the changes of the weather, the countries I have seen,

And my robes that were kept in the cypress chest.

O Prince! O Master! King of men!

(Pause.)

(Steps. Voices behind the scenes.)

(Enter the COMMANDER OF THE SECOND ARMY with other officers.)

THE COMMANDER: Here?

THE CAPTAIN: Here, on this rock in the middle.

THE COMMANDER: I do not dare to advance. Monarchy reposes in these shadows.

THE CAPTAIN: He is there.

THE COMMANDER (*perceiving the PRINCESS*): But who is that? Whom have you left beside him?

THE CAPTAIN: No one.

THE COMMANDER: No one? Yet yonder are hands and the semblance of a face. Look.

AN OFFICER: Yes. There is someone there beside the bier.

THE CAPTAIN: It is most astonishing. I saw them all depart before I set out myself to meet you.

THE COMMANDER: Hola! Is there someone living in the shade of the trees and the night?

THE OFFICER: No answer.

THE COMMANDER: Let us advance.

(Together they approach.)

FIRST OFFICER: A young girl.

SECOND OFFICER: And fainting or dead.

THE COMMANDER: Care for her. Find if she lives!...

And I for him

Lying here with a face so pale....

(He puts his hand, on the breast of the KING.)

THE PRINCESS: Ah!

FIRST OFFICER: Does she live?

SECOND OFFICER: Yes. She is coming to herself.

THE COMMANDER: Both live.

FIRST OFFICER: What did you say?

THE COMMANDER: A glimmer of life like the fire in a dying coal. The four limbs are dead; but still the heart stirs beneath the touch of the fingers.

And see!

SECOND OFFICER: Yes; his lips are moving.

FIRST OFFICER: Speak to him. Perhaps he will hear. And if he hears he may contrive to speak.

THE COMMANDER: O King! I am the head of the second army.

Have you anything to say to me?

THE KING: Let her ... let her....

THE COMMANDER: Did you hear?

THE KING: Let her be....

THE COMMANDER: Let her be ...?

FIRST OFFICER: What? Speak.

THE KING: Qu....

(He dies.

THE COMMANDER: Peace to his soul!

THE SECOND OFFICER: He said "Queen," I heard him.

THE COMMANDER: Let her be Queen?

ANOTHER OFFICER (*who supports the PRINCESS*): Ah! A thing horrible and very strange!

See!

ANOTHER: Her hands bleed.

ANOTHER: Pierced through and through!

THE COMMANDER: Who can she be? Let her be Queen? Who? Have any of you seen this wild, creature before?

FIRST OFFICER: No.

SOMEONE: I know

That face,

That face in so far as I can see

In the obscurity of the twilight.

THE COMMANDER: Who is she?

(The PRINCESS regains consciousness.

THE MAN (*staring at her*): I know it....

No longer.

THE PRINCESS: What men are you? Let me go!

(She frees herself and falls.

SOMEONE: She speaks our language.

THE COMMANDER: Lift her with all respect.

(They support her in their arms.

Young girl, can you hear me?

THE PRINCESS: Yes.

THE COMMANDER: Who are you?

THE PRINCESS: Why should I hide it? Your former King who was killed by that man there....

THE COMMANDER: Are you his daughter?

THE PRINCESS: I am.

THE COMMANDER: Tête-d'or

Commands that you be Queen.

THE PRINCESS: He said this to you?

THE COMMANDER: Yes, with his last breath.

THE PRINCESS: Then let it be according to his wish.

THE COMMANDER: What he wished, we also wish.

THE PRINCESS: Make haste! Clothe me again in the garments of a queen.

THE COMMANDER: What did you say?

THE PRINCESS: The coronation costume. Put it on me.

The crown and the sceptre.

THE COMMANDER: Go search for it, one of you. The royal treasures are packed among our stores.

(An Officer goes out.)

THE COMMANDER (*to the PRINCESS*): I am astonished to see you.

THE PRINCESS: After I had left your country

I was pursued

Thus far. And here I lived.

But have you never seen me

Before?

THE COMMANDER: Never.

THE PRINCESS: You will be faithful to me?

THE COMMANDER: Yes, Queen.

THE PRINCESS: All is well.

(Enter many men hearing various parts of the coronation costume.)

THE PRINCESS: These are the things I asked for?

THE COMMANDER: Yes.

THE PRINCESS: You must serve as my maids, soldiers.

My strength is gone.

THE COMMANDER (*to another*): You, support her beneath the other arm.

(They present to her one by one the parts of the coronation costume.)

FIRST OFFICER: The long chemise, the Alb.

(They put them on her.)

THE PRINCESS: I saw him....

THE COMMANDER: It is true. At the last moment of his life.

THE PRINCESS: One desire lived in him

Still. Certainly a desire still burned in his breast.

—The robe.

SECOND OFFICER: Here it is.

THE PRINCESS: Hide me under the costume of the Queen.

(They put the robe on her.)

THE PRINCESS: The sleeves. Gently, gently, my friends! Ah!

Have patience. My arms are somewhat rusty.

THE COMMANDER: O Queen, let me take your foot.

(They remove the hide boot and put a sandal in its place.)

THIRD OFFICER: This that you remove is the shoe of the exile.

THE COMMANDER: And they place upon your foot the imperial sandal with fastenings of gold.

(They do the same for the other foot.)

THE PRINCESS: What is there still to do? Throw the mantle over my shoulders. Quick, I am in haste! Fasten this clasp!

And you, place the crown on my head, O paranymp!

THE COMMANDER: Be Queen!

(He places the crown on her head.)

THE PRINCESS: The sceptre. (*They present it to her.*) How shall I hold it? (*To the COMMANDER.*) See this hand!

(She turns it painfully from side to side.

THE COMMANDER: It bleeds!

THE PRINCESS: Poor hand!

(She looks at it with a kind of smile.

I have been nailed....

THE COMMANDER: Nailed!

THE PRINCESS: Know that I have been nailed by the hands.

What are they good for? Nailed like a bird of the night.

Like the tree that is crucified that it may fructify.

THE COMMANDER: You have suffered a great outrage.

THE PRINCESS: I cannot hold the golden sceptre and yet I must. Help me.

Clench my fist with your hand that I may hold it erect.

(She grasps the sceptre.

THE COMMANDER: Hail to you, Queen!

ALL: Hail!

THE PRINCESS: Indeed there still is dimly visible

Through thickening veils of murky air

The procurator of royalty,

The ruler of men, the bell-wether of the tribe.

I, woman, covered with this sumptuous apparel!

Nothing is lacking. The crown is on my head,

And the pompous train of the mantle sweeps the earth at my feet.

THE COMMANDER: Queen....

THE PRINCESS: Dust and ashes!

Why was I born what I am? It is only I.

I am the sovereign of a season that is ending.

Who calls me queen, unless it be the queen of things that exist no more,

Or of the leaves in the instant that they swim in the dusty air?

Already the mist submerges the valleys and, through the fog,

The Moon shines forth, like a beckoning finger with sharply pointed nail.

Lead me....

THE COMMANDER: Where?

THE PRINCESS: To your testator, there.

(She approaches the body of the KING.

O dead body, do not refuse this present that I bring you.

It is to you that I speak, body!

That austere spirit

Who inhabited you is now as far removed

From you as from me.

—Oh, that I had been dowered with that soul! Here, all ungrateful more vainly than the urn of Aquarius empties itself....

—But you!

This is ineffable.

It is to you that I make this last offering, beloved dead.

—Help me to lower myself.

(She painfully sinks to her knees and kisses him on the lips, then rises.

You tremble, my heart?

I was born that I might live. And I die that I may....

(She dies.)

FIRST OFFICER: The Queen is dead.

SECOND OFFICER: How her head suddenly drooped beneath the crown!

THE COMMANDER: O Queen! O Empress still warm!

THIRD OFFICER: Her golden shoes have made

Only a rustling in the bed of leaves.

(Pause. The COMMANDER gently and respectfully lays the body of the Queen on the ground.)

THE COMMANDER: Three dead Kings! Events most strange!

The laws of custom broken, human weakness surmounted, the obstacle of circumstances

Dissipated. And our effort, reaching a vain conclusion,

Undoes itself like a fold.

Place the queen on a shield, clad in her royal robes. We will bear her with us.

We must descend. The West, behind the shaggy boughs of sombre pines,

Grows pale, and Memnon cries in the mist!

Thus a hundred times before us

Hyperion will disappear in the clouds

Before our rear-most legion will see its flaming buckler sink in the blackness of the sea.

(They raise the body.)

Exalt these shining feet which thus adorned to tread the earth no more shall retrace

The people.

As for us, we understand how not to be afraid!

And if attacked we will show

Gums that are formidable yet.

(Retreat, scarcely perceptible in the distance.)

Come! Those who go before us already are far away.

Forward! Home! To the West!

(They all go out.)

FINIS.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TÊTE-D'OR: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS ***

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