

THE TALL BAZILLE

Translated
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To Whom
This play
Is
Most lovingly and
Gratefully
Dedicated.

“Peux-tu croire que ce jeune, gracieux et charmant Frédéric Bazille a été tué l'autre jour devant Beaune-La-Rolande?”

*Dr. René Leenhardt, army
surgeon, letter to his wife,
December 1, 1870.*

“Le grand Bazille a fait une chose que je trouve fort bien; c'est une petite fille en robe très claire assise à l'ombre d'un arbre derrière lequel on aperçoit un village; il y a beaucoup de lumière et de soleil. Il cherche ce que nous avons si souvent cherché: mettre une figure en plein air et cette fois-ci, il me paraît avoir réussi.”
Berthe Morisot, letter to her sister, Edma, May 5, 1869.

Characters In Order Of Appearance

Frédéric Bazille

Marc Bazille,
Younger brother
of Frédéric.

Gaston Bazille,
Their Father.

Camille Bazille,
Their Mother.

Alfred Bruyas,
Elderly Art Patron
And Collector.

Auguste Renoir

“I have just learned that poor Bazille was killed at Beaune-La-Rolande on November 28th.”
Edouard Manet, letter to his wife, Suzanne, February 9, 1871.

“Do you know that all our acquaintances have come out of the war without a scratch, except for that poor Bazille, at Orléans, I think...Manet spent his time during the siege changing his uniforms.”
Berthe Morisot, letter to her sister, Edma, February 27, 1871.

Introduction (To Any Scene) Or Epilogue The North

Anywhere in Paris. Early May, 1870. FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE, AUGUSTE RENOIR. Scenery is optional. Scene can be a voice-over.

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE: I leave in a few days.

RENOIR: Why?

FB: Montpellier. Méric. The banks of the river Lez. The family—that you saw in my painting.

RENOIR: When Monet marries Camille, you won't be here. The god-father of their son can't be bothered.

FB: I can't be here in June. Papa—may need support. The vines...

RENOIR: If I were rich, I could be lazy, too, and never try to sell anything. People in Paris think you're not serious. Show them they're wrong. Stay here and paint with Monet or me. Poverty makes us work hard.

FB: Ridiculous! You and he don't know or care about anything but painting. I don't work as hard, but I care as much. I go home each summer and work. More than you think. And I'm sick of hearing about your damn poverty. I do what I can for you.

RENOIR: Shit, shit, shit...Send us wine.

FB: I can't. The grapes are dying at Saint-Sauveur and all through the South. They dry up and die. Papa is desperate for a cure.

RENOIR: What help could a painter be? Don't leave. Work with us again. Side by side again in plein air. To hell with meaning and history. Stay here and do some honest work. Look at nature near Paris. Paint your own truth. The truth of what you see and feel about it. So it stands out on the surface. Is the surface.

FB: I can't paint like you. Or Monet. The Salon accepted one canvas of mine last year. None by him. I must be what I am.

RENOIR: I don't like what you are. You compromise. You imitate. You are everybody from Veronese to Delacroix. Another Cabanel.

FB: Shit! Three times.

RENOIR: You don't belong among provincials. Montpellier is not good for you. You don't exhibit there. Bruyas despises all of us.

FB: I do good work at Méric. The light, Renoir! You should see it. There is nothing like it in the North. I need the South.

RENOIR: The South is killing you. Like the grapes on your father's farm.

Scene 1

Méric

Terrace at Méric, owned by Frédéric Bazille's mother and her sister, near Montpellier. Late afternoon, August 2, 1870. Outdoor furniture of the type seen in *Family Reunion*. Bazille is seated in front of an easel, brush poised in right hand, palette in left, hunched forward, studying *On The Banks Of The Lez* (height, 54.33"; width, 79.53"). He is in the position in which Renoir painted him in the act of painting *The Heron*.

MARC BAZILLE: (*He enters.*) Good afternoon, Frédéric. I am here. Don't get up.

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE: Marc! You look well. (*He puts down palette and brush and rises.*) Lost a little weight. Good. Vacation agrees with you.

MARC and FB: (*They embrace.*)

FB: Thank you for coming. Suzanne and the baby are well?

MARC: Quite well, thank you.

FB: The reeds I brought from Paris for your bassoon? Are they satisfactory?

MARC: They are excellent. I have never played better.

FB: I am very pleased. How old is Andre now?

MARC: Three months to the day. Valentine was two on June 29th.

FB: You most certainly are a devoted, happy husband and father.

MARC: Very happy. Once again, I recommend marriage. You would make Mama and Papa very happy if you would...

FB: I will do the ordinary thing someday. I realize that. Unfortunately, there is not another Suzanne to be found.

MARC: The older son should be married and produce an heir as well as paintings. Papa would be pleased. Women never cease to be interested in you.

FB: I had to be cruel once, had to cut things off quickly. I did not like myself. I had trouble painting. I hesitate to encourage anybody.

MARC: Your artist friends—Monet and Camille. Renoir and Lise. If Renoir does not marry her, it seems clear that he will marry somebody. Manet...

FB: They are different. They achieve order in life more easily than I. They paint fast. They catch the changing light. They have time for women. They are not burdened by social expectations. I am lazy. I paint slowly. I have no sense of time. Where is there a woman who could love and tolerate me? Last year...I thought I might have found her...I regret that I disappoint Papa...Not Mama. She understands that life for me cannot be traditional...Last year...my dreams of marriage received a hard blow. It will be a long time before I have such dreams again...How is the spa this year?

MARC: For the last two weeks, since the war began, nobody talks about anything else. Learning that people we see there year after year are military geniuses has been quite a revelation. And you? Are you lonely here?

FB: Never. With Mama and Papa in town or at Saint-Sauveur and the cousins with you at the spa, I have complete solitude

which pleases me infinitely. I work hard and read much...I am grateful to Suzanne for letting you leave her and to you for coming.

MARC: Your note—very terse, a little alarming—said that you want to see me before Mama and Papa arrive this evening. Why is that important? (*He notices the painting on the easel.*) A new painting! Is it finished? (*He looks at the painting intently.*)

ON THE BANKS OF THE LEZ: (*If possible, a very large copy appears.*)

FB: I am not sure. It may need another brush stroke. It is difficult to finish a painting. Courage and decisiveness are required to stop work. To leave it. Perhaps not see it again. Do you like it?

MARC: Yes! A magnificent landscape. I recognize the scene. The banks of the Lez near the mill at Navitau. On the road to Clapier. At the lower right...Very dim... (*He looks more intently.*) Is that the abandoned old kiln where we played? And... (*He looks more closely.*) the dog that always played with us? That belonged to the old farmer. The dog is barely visible. (*He again faces FB.*) Obviously the dog did not pose for you. He has been dead for many years. Is this the spirit of the dog? A reference to moments of great joy that can never be recaptured?

FB: That grow dim as they recede from us with time.

MARC: The dog is like the woman in your painting on the bench over there. (*He points.*)

ON THE BANKS OF THE LEZ: (*It ceases to appear.*)

FB: *The Oleander.* The oleander bush at the edge of the terrace. Bright sunlight floods the background. In sharp contrast

with deep shadows which obscure the bench and figure in the foreground.

THE OLEANDER: (If possible, a very large copy appears.)

MARC: Shade so dark that one can barely see her. She sits alone. She is weightless, without features, transparent. Who is she?

FB: A dream. Or memory of somebody who cannot be.

MARC: Monet would not approve. Memory and realized emotion are of the mind, not of the senses.

THE OLEANDER: (It ceases to appear.)

FB: I lack his faith and power. I realize that. I paint what my mind knows. When Monet works, his eyes are the length of an arm and a brush from the canvas. He sees a random smear of colors at that distance. From a meter away you see the result of his faith that a smear is something much more than that, of his power to make of those smears great art. My arms and legs are so long that my eyes are further from the canvas than his when I paint. Perhaps, this reinforces my tendency to paint what I know instead of what I see and feel about nature. Less faith and power is required of me...Monet and Renoir can go to hell! Shapeless space is not natural to a southerner. Solidity, mass, structure, balance, colors with weight and depth are natural habits not easily overcome. I don't paint crowds, cities, or water. So damn Monet!

MARC: Hah! You are godfather to his son. In June you were in a foul mood for days because you stayed here, to oblige Papa. To be inducted into the Grand Loge, instead of rushing to Paris for the wedding of Monet and Camille. I can still hear you grumbling, that you should have been a witness along with

Courbet. Today you curse Monet. Tomorrow you embrace him and pay his debts. And Renoir's.

FB: They have enlisted in art as a way of life. They don't care about anything else except their women. I cannot do what they do. I cannot complete a painting in plein air. I cannot suppress form and architecture in southern light. The light here is harsh and relentless. It reveals and reinforces everything. Edges, contours, mass. Beauty and ugliness. I accept its challenge. When I do well with it, I love what I create, and I love being an artist. God help me—I love it so.

MARC: You are happier than when you first arrived at Méric this year...There is power and joy and tranquility in this painting. (*He points at it.*) A triumphant return to your commanding essence. To your home. Your exotic paintings, brilliant, enigmatic. That Biblical painting...

FB: *Ruth And Boaz.*

MARC: Haunting. Outstanding in the genre. But not your proper oeuvre. This is your essence.

FB: My essence? It is elusive. If the life of an artist were a great painting, in its composition death and essence would arrive the same time.

MARC: (*He tries to say something but does not know how to respond.*) Frédéric...

FB: I am not sure what my essential self is. I am tired of looking for it, of trying to create it. The effort is a great burden. Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Pissarro—are pure and consistent in their rejection of classical, Biblical, and literary allusions. I am not. One must be accepted at the Salon; one must sell. A banal talent like Cabanel wins medals with abominations while I am rejected. Last year was devastating. As you see, I have

been painting, recently, for a wide range of tastes. When I paint well, I dislike myself less.

MARC: Cabanel argues for you with the jury. He is a decent man.

FB: When he knows I will be rejected. I am uncomfortable being patronized by him...I compromise, Marc. One reason that I am happy to be here is that I can compromise privately. I miss the excitement of Paris. When all the painting and talk about painting and everybody's money troubles become too much, I relax with Maître and enjoy being lazy. With him there is music, literature, and drama. Or a rowing regatta. He came from far away like me. Bordeaux. To study law. Stayed to paint like me. We play four handed piano, attend concerts, act in amateur plays; he encourages me to write. But here I can work on my compromises without the chatter of Manet and the subtle objections of Renoir. He talks very little about art—whether painting ought to be objective or subjective, realism or some other damn ism; but he objects and condemns with a raised eyebrow and an audible silence.

MARC: He has great affection for you. He showed it in the portrait of you. Seated in front of an easel. Painting. Long legs awkwardly bent. Brush in hand. You lean forward slightly. Energy flows from your head through your arm, hand, and brush to the canvas which totally engages you.

RENOIR'S *PORTRAIT OF BAZILLE*: (*If possible, a very large copy appears.*)

FB: He used my colors, rather than the increasingly sensual palette which he usually contrives.

MARC: Where is the painting now?

FB: Manet bought it. Something about it fascinated him.

MARC: Something about you.

FB: I doubt it. He thinks it is Renoir's best. He watches Renoir work on other canvases, snorts at them, and says, not as good as the portrait of Bazille.

RENOIR'S *PORTRAIT OF BAZILLE*: (*It ceases to appear.*)

MARC: You have managed yourself well. This painting...

FB: *On The Banks Of The Lez...*

MARC: Is a triumph.

FB: Thank you. I am pleased with this painting. It helped me. Alone by the Lez, with my paints, my cigar, I made a decision. Until I made it, I was distressed. Now I feel free. I must talk to you about my decision.

MARC: What decision?

FB: The war. We have been at war for two weeks. The third zouave regiment is forming in Montpellier. I intend to enlist with the rank of private.

MARC: I cannot believe this! An absurdly tall, twenty-eight year old private in the képi and ridiculous red trousers of a zouave! This is grotesque!

FB: You must promise not to enlist or accept conscription. If something should happen to me and you, it would be more than Papa and Mama could bear. You have a wife and two beautiful children.

MARC: Why are you doing this? You have no interest in war or politics. This is not a republican's war. This is the little Napo-

leon's war and Bismarck's war. For two northern provinces that have always been filled with Germans.

FB: I have become a northerner. Form, mass, outline, the fundamental structure of things and the human form—eloquently realized in southern light—no longer interest me now that this painting is complete. Don't worry. The war will probably end in a few weeks with the Prussians rushing for safety on the other side of the Rhine howling for Bismarck's head.

MARC: Don't be facetious, Frédéric. You don't believe that...You in the zouaves! An overage private with farmers, bakers, convicts, and thugs. You already serve in the ranks of something more valid.

FB: More valid? I don't know. I know that service in the ranks of art is demanding and thankless. I am not needed or fully accepted by anyone. I now enlist in something that I can accomplish without the inherent necessity of working alone. I envy the old masters who could command their apprentices.

MARC: This is foolishness. Papa will think so also. He did not support you and see you come this far to have you waste your time and his financial and personal investment in your success.

FB: One of us should serve. Exposing the married son to arms while the first son indulges himself with paints and brushes and produces proof of self-indulgence and contempt for public sentiment with each painting that he completes would bring dishonor to the family. We cannot be certain that we would be able to hire a replacement for you in the conscription.

MARC: That is true whether or not you enlist. Private Jean Frédéric Bazille!

FB: By enlisting and supporting France with my hands and body I make a statement about liberty that promotes the republican cause and increases your chances for avoiding conscription. A leading Protestant, republican family owes a duty to France which I shall have the honor of performing.

MARC: The honor of performing! Please, Frédéric! The chances are excellent that Papa can hire a man for each of us. The increase in unemployment caused by the infestation in the vineyards makes the chances better than ever. What are your real reasons? What is the truth?

FB: The truth is in everything I say. Particular reasons do not matter. Having reasons is the old way. Responding through the senses without or in spite of reason is now the painterly way.

MARC: The truth, Frédéric.

FB: I shall enlist for the light of North Africa. Ten years ago, Monet was conscripted. The paintings of Delacroix made him interested in North Africa. He volunteered for duty in Algeria. The third zouave regiment will train in North Africa. I shall find Monet's light.

MARC: You know Monet's light and reject it.

FB: Not entirely. Not happily. I shall seek comparable discoveries to inform my work. I will not stop being an artist.

MARC: Why, Frédéric? Why? Be serious. You never share yourself beyond a certain point. This is not good. Not fair to people who love you. Perhaps your women have felt the same way.

FB: I am tired of writing to Mama to persuade Papa to send more than the monthly stipend when I can't make it through

the month. When I need a little more for rent. For paint. Not for pleasure, which costs a cultured man almost nothing. At my age this is humiliating. He knows that I am not extravagant. In the army I will receive regular pay and enjoy the experience of being dependent on nobody. Papa will be relieved of a financial burden.

MARC: Regular pay! If money were a real reason, I would have heard these complaints before.

FB: Why does anybody join the army of his country in time of war? There are many reasons. Some noble, some ignoble. I can tell you this. Since I joined M. Gleyre's studio in Paris, adding art to medical studies, I have been painting and painting and talking about painting and living with painting and painters without respite.

MARC: That is what an artist does, is expected to do, and prefers to do.

FB: I must be away from art for a time. My creative capital is exhausted. I must learn whether or not I can accumulate new capital for a creative surge. You see, my imagery invokes commerce, not art. That is good. I should be something else for a time. If I am a soldier, I will be restrained from relapse into art at a time when I fear mediocrity.

MARC: Mediocrity? Never.

FB: I am sick of rejection. Even M. Bruyas, who has known me since birth, did not care to collect my work.

MARC: He rejects anybody younger than Courbet. He would not buy the large Monet either. The one you bought to help Monet and brought here to show Bruyas.

FB: *The Women In The garden.*

MARC: Yes, that one. Since Delacroix stopped producing, M. Bruyas has been dead above the neck...How will Mama feel?

FB: He may have been right for once. Monet's large canvases do not succeed because they are not Monet. He cannot be superimposed upon Courbet. If you could see what Monet and Renoir and Sisley are doing now. They gave me vision, method, cause. To which at the moment I feel unequal.

MARC: HOW WILL MAMA FEEL?

FB: She will be frightened and feel what Papa feels. Who will support me as he always does when I make a sincere and honorable decision.

MARC: Not so. He will feel as I feel.

FB: Forgive me, Marc. I have not considered your feelings. What are they?

MARC: I never had your talents. I can't paint; I am not a good musician; I write poorly...

FB: I do not consider being an artist in any manner superior to other occupations. I envy your skill in banking and business and the fact that Papa can rely on you.

MARC: I do not envy you, Frédéric. I am proud of you and take great satisfaction in doing what I can to permit you to paint, unburdened by involvement in the family enterprises. It is an honor and privilege to do so. That is why I feel...

FB: I could not ask for more support than I have received. I hope that I can be worthy of it.

MARC: Stop posturing, Frédéric. You are well worth it. That is the point. You are an important artist. You begin to bring fame and honor to our family and our city. You belong with your work. I feel betrayed. Papa will feel the same. He did not support you to give you to the army where hundreds of other men are able to do whatever you will do. Then, too, if you enlist, people will say, how noble and brave the elder Bazille son is and conclude that I am deficient in patriotism and courage.

FB: Rubbish! You have a family. I do not.

MARC: It is for me to think of them. They should not concern you.

FB: They do concern me. Thinking of them is an indulgence which I will not deny myself. Which, however, has little to do with my decision. The other new painters give themselves entirely to their work. They are blessed and feel blessed. You can see it in their work. They give themselves to the canvas which rewards them. I do not know how to give myself as they do. If I can once give all of myself, I may find redemption and renewal; I may burst through into the blessing of something great. This cannot happen until all is given.

MARC: But the zouaves! They are crude, crazy fanatics.

FB: So is anybody who chooses the risk of giving everything... We may not be alone again. I want to give you some instructions. Things to be done while I am away. In case anything... Anything should happen. I will leave a will and written instructions. I may forget something.

MARC: I understand.

FB: The paintings completed this summer, *On The Banks Of The Lez* and others, are to be sent to Edmond Maître at our studio at 8 Rue Des Beaux Arts with instructions to submit

them to the Salon. My work here can be found in the orangerie and in my room. The proceeds of any sales are to be for the benefit of your children. In regard to sales, you and Papa have complete discretion. However, wishes of the Fabre Museum should receive respectful consideration. I do not care what happens to my personal effects. I wish to be buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Montpellier.

MARC: This is all too lugubrious. Your career, in spite of the violence you are determined to inflict upon it, will soar. You have already had at least two triumphs rarely experienced by any artist. *Family Reunion* and *View Of The Village*.

VIEW OF THE VILLAGE: (If possible, a very large copy appears.)

FB: They were satisfying. *Especially, View Of The Village*. I painted the plain daughter of our gardener seated on a low wall at the north end of Méric with Castelnau in the background on the other side of the Lez. The hands, the ears, the earrings, the dress, the sash, the little bouquet are literal. None of the twelve others could have done it. Manet told me what Morisot wrote to Edma, her sister: The tall Bazille has done something very good. A figure outdoors. In light and sun. We all have tried so often, she said, I think he has succeeded.

VIEW OF THE VILLAGE: (It ceases to appear.)

MARC: *(After a slight pause.)* The twelve others?

FB: Something happened, Marc. Which might not have happened if there had not been so many of us. The artist became as important as the painting because he or she submitted to nature and did not care to be important. It began with Boudin and Jongking. When Manet painted his *Olympia*, something new was in the world. The way you see the world became as important as what you know about it. I count thirteen of us. It is a different world now. It can never go back to what it was

before. Art has shown a new way of seeing the world. When that happens, there is always fear, ridicule, and hatred. The critics converge. The act of painting now implies the impudence and pride of presuming to create and promote something uniquely personal. Ironically, the pride is commensurate with the humility one feels at being somehow privileged to create uniquely. The pride, presumption, and impudence enrage the critics.

MARC: Do you feel this pride?

FB: Not often. I am not blessed with it often. When it comes, it is an emotion which is greater than anything else. Than wealth, or love, or life. To have done what only you could do, and it is good! But France accepts only one Creator and His unique creation. Any other is presumptuous, sinful and resented. For the pride which follows a great creation should be experienced only by God. Remember The Bible...

MARC: "God saw everything that he had made. Behold, it was very good. There was an evening. There was a morning: sixth day."

FB: He created perfection in one effort. The artist must make many efforts because he is conceived not in sin but in failure. He knows that a masterpiece is not perfect; it is only further from failure than a lesser work. From one brush stroke to a finished painting—is only a matter of degree. Each choice excludes all other possibilities which might be superior. The true artist is humble. His greatest triumph, he knows, is failure by definition. He never knows the extent of his failure. Only God could succeed with one sustained effort. Only He deserved to indulge in repose on the seventh day. On the seventh day, says The Bible...

MARC: "On the seventh day God finished the oeuvre that He had made, He rested on the seventh day from the entire oeuvre."

vre. God blessed the seventh day and consecrated it for He had then ceased the entire oeuvre that He alone had created by His action."

FB: Very good. You are still a good Huguenot...Thirteen of us, Marc. Who are the twelve disciples, and who will be sacrificed? Sometimes I think it may be Manet. He is foremost. He draws more wrath...Sometimes, lately I think that I am...Judas.

MARC: Never. Saint Paul, perhaps. This is nonsense. There are no Romans here.

FB: A temple is being purified. There is an emperor.

MARC: Can this be? You want self-flagellation? Self-immolation? The asceticism of an apostle? For what? For failing to be acclaimed at a young age? For being lazy? For art? For pride?

FB: Marc, dear Marc, don't you see? What I am doing is, at last, beyond logic and reason and knowing. My enlistment is the oeuvre that I want. I am not afraid. I am happy, Marc. Happier than I have ever been. When I am discharged from the army, I will paint again with brush and palette instead of rifles and artillery or whatever soldiers do. I will begin again. I will be cleansed; I will be truth.

MARC: You have never talked to me about yourself like this before. I am honored. And disturbed. You sound old and distant. Like a stranger from a foreign land that I know nothing about.

FB: I will tell you a secret: I often feel that God and I are fellow craftsmen, fellow creators. We both know what it is to create something out of nothing. Creating the world could not have been easy for Him. Not without agony. "Behold, it was very good," He said. He did not say that He was satisfied. He may

have stopped short of perfection. I see so much that, to me, does not appear well wrought. I do not question the wisdom of applying the final stroke when He did. I simply note that, aesthetically, His decision to terminate work when He did was arbitrary and, sometimes I think, unfortunate.

FB and MARC: *(They are silent for a few seconds.)*

MARC: I hear a carriage...It must be Mama and Papa...When do you report for duty?

FB: Middle of the month. When will you go back to the spa?

MARC: Tomorrow morning.

FB: Mama and Papa will probably stay for several days. The city is very hot. Let's not talk to them about this until just before you leave. *(He walks to the edge of the stage.)* Mama. Papa. I am on the terrace. Marc is here.

CAMILLE and GASTON: *(They enter. One of GASTON'S hands is bandaged.)*

GASTON: Do not interfere, Camille. We will go to Saint-Sauveur this evening. As soon as I examine the mail and find the books I need.

CAMILLE: *(She kisses and is kissed and embraced by each son as GASTON continues to fulminate.)*

GASTON: I have fought the mayor and the Central Hérault Agricultural Society all day with only M. de Planchon to support me. The economy of the region is dissolving before our eyes. The entire Midi will soon be ruined by this terrible plague. I will not tolerate opposition from you. Ah, Marc. This is a surprise. Suzanne, Valentine, and Andre? Are they here?

CAMILLE: Yes, Marc, my darling Valentine and Andre?

MARC: I came alone, Mama. I return in the morning. I...left some papers here. Some work. The milk production at Saint-Sauveur. I have time to do some work at the spa.

GASTON: Don't work too hard, Marc. This is your vacation.

MARC: You are a fine one to talk.

GASTON: I want to talk to you about milk for a moment if I have time. Not before I settle things with Mama. We must leave here in two hours, Camille, so that I can arrive at Saint-Sauveur tonight and be rested for a full day of work tomorrow, and that is that.

FB: What happened to your hand, Papa?

CAMILLE: (*She sees the painting.*) A splendid landscape, Frédéric!

MARC: Your hand, Papa!

GASTON: (*He looks at the painting.*) I recognize the view. Just what Bruyas is looking for on behalf of the city. We will invite him to see it.

CAMILLE: We will invite him if Frédéric does not object. The vain, pompous fool! A rich patron of artists, of course, cannot be told that he is a fool. I count his face over twenty times on the walls of the Musée Fabre! If he were not so good looking, the number of those sickening genuflections would be obscene. At least Courbet put himself in the picture when he painted Bruyas.

MARC: Frédéric never offered to kiss his rear by painting him.

CAMILLE: Like Cabanel.

FB: I was never asked. Your hand, Papa! What happened to your hand?

CAMILLE: He is obsessed, consumed by the...the...

GASTON: Phylloxera. You at least could do me the honor of remembering the name. I have identified the parasite that destroys the wine of France. What we must look for now is no longer the cause of the disease. We must now look for the remedy. A problem well expressed is a problem resolved.

CAMILLE: He is not satisfied with the efforts of Montpellier and Hérault and all of France to do something about the plague. He has begun to experiment on his own farm. He insists on going there tonight.

GASTON: There is not a day to lose. If we do not defeat this plague, there will be poverty and social upheaval in our region first. The people in authority with funds to commit do nothing. They know as little about how to organize an attack on this pernicious enemy as...as...

CAMILLE: As M. Bruyas knows about art. They are not convinced about the cause. You are, but they are not. You must try to understand, Gaston.

GASTON: I will not tolerate this, Camille. Their professed reservations are an excuse which is used to conceal their stupidity in failing to recognize the dimensions of the crisis and take leadership in raising and committing funds to deal with it. My conclusions are unassailably documented and permit no disagreement.

MARC: What happened to your hand, Papa?

GASTON: There can be no doubt. I have proved it. It is the phylloxera.

CAMILLE: He experiments on our vines with anything that comes to mind.

GASTON: I know that you want me to rest, Camille.

CAMILLE: Petroleum. Lime. Cow urine. Copper sulfate. Boiling water. Yesterday he left a meeting in Montpellier in a rage, rushed to Saint-Sauveur, and burned his hand in boiling water. He refuses to see the doctor. Today, in more of a rage and in pain, which he will not admit, he attended another meeting in town...

GASTON: Where again nothing was accomplished.

CAMILLE: He promised that he would rest here for a few days, but now he says that he...You heard what he said.

FB: Let me see the hand, Papa. My medical studies may not have been useless. I failed the examination in dissection of cadavers. You are very much alive.

GASTON: You failed it twice.

CAMILLE: Let him, Gaston. At least take time enough for that. Remember how he cared for Monet when Monet was injured in the Fontainebleau forest. Remember his delightful painting of the makeshift hospital bed that he devised for Monet.

GASTON: (*He extends his hand to FB*) It is nothing. Much less painful today.

FB: (*He removes the bandage and examines the hand.*)

GASTON: (*He speaks while FB removes bandage and examines.*) I have tried to destroy the insects directly. That may not be the solution. If we know the way of things, the mechanism, the solution is there to be found. They enjoy living on our vines and eating them. If we make the vines hostile or inedible, we can accomplish as much as we would by destroying the pests after they lodge in the vines. Did you see any mail from America?

FB: No, Papa. The hand needs air. This evening and tomorrow, Mama, the juice of an aloe branch should be applied and permitted to dry. (*He reapplies the bandage.*)

CAMILLE: Are you listening, Gaston?

GASTON: The plague came from abroad. It would be fitting if the solution came from abroad.

MARC: Surely a French solution can be found. Montpellier has always been a leader in the study of botany and research in pharmacology.

GASTON: One way or another, we must destroy the invaders as soon as possible. The insect pests and the Prussians.

FB: When I took the dissection examination for the second time, I thought I did very well. The three examiners were out to flunk us. I don't know why. Three of us took the examination together. One of the other two was an intern. We all failed... The bandage is clean. I have reapplied it loosely to expose the lesions to air. Now I have practiced medicine after all. You see, Papa, I did not need those impossible certifications.

MARC: Mama and Papa do not intend to stay until tomorrow, Frédéric.

FB: I understand. I heard Papa say so.

GASTON: Of course, I said so. He is not hard of hearing, Marc. I shall examine the mail now. We shall all dine together, and then Mama and I shall leave. I would be obliged, Marc, if you would instruct Henriette to serve supper an hour and a half from now and tell Pierre to have the carriage and horses ready in two hours. (*He begins to exit.*)

MARC: Papa, wait, please. Frédéric has something...

FB: Has something to tell you. And Mama.

GASTON: I'm in a hurry. It can wait until supper.

CAMILLE: Which you will hurry through—as the boys know. You haven't seen them for weeks. I want to hear Frédéric now. There is something he wants to tell BOTH of us. The boys are very serious. I am not sure that I want to hear. If I must, I shall hear him now. Please be still for a few minutes at least one time this summer.

GASTON: (*He retraces his steps.*) Yes, my dear. I shall. I am sorry that the summer has been so stressful. The phylloxera and the war. What is it, Frédéric? You're not thinking of marrying one of those young Parisian coquettes again? It's not too late to find a good wife around here.

FB: Like Suzanne?

MARC: Difficult, but not impossible...Come to the point, Frédéric.

GASTON: There will always be girls, from good families, who wouldn't think twice about being the wife of the first son of a prominent family who is also a handsome artist. It's time to have children. Your mother and I were married seven years

and had two children by the time I was your age. A man should marry and have an heir.

FB: You do so much for me; I disappoint you so often. I try to please you, Papa. There are other things a man can do to be a man. I hope that you will be pleased. I have...

CAMILLE: (*She turns her back to FB*) I don't want to hear. I don't want to hear.

FB: Please, Mama.

MARC: You must listen to him, Mama.

CAMILLE: (*She turns and faces GASTON.*) HE IS JOINING THE ARMY! This is your work, Gaston. A Languedocien from a leading family must set an example. Do his manly duty. Put on a plumed helmet and tight trousers and wave a sabre or a rifle and do whatever men do in the emperor's glorious legions to make themselves feel like men.

MARC: It is worse than that, Mama. He intends to join the zouaves.

FB: The third zouave regiment is forming in Montpellier...

CAMILLE: The zouaves! They are shock troops! My cousin—Commander Lejosne—once told me that. He has filled your head with dreams of military glory and honor and duty!

FB: He had nothing to do with my decision. He never talks to me about the army.

PORTRAIT OF ALPHONSE TISSIÉ: (If possible, a very large copy appears.)

CAMILLE: He did if you think that he is typical of military men. If not him, then Alfonse Tissié! You painted him last summer in full dress cuirassier uniform. His ridiculous plumed helmet and huge, absurd epaulettes. He has filled your head with fantasies about military glory.

FB: You are being absurd, Mama. He was a subject, not an inspiration. I could never be influenced by him.

CAMILLE: I do not believe you. The painting is replete with admiration.

MARC: You must be calm, Mama. He painted him to please Suzanne's parents because he is her brother. He is merely a reservist. Frédéric thinks he is an ass. I share this opinion. Look carefully at the painting. You will see.

PORTRAIT OF ALPHONSE TISSIÉ: (It ceases to appear.)

FB: The zouaves, Mama. Only the zouaves permit a recruit to keep his beard. Now smile and stop looking so distressed. You will be thrilled when you see me in uniform.

CAMILLE: I am very distressed. Do not go through with this.

GASTON: The idea is commendable, Frédéric. Commendable. The Prussians will be annihilated in no time, Camille, if our exceptional young men set a good example. Act with such patriotism. Even those who despise the emperor. How did you arrange for an officer's commission so quickly without my help? Is it military procurement? The adjutant general's office? Did you see the mayor? Bruyas? My brother?

FB: I have not seen them, Papa. I have not asked anybody for anything.

MARC: He intends to enlist as a private.

CAMILLE: No!

GASTON: Isn't that being a little...a little improvident? Of course, the war will be short, Camille.

CAMILLE: And, of course, you will receive all the support and money you need and discover how to eradicate the phylloxera tomorrow.

GASTON: The Emperor is moving north to envelop the Prussians. Their supply lines are overextended. They will sue for peace in a few days. Everybody says so.

MARC: Everybody. All the old men and fat women at the spa.

GASTON: Nevertheless, the risk of possible...of possible injury should be minimized...All this is immaterial. I have already bought you a man in case of conscription.

FB: I intend to be a real soldier. I intend to be authentic. I have not been authentic for a long time.

GASTON: I cannot be hearing correctly. My oldest son, whom I support and encourage in endeavors of which I do not always approve, refuses to minimize the risk of possible...misfortune.

CAMILLE: Do not do this to me, Frédéric.

GASTON: The risks are remote, Camille, but, Frédéric, let us reason together for a moment.

MARC: He has no interest in the way of things, the mechanism, Papa. He does not subscribe to a rational world.

CAMILLE: The Prussians cannot be dislodged from France by misguided, glory seeking, romantic young men and incompe-

tent generals whose knowledge of warfare comes from fighting outnumbered Africans without modern equipment. I am afraid for our country. Everything is going wrong. Please, Frédéric. Wait for your number to be drawn in the conscription lottery. Your father has hired a man for you and a man for Marc. The best families do that. It is not a disgrace.

FB: Honor and glory have nothing to do with my decision... Marc will not leave you. He will let himself be replaced. We have agreed.

CAMILLE: I am thinking about you now, not Marc. I am your mother. I have only two children. If you will not do anything to avoid induction or to keep yourself out of danger, you must tell me why.

FB: Joining the zouaves is simply what I now must do. It is the project that I must now undertake.

CAMILLE: You are not acting in one of your dramas now or playing charades. I see only a part played by an actor, not the actor himself. I see the surface of the canvas, not the heart of the artist. Where are you, Frédéric?

FB: I am here on the surface, Mama. It is all I know or care about. You see everything.

CAMILLE: I will not be put off. I have thought about this moment, feared it. When you were little and sat on the edge of your window reading with your long legs hanging out, I could protect you by having your father install the iron bars. I can't protect you from this risk, but I am entitled to know why you are taking it. (*She faces GASTON.*) I have let men propel me all my life. All my life I have been directed by them. I submitted and participated and followed and accepted willingly. I have been the canvas, not the artist. (*She faces FB.*) Until this moment. If you are going to abandon your magnificent talent, I

must know why. I must face what I have done to cause such a terrible thing to happen. If I must face losing you, I must have your truth. A man who is a son owes that truth to a woman who is his mother. Who has loved him intelligently and extravagantly. I do not know what portrait you composed for Marc. Now you must reveal to me.

GASTON: Camille, the boy is troubled. Last year, the discouragement. The headaches...

FB: I am better now. My mind is clear.

CAMILLE: You are stubborn like your father.

GASTON: Then, you have made a brave and manly decision. We should be proud of him, Camille. We, too, must be brave.

CAMILLE: SILENCE, Gaston. For once and at long last, silence. I insist on something as a woman. As a mother. As a wife. I want something that I can carry with me as long as I live. I want the truth of my son. He knows what I want. An artist as fine as Frédéric knows the truth. Each time his brush touches the surface he paints the truth of that moment. So now, my most beautiful, darling artist, you will paint for me ...You look surprised, Frédéric, Marc, Gaston. "Dearest Mama", "my darling Camille". Always nervous when she sings before an audience. She knows what it is to be an artist. She knows the form of truth. I want the truth of the brush touching the surface.

FB: Dear, Mama. The truth is what you see in the two dimensions of surface. In the form and color and the bare, untouched parts of the canvas which serve the composition. Peace for me, if not happiness, is on the surface. I am not in another dimension which you cannot see. My brush embraces the surface to let truth be seen as I embrace you, Mama.

CAMILLE: I know that there is agony in your truth.

FB: The agony is the absence of truth after the brush meets the surface, when my hand withdraws it, and I see the result. I feel nothing. I am nothing. I am an imposter impersonating an artist. I think constantly about the process and meaning of doing art. I no longer feel authentic. I am a fraud. Derivative, secondary, unnecessary, parasitic.

CAMILLE: I want to be alone with him, Gaston, Marc. Please leave the terrace.

GASTON: Camille, I know how you feel. I, too...

CAMILLE: LEAVE US!

MARC: Mama.

GASTON: Come, Marc.

GASTON and MARC: (*They exit.*)

FB and CAMILLE: (*They are silent for several seconds.*)

CAMILLE: Unnecessary. Parasitic. Beyond the words, Frédéric. You must take me to the truth beyond the words. The phylloxera is a parasite. It destroys. Art does not destroy.

FB: People cannot eat it. It does not cure illness or provide shelter from wind, rain, and cold. It does not have an indispensable purpose. If all the artists were gone and all their work were gone, people would continue to live and engage in commerce and other intercourse. I no longer feel committed to what I do nor believe that it is important.

CAMILLE: When you came home for the summers during your first years in Paris and told us about your friends and were

filled with excitement, you did not care about utility. You said that art may have purpose for people who can give themselves to it and experience its communication. Whether or not people do that was not your concern. Your friends don't care about utility.

FB: They are different. They are pure. They lay aside everything and simply paint. Untroubled by things which trouble me. Papa and Marc produce food and milk for a great city and fight to save the vineyards of the South. All of which I know little about because they give me freedom to live outside the primary world and presume to be an artist. Suddenly there are foreign invaders. With a little training I can be useful in labor which is needed. There is a primary world, and there is a world of art. Marc is primary. I am not...Art should derive from morality. Others may not think so, but that is what I think. It follows that a true artist should be willing to deny himself his art if needs of the primary world require this. Sacrifice is the ultimate morality.

CAMILLE: I do not believe you. Your friends will avoid conscription if they can. For some reason you want to show them that you are different, to emphasize a difference, to distinguish and distance yourself from them. They are the cause of this...oeuvre which seems to enthrall you.

FB: The composition of the oeuvre has nothing to do with them. Only with me.

CAMILLE: The theme of the composition is destruction and death.

FB: I will not be a fraud again. I will not be half a soldier or a safe soldier. I want to be pure again. The way I felt when I first knew that I wanted to paint pictures instead of collecting them like Bruyas and Louis Bazille. The way I felt when I painted shoulder to shoulder with Monet and Renoir. In Normandie

Monet said that he wanted to paint everything. He said that his head was bursting with light. I thought that I could forget the South and look at light as fast and well as he did and paint like him.

CAMILLE: Things only begin once.

FB: The truth is that I have lost the truth. I want it, Mama. I want it. I want to be renewed.

CAMILLE: The truth is that you want something which I and this family cannot give you. You abandon us for something else. Not needing our love, you abandon us for something else, something which you prefer. We are not enough.

FB: I do not want to hurt you, Mama.

CAMILLE: You destroy me, Frédéric. You create a self by serving a cardboard emperor and fighting a Prussian from hell. You indulge in a shadowy, dark conception of yourself and destroy me.

FB: The young men are needed. To do this work for everybody. To pay, on behalf of everybody, for the greed and stupidity of the rulers. It is always so. Why not a man like me? Who has indulged himself in living a good life, in doing what he loves, and in suffering only for what he loves—a very doubtful form of suffering. Somebody who—as Papa says—does not have enough sacred fire, who retreats from difficulties instead of overcoming them with patience and energy.

CAMILLE: You are not simply choosing to perform a duty. You WANT to do this as much as you have ever wanted to do anything. That is what I cannot accept. That is what injures me.

FB: I am different from other people and other artists, Mama. I think aesthetically all the time. Making art is what I know and

care about most. If I were skilled in other disciplines, other ways of being, I might apply them to my life. I cannot. I don't know how. I don't know what a man from another discipline might decide now. Such a man would not be me. I, like you, am unique. If I submit to you, your love will corrupt the life that you want to protect.

CAMILLE: Is that the truth of you?

FB: I tried to explain to Marc, Mama. I am outside reason and knowing and not knowing. An artist spends his time choosing ONE of an almost infinite number of possibilities. How and where he will touch the surface with his brush. The paints he will select. These are not matters of knowledge. He is not in a knowing business. He knows that he does not know. He knows less than other people. He asks questions like an innocent child and finds amazement in learning things that everybody else seems to know—in discovering the mystery and majesty of the world around him. Knowing that he does not know may be the highest knowledge and truth.

CAMILLE: I have lost you, Frédéric. You have gone to a place where absurdity is reason and death is life. Where I cannot speak the language. I understand that much because we are both artists. Men move in straight lines, their jaws tight with purpose, their eyes fixed straight ahead. Women go consistently from one mood to another, one composition to another. They perceive more broadly, plough a wider furrow than men. I understand that much because mothers are artists.

FB: They are, Mama. Great artists. Artists cannot be good if they have only male in them. They must also be feminine. You and I conceive in the same way. In metaphor more often than simile. The surface should not be like something else. It should be what it is.

CAMILLE: We create that which could not exist without us, which, after it is created, is independent of us, something separate and apart. I suppose that the end of creating, like the beginning, can only happen once.

FB: A moment of separation comes after the last stroke of the brush or the palette knife. It is a terrible moment that I must choose—to do no more to perfect my creation. I am never certain that the last stroke should be the last stroke and, like all the others, if it is the best stroke that could be made, the right stroke. I always hope that the strokes which came before it have been good enough and true enough. But the moment comes.

CAMILLE: My beautiful artist from another world.

FB: It must be an honest stroke with truth in it.

CAMILLE: (*She walks slowly toward the easel and looks at **On The Banks of the Lez.***) It is a masterpiece. Only you could paint it. Have you given it the last stroke? Have you said, good-bye?

FB: (*He walks to the easel, sits, puts palette in left hand, brush in right, hunches forward, lifts brush, studies painting. He is again in the position in which Renoir painted him painting **The Heron.** He puts down palette and brush, rises, steps back from painting, studies it again, sits again, and resumes the pose of the Renoir portrait.*) It is complete. It needs nothing more.

Scene 2

The Seventh Day

Dimly lit courtyard, Bazille mansion, 11 Grand'Rue, Montpellier, 9:00 P.M., Tuesday, December 13, 1870. Weather is chilly. A block for mounting horses is present. A large cart with a casket covered over is at side or rear of the stage.

GASTON: *(He is tired, defeated. He stares toward the cart, sits.)*

CAMILLE: *(She enters.)* I am so relieved that you are here, Gaston. Are you cold? I can bring you a coat.

GASTON And CAMILLE: *(He rises. They approach each other but do not touch.)*

GASTON: I am not cold. In the north I was cold. The north was a cold place. Dampness, rain, snow. Clouds which cover the sun. *(He embraces her, separates.)* Dearest Camille. I want to take him to Méric. He should be there again before he leaves us. He should be near Castelnau again.

CAMILLE: Yes. He should be on the terrace where he painted Castelnau with such affection. Where is he?

GASTON: In his cart over there. *(He indicates.)* But please do not go to him now. You should not view him now.

CAMILLE: I must go to him. *(She steps in the direction indicated by GASTON.)*

GASTON: *(He restrains her.)* No, Camille. I forbid it. You must not.

CAMILLE: You forbid!

GASTON: You must not see him. I will describe him. His scarlet pantaloons are hardly stained. His tunic is rent but whole and fully buttoned. His képi...He has a borrowed képi. It is slightly large for him. His face...The cold weather in the north, the cool weather here has been fortunate.

CAMILLE: I want my son. Not a description.

GASTON: You will see him tomorrow. After M. Bertrand has tended to him. He will be ready for you tomorrow.

CAMILLE: I am grateful to you for bringing him home. I worried about you, Gaston. Now you must give me my son's agony. Let me have this much of him. Do not shield me from sorrow. I can face him and myself. You must live through this night as best you can. I must survive in my own fashion.

GASTON: Please, Camille! Do not look at him until tomorrow. In Montpellier. Stay close to me. I would be grateful. I am exhausted. I am reduced to nothing. I would be grateful.

CAMILLE: (*She gives up her desire to go the cart.*) Yes. You must be exhausted, my poor Gaston. Such a long, hard, cold journey.

GASTON: I suffer, Camille. Is Frédéric's return a punishment for me? What must I do? What can I do?

CAMILLE: I do not know. I see my failures. I face them alone.

GASTON: Failures were mine, not yours. I made decisions. You did not fail.

CAMILLE: How strange even now: you direct my grief and my atonement to protect me. You do the wrong thing for a good reason. Frédéric says that atonement is self-indulgence which

is not deserved. Which does not promote truth. My grief should go on and on. It should be a painting which fixes and perpetuates. Frédéric could paint it. None of his friends could. They paint reflected light and objects seen by near-sighted people without spectacles. They cannot paint the power of sunrise, the savage truth of sunset. To their credit they do not strive for more than they can reach. There aren't any painters who could paint my sorrow. Frédéric is the last of them. Among the new; the last of the old. I like the old better.

GASTON: Come inside with me, Camille. I am ready to go inside.

CAMILLE: I was weak. I let you decide. I let myself be your instrument. You wanted him: To be for us, for family, for two great families. Not for him. To continue the medical studies after he came to hate them. You: Disliked his artist friends. Made him feel small about accepting money. Seldom sent him enough. I had to fight you to support his artistic training, to send him enough money to avoid being starved out of it. You would have succeeded if you had not been afraid of what the Parisian relatives would think. You: Disapproved of his refusal to exhibit in Montpellier. Of his engagement to the Parisian woman. Were enraged when he rejected the marriage that we arranged with a Montpellier family. Tried to force the role of the first son in a great family on him. Obligations which were not natural for him. Except for loyalty and honor. Always honor. Made him doubt himself as a man. He could feel your disappointment and disapproval without your saying a word. You refused to let him live for himself or for art if he chose. He tried to please you. To show you that he had the sacred fire, that he could face difficulties and overcome them. You rationed your approval. I let this happen. I was submissive. Weak...

FAMILY REUNION: (If possible, a very large copy appears.)

CAMILLE: *Family Reunion* was truth. Eleven of us on the terrace at Méric. Sitting, standing. Elegantly dressed. Five men. Six women. Homely girls. Pretty girls. Handsome men. Separate. Together. Alone. Me looking plain and old, facing the viewer. You, declining to do so, stiff, distinguished, seated next to me on the green bench. Eleven separate, full length portraits. Each of us with ten different relationships; each responding differently to the act of posing. A theatre piece. M. Zola said that the painting was truth. Truth is elusive until it is captured in paint. On the surface. I let the truth escape. I could not seal it in.

GASTON: Do not torment yourself. Do not cause me more torment than I can bear.

CAMILLE: Forgive me, Gaston. You suffered so much. Walked so far. We should be close. Held together by the bonds he painted. We should not lacerate each other...December 6 was his 29th birthday. Here, alone, without you, I could think of nothing else.

FAMILY REUNION: (It ceases to appear.)

GASTON: You are cold, my dear. Go inside.

CAMILLE: I want to be near him. (*She takes a step toward the cart.*) You have tilted his cart so that he can see the window of his room. That was thoughtful of you...Tell me about him. Do not deny me that.

GASTON: He never complained about being a common soldier. The officers respected him. His fellow soldiers liked him. He was promoted to sergeant-major the day before the battle. He dined with Captain D'Armagnac and the other company officers that night. The captain was wounded in the battle and sent here. I met him on the train. He told me what Frédéric said at the dinner. He said, "I am sure that I won't be killed. I

have too many things to do in my life." The next day during the battle...

CAMILLE: He was happy, then. He was complete.

GASTON: Yes. The life in him was what everybody remembers.

CAMILLE: How did you find him?

GASTON: I was permitted to cross the Prussian lines with a zouave. The Prussian commander was very courteous. He knew about my work on the phylloxera...The snow covered everything. After several days we found Frédéric—buried in a ditch for sergeants. Near a stream. A few meters west of the old walls of Beaune-La-Rolande and the town watering place. Not far from the cemetery. The sun came out. The snow reflected the light. The hills, the forest...The Mazures is a gentle stream. Like the Lez. A landscape as beautiful as the name of the place.

CAMILLE: Beaune-La-Rolande. The sound is beautiful. One of his friends painted snow. Monet. Snow is for northern painters.

GASTON: Death was in the air.

CAMILLE: Monet could not paint death.

GASTON: A priest from Aix-En-Provence helped me find a cart and a miserable excuse for a horse. I led the horse and cart through the snow. On icy roads. Silently. To the train at Issoudun.

CAMILLE: My poor Gaston.

GASTON: I am broken, Camille. I care about nothing.

MARC: (*He enters.*) M. Bruyas is here. Inside by the fire. He would like to see you. Please come in where it is warm.

GASTON: What does he want? Were you expecting him?

CAMILLE: No. Ask him to come out here, Marc. We shall stay here with Frédéric. Please tell Henriette to warm some broth for your father.

MARC: Mama!...Yes, Mama. (*He exits.*)

CAMILLE: Bruyas. Only he would come at such a time. The whole town knew of your approach. I hope that nobody else will come tonight. I am not ready.

BRUYAS: (*He enters.*) My dear Camille, Gaston. Please accept the expression of my profound...

CAMILLE: We understand, Alfred. It is unnecessary to say anything. I am sorry that I have nothing prepared to offer you.

BRUYAS: Of course, dear Camille. There will be time. I was asked to come as soon as we learned of Gaston's arrival. It occurred to us that there will be great interest in Frédéric in Languedoc and beyond. There is a great surge of regional pride and interest in his achievements. In his patriotism and courage. Our innkeepers and merchants would benefit greatly from such interest. In view of your position and service to the city, Gaston, it is felt that you, of course, would not hesitate to promote the pecuniary benefits of an increase in the number of visitors to Montpellier when the war is over.

GASTON: Of course.

BRUYAS: I have been asked to inquire on behalf of the city about paintings which might be available. We heard that collectors from the North and Lyon and Marseille are interested

in acquiring. His work should be in Montpellier where he was inspired and prepared. I, myself, can modestly claim some credit for his accomplishments. No doubt you have fond memories of the privilege he enjoyed as a child of crossing the street from your mansion to mine where he viewed my collection innumerable times. Especially paintings by Delacroix and Courbet which he studied endlessly. Having donated my collection to the city, I no longer collect for myself. Otherwise, I would bid for myself with great enthusiasm. His last painting. The landscape which I saw in August, *On The Banks Of The Lez*? Is it available?

CAMILLE: That is not his last painting. His last painting is untitled. He did not paint it. He conceived it. It is not available.

BRUYAS: Ah. You have studies and sketches of another work which I did not see. These too would be of great interest and value. May I be the first to see them? With a view, of course, toward acquisition.

CAMILLE: There is no paint or line on canvas, paper, or wood. Only words on paper.

BRUYAS: Words on paper? My dear Camille, I do not understand.

GASTON: His last letter. She read it many times. It describes something that he saw on the march to battle.

CAMILLE: A battalion of soldiers marches silently, in good order. Northwest from Quiers-Sur-Bézonde. To a battle which will consume them, beyond a barren, ominous horizon. They march across a cold, sunless landscape. A woodpecker flits about in front of the column. It can't decide which side of the column to fly off from. A soldier in the foreground is taller than the others. A woman watches the column pass by. She is crying. She says nothing. The soldier looks at her and is moved.

He marches on. For the first time there is snow in Frédéric's work. And sadness. And death. His browns serve him well. Delacroix could never have undertaken such a painting. Nor Courbet; nor Cabanel, your portraitist.

BRUYAS: Yes, of course, Camille. I was referring to the landscape...

CAMILLE: The landscape in which you showed no interest last August. Just as you showed no interest in other masterpieces year after year.

BRUYAS: He refused to exhibit and sell here. He was contemptuous of local taste and preference. "I put no stock in the appreciation of my fellow citizens." Those were his words; they were reported to us. He offended local dealers and collectors. Even Gaston's brother Louis. You yourselves could not have been comfortable with his attitude. There were pressures on me...

CAMILLE: From academicians in our region. You could have bought...The painting was shipped to his studio in Paris at the end of August along with other work completed here last summer before he enlisted.

BRUYAS: Let us hope that it survives the siege. Paris is a desolate place. The Louvre is closed. There is no food ...Because of Frédéric, there will be increased interest in the work of his friends. The large painting by the young fellow who always needed money? Whose three smaller canvases I declined to purchase six or seven years ago when Frédéric presented them for my consideration. The large painting which I saw several years ago.

CAMILLE: *The Women In The Garden*, which you refused to buy. Because it was much too different for you and suggested that the artist would not care to paint your portrait in the

manner which you require. Because he does not subscribe to realism as bombastically preached by your M. Courbet.

GASTON: Camille!

BRUYAS: I may have been hasty. One needs time. It was so different. The young man had to dig a trench and lower the painting into it in order to paint in plein air. Courbet told me this was absurd. He was shocked that work was not done in a studio where a large canvas could receive the attention necessary to achieve verisimilitude. He told me that even M. Manet ridiculed the painting when he saw it in the window of the shop where Frédéric exposed it for sale. Realism can only be realized through diligence in the studio. Courbet may have been hasty in his assessment. If I could view it again, I am sure that I might reconsider my...

CAMILLE: Not for sale. Gaston has discretion. Not for sale. Not the work of Frédéric. Not the work of his friend. Is that right, Gaston?

GASTON: I regret, Alfred, that money is still owed to Monet. Frédéric was to pay 50 francs a month. The war interrupted the payments. We must settle the balance. Perhaps at a later time...

CAMILLE: There will be no later time. You are blind, Alfred. You did not see that art does not end with the coterie of painters who paint your face. Your Cabanel, Courbet, and Auguste Glaize. That art could go beyond Delacroix and even Courbet. That art is open because its nature is to open and enlarge.

BRUYAS: I think that I have come at a bad hour. You must forgive me. I shall see you at the cemetery on Thursday. A large crowd will assemble near the gate, on the Boulevard Rabelais. Rabelais. Another great son of Montpellier.

GASTON: Marc will show you out. Thank you for coming, Alfred.

BRUYAS: Camille. Gaston. (He exits.)

CAMILLE: Edmond Maître will send us the paintings in Paris at the Rue Des Beaux Arts. We will keep them.

GASTON: We will keep them...Everything else is gone. Taken away on a ridge at Beaune-La-Rolande. In the snow. I am humbled for my arrogance and pride. Toward Frédéric, toward you, toward Marc who tries so hard to please me with so little in return. Toward people who want to defeat the plague no less than I. Everything is lost. France. Her wines. No man should be so sure that he is right.

CAMILLE: I failed to show you the world as you might have seen it. I have not been a good artist.

GASTON: My strength is gone. I cannot fight any more. I have nothing left. I am old and beaten. I am lost and tired. I cannot see. All the years that Frédéric painted—I did not know how to see. How to look at a painting.

CAMILLE: I saw poorly for a long time. And looked too quickly.

GASTON: Can you teach me to see, Camille?

CAMILLE: You cannot be taught. You see in the fullness of time when you want to see or are given the full power of sight. You saw intelligence, energy, struggle. Not serenity. Gentleness. Love. You wanted force and motion. You never completely accepted him. You worried that he might be effeminate. You did not see the ultimate virility, the convergence of all things and feelings where there is love and truth.

GASTON: I have no strength for seeing.

CAMILLE: You must try. You have more to give. You must try. It is not too late for us. Frédéric has shown us. We created him. He has shown us.

GASTON: I will try. I will try.

CAMILLE: We will try together.

GASTON: You have always seen me. I am ashamed of what I exposed to you. Can you forgive me?

CAMILLE: I will be here for you, Gaston.

GASTON: I begin to see you. As you see. As an artist sees. I begin to see the great creation that you are. I have never seen you before.

CAMILLE and GASTON: (*They face each other.*)

MARC: (*He enters.*) M. Bruyas wants us to know that it will not be necessary to go to the bother of obtaining a death certificate. He used his considerable influence at the mayor's office to obtain permission to proceed without one...Come inside, Mama, Papa. There is mail for you, Papa, from the agricultural society. From the mayor. From M. de Planchon. A letter from America.

GASTON: I am not interested in them. Not interested in a letter from America.

CAMILLE: Go in, Gaston. You must try.

GASTON: I am not interested, Camille. I will stay here with you and Frédéric.

MARC: The American vines, Papa. Perhaps they resist infestation. The letter may contain important information.

GASTON: Look at it for me, Marc. We will come in soon.

MARC: Soon then, Papa. The mail is on your desk.

CAMILLE: (*She takes the hand that had been bandaged in Scene 1 and studies it for a moment.*) At the place with the beautiful name, did you learn anything about what happened?

GASTON: General Bonne's right wing attacked Montargis; the left attacked Pithiviers. The zouaves in the center attacked Beaune-La-Rolande. About a hundred meters south of the cemetery, some women and children were in a barn between the lines. They came out and ran toward the forest. Frédéric ordered his men to stop firing. The enemy fire continued. He stood up. Called to the Prussians to hold their fire. Pointed to the running civilians. His red pantaloons and great height gave the enemy a perfect target.

CAMILLE: Narrative and landscape. The last stroke of the brush. Before the moment of separation. No other stroke was acceptable. Nothing else would have been...truth. Nobody else could paint it.

GASTON: Delacroix might have been able to do it, but he is dead.

CAMILLE: No. Not him. Not disorder and exaggerated color. This is not a romantic composition. Possibly Courbet if he could face what is truly real.

MARC: M. Manet, perhaps. He painted the naval battle between the Alabama and the Kearsarge. He painted the execu-

tion of Maximillian. He does not let the narrative entirely dominate the composition.

GASTON: There was a lull in the fighting. Some zouaves carried him to the stream and laid him down near a juniper bush. One of them told me that he was serene. Asked them to give us his ring. It was never given to me. Perhaps it was stolen. Or the man he gave it to, killed. I cut some juniper branches for you. They are with him in his cart.

CAMILLE: At the moment of separation—he was happy, Gaston. He was authentic. He had what he wanted.

MARC: He was blessed. There could be no blessing until all was given. Painting was all, what he loved most. Giving all was his essence.

GASTON: You have been a great comfort, Marc. I wish that I could find the words. I love you, Marc. No less than Frédéric. I have always loved you.

MARC: I know, Papa...Come in now, Mama, Papa.

GASTON: I engaged a notaire at Beaune-La-Rolande. Maître Durand. To make a contract of sale. For the land where Frédéric died. He knows the owners.

CAMILLE: The land where Frédéric died.

GASTON: I shall buy it.

CAMILLE: What will you accomplish? What can you change?

GASTON: Buying the land is something that I can do. I want to own that land. As long as I live, I want to own it.

CAMILLE: Then, buy it, Gaston.

MARC: Come inside. I must go home. The children are still ill. But I will not leave until you are inside.

GASTON: Mama and I must take him to Méric. Pierre and Emile can help us. You must go home to Suzanne and the children.

MARC: It is too late to take him to Méric. He would understand. You have done enough, Papa, and we are all very tired. We will surrender him at the Protestant cemetery the day after tomorrow. You cannot hold him any longer. He was never really yours. He was on loan from somewhere. Now he is redeemed. At the time of his essence. Come inside now. It is cold here.

CAMILLE: Go inside, Gaston. I want to be with him for a little while. I will be all right.

GASTON: Come in soon, Camille. I want to be near you.

CAMILLE: I will, Gaston.

GASTON and MARC: (*They exit slowly, Marc helping GASTON.*)

CAMILLE: (*She looks toward the cart for a few seconds.*) It is complete. It needs nothing more.

Scene 3

Southern Light

Terrace at Méric, late afternoon, August, 1876. Furniture of the type seen in *Family Reunion*. Gaston Bazille is seated reading.

MARC: (*He enters carrying Frédéric's easel and an unframed painting covered over. It is 41 by 29 inches. He puts it down, leans it against the easel, and goes to his father.*) Papa.

GASTON: Welcome back, Marc. (*He rises.*)

MARC: (*He embraces his father, kisses each cheek.*)

GASTON: What is happening in Paris?

MARC: Your gazette can give you more news than I. I spent most of the time visiting boutiques with Suzanne and studios of artists. Let me see...There is a high opinion of you in Paris. Your work on the phylloxera crisis, grafting the American vines, saving the French wine industry...Of the new painters, Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley—more people are interested in them. Manet, of course, is foremost. He had strong feelings about the portrait.

GASTON: He should have offered it five years ago.

MARC: He and his family knew Frédéric well.

GASTON: Nobody knew him...Is that the portrait?

MARC: Yes, Papa. Perhaps you and Mama would like to view it for the first time together. Shall I bring her? Where is she?

GASTON: She is in her room. She will greet you at dinner. She wishes to be alone. This event is painful for her. For us.

MARC: After six years, I had hoped...

CAMILLE: (*She enters. MARC and GASTON do not see her.*)

GASTON: We will view the painting in good time.

CAMILLE: This is a good time and place. I am prepared.

MARC: I embrace you, Mama. (*He does so and kisses her.*)
This need not be a painful moment. Frédéric is here. In a form that will continue after we are gone. M. Manet says that Frédéric...

GASTON: Enough, Marc. The business is done, and I thank you for attending to it. You brought M. Manet a painting of over 52, 000 square centimeters in exchange for one which is just over 7, 500. Again a Bazille is exploited by an ungrateful modern painter.

MARC: Papa, there is no need to be bitter.

GASTON: They took advantage of him. They could have helped him. They caused his distress. They knew that he was distressed. They could have helped him.

CAMILLE: They were all so busy, so much on the surface of the canvas, on the surface of life in the open air. Involved in struggle to survive. His distress did not show on the surface. He appeared contained, contented, and gentle. It was difficult to know that he was troubled.

GASTON: They were ruthless. All they cared about was art. Nothing else. Not family. Not church. Country. Humanity. It is not right. They survived. He perished.

CAMILLE: Single-minded, less committed men are better equipped to endure.

GASTON: Frédéric enlisted within a month of the outbreak of war. He cared about more than art and artists. About more than himself.

CAMILLE: No, Gaston. The war was a pretext which arrived when he needed it. What he did was personal. The war let him affirm something private.

GASTON: A portrait by Renoir. Which Manet owns and exhibits in the second impressionist show in April at the Rue Le Peletier. Then promptly exchanges for an early Monet. The whole gang is involved. Why didn't Manet ask for something by Frédéric?

CAMILLE: Oh, Gaston! The idea of parting with anything by Frédéric instead of a large Monet that we never wanted and have no reason to keep!

MARC: M. Manet was very generous, Papa. Nobody wanted *The Women In The Garden*. Frédéric bought it for the 2, 500 francs to keep Monet and Camille from starving...Monet HAD to accept the balance.

CAMILLE: Manet could have kept the Renoir. He did not. I commend him. He makes a splendid statement about his feelings for Frédéric. The painting belongs in the family.

MARC: I saw Monet and Renoir. They ask you...

GASTON: (*Interrupting.*) He did so much for them. They never came to visit him during his summers here.

MARC: That is foolish, Papa. They were too poor to travel this far. Only Maître could afford to leave his mistress and come, and he did. Frédéric was happy to be away from Monet and Renoir when he came home. They were too intense for him.

GASTON: That last summer—he needed them. They should have come.

MARC: He consulted no one. When he wrote to Maître, a reply came back immediately. You saw the letter. "YOU ARE CRAZY. ULTRA-CRAZY. WHY DIDN'T YOU TALK TO A FRIEND? YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO ENLIST". And Renoir added his note: "SHIT, THREE TIMES. ULTRA-DUMB." The man of few words ...Monet and Renoir ask you to...

GASTON: (Interrupting.) I know. *To believe in the expression of our very sincere and devoted sentiments.* Our language is an artist. It makes something out of nothing...They produce art as prodigiously as our cows produce milk. Frédéric is forgotten.

CAMILLE: The empty space in the ranks of these artists, the space that should belong to Frédéric—That is something we must live with... (*She looks toward Castelnau.*) Look at the reflection of the sun on the buildings of Castelnau. Across the Lez. See it reflected by the river. That is southern light. Frédéric painted it from this terrace and along the Lez. It penetrates. It makes deep shadows. It is hard light, but many things grow well in it. He loved it.

MARC: The light in his work begins to appear in Cézanne.

CAMILLE: Light is different in the north. Frédéric was not northern. He was solid and fertile. He was Saint-Sauveur and all the great farms south of The Massif.

GASTON: (*After short pause.*) If he had entered into the marriage that we arranged or found somebody whom he loved...

CAMILLE: Somebody acceptable?

MARC: The weightless, diaphanous woman, barely visible, sitting at the end of the bench in the heavy shadows of *The Oleander*—She is not rejected. The absence of her full fleshly presence is regretted in sadness. He knew that he would never sit next to her. He painted himself into the other paintings of the terrace, *The Terrace At Méric*, *Family Reunion*. He did not put himself in *The Oleander*. He had no room for anything but art.

GASTON: I am not thinking of what I wanted. I am thinking of what he might have wanted. The excitement of courtship. A wedding night. The devotion of a particular woman. Defeat of loneliness. Great moments of peace. An heir.

CAMILLE: Heir production, like wine and milk production, is performed by lesser men. Our Lord did not produce an heir.

MARC: He took his long, ascetic body beyond disillusion and failure. Beyond knowing. Beyond time. To a snow covered ridge...Where he found perfection...He thought that God might have worked at least another day before He rested. That God might have done more! To lose Frédéric in a corrupt, foolish war! The soul of man is not well wrought. It might have been. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN. Frédéric knew that. WHY DID GOD REST WHEN HE DID?

GASTON: (*After a brief pause.*) Shall we view the painting? I am prepared. I have learned to see what I did for love and what I did for other reasons.

CAMILLE: He knew that you loved him, Gaston. I knew that you loved him.

GASTON: I do not judge myself by what other people see on the surface.

CAMILLE: You have brought truth to the surface where I can see it.

GASTON: Uncover it, Marc.

MARC: Yes, Papa. It is time. (*He mounts it on the easel and begins to do so.*)

CAMILLE: No! Stop. I can't.

MARC: (*He stops moving and looks at CAMILLE and GASTON.*)

GASTON: He has come home again because we are wise enough and strong enough to have him and accept our loss. Uncover it, Marc.

CAMILLE: (*She turns so that she cannot see the painting.*)

MARC: (*He uncovers the painting, steps back and views it.*)
Look, Mama. He sits before his easel and studies the canvas. He holds his palette with the left hand, a brush with the right.

RENOIR'S PORTRAIT OF BAZILLE: (*If possible, a very large copy appears.*)

GASTON: (*He looks at the portrait stolidly.*)

CAMILLE: (*She turns slowly and looks at the painting with growing, glowing pleasure.*) He wears the slippers which I insisted he wear in cold weather. His studios were always so cold.

MARC: Renoir paints him in the act of painting the dead heron which Sisley painted at the same time.

CAMILLE: (*She bends closer to the painting and points toward the painting of the painting of **The Heron**.*) The painting of the painting is an abstraction of the colors and composition of Frédéric's painting of the heron.

MARC: I can't understand why so many good artists paint dead birds.

CAMILLE: *Nature morte*—still life—, landscape, figure painting, the conventional, classic subjects of artists. They accept the challenge presented by all three. The bird was a beautiful subject. We do not know how they happened to choose it. A hunter may have killed it and given it to them. Killing the bird was a brutal act. Perhaps necessary or beyond judgment. But the heron which gracefully flew in an opulent palette of colors is fixed in a life and meaning which it did not have as a living creature.

RENOIR'S *PORTRAIT OF BAZILLE*: (*It ceases to appear.*)

GASTON: I know what should be done.

CAMILLE: Do you remember what Edmond Maître wrote to his father about Frédéric and about the Louvre when it re-opened? After the siege of Paris, the commune, and the barricades? Marc? Gaston?

GASTON: (*He thinks about what should be done and pays no attention to the question.*)

MARC: The copies of letters that Edmond's father sent us. To express the grief of the Maître family and comfort us. I remember, Mama. I could not forget.

CAMILLE: Tell me what you remember, Marc. I want to hear.

MARC: After Papa sent the telegram to Edmond about finding Frédéric and bringing him home, Edmond wrote that no one in this world will ever fill the empty place that Frédéric left. That half of himself died with Frédéric...The letter about the Louvre said...that when the Louvre re-opened after being closed for a year, nothing there had changed. The same figures. Unchanging in their frames. The true kingdom. The only reality. Everything else is illusion. The letter said something like that.

CAMILLE: Yes. Something like that.

GASTON: **We will see that he is remembered in a way that none of the other artists will be remembered.**

CAMILLE: *The painting is a tribute to Frédéric. Renoir suppresses his luxuriant palette in favor of the brown tones in Frédéric's work.*

GASTON: **We will honor him as a soldier. We will commission a soldier's monument for his grave in Montpellier.**

CAMILLE: *We are drawn to the tip of the brush which Frédéric holds. It touches the surface delicately.*

GASTON: **We will build a monument on the ground where he died. On the land that I bought. I already have given his copy of the Veronese to the church at Beaune-La-Rolande. *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*. The town will remember him.**

CAMILLE: *The painting of the heron is not finished.*

GASTON: **Our monuments will speak for him as a soldier.**

MARC: **I WAS WHAT YOU HOPED HE WOULD BE. HUSBAND, FATHER, UPHOLDER OF TRADITION. A MAN LIKE PAPA.**

CAMILLE: *He has more work to do...*

MARC: **HE WANTED ME TO BE SPARED. THERE WAS NO WAY TO STOP HIM.**

GASTON: **His work will stay here with US—at Méric.**

MARC: **NO, PAPA. IT MUST LEAVE HERE AND SPEAK FOR HIM AS AN ARTIST.**

CAMILLE: *Before the last stroke of the brush.*

(She studies the painting more closely.)

I must be alone with him and think about a frame and a place...to hang the portrait. I must be alone with him and think. May we be alone?

GASTON: *(He moves close to her, studies her for a moment, looks at the painting, looks at her again, takes her hand.)*

Dear Camille.

(He looks at her hand for a moment, releases it, walks to the edge of the stage, turns, looks back at her and the painting, exits.)

MARC: Mama. *(He kisses her and follows GASTON slowly.)*

CAMILLE: *(She is alone with the painting.)*