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THE RED AND THE BLACK
Stage adaptation of Stendhal's novel
Le Rouge et le Noir
by COLIN DUCKWORTH

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*N.B. MONOLOGUE MODE: When a character is speaking a monologue (either to him/herself or to the audience) the other character if on stage does **not** hear or react to it. This will be obvious to most directors, but not, in this writer's experience, to all!*

CHARACTERS

Julien Sorel. Nineteen, but looks younger. Angelic face. Beautiful eyes. Very ambitious and vain, but gauche, nervous, and quick to take offence. In Act 2 he matures and becomes quite noble in his bearing.

A plaster cast of his decapitated head will be needed.

Madame de Rênal. She is 30, very beautiful in a pallid sort of way, elegantly but modestly dressed. By nature conventional, naïve, not at all flirtatious, but underneath her innocence she is capable of passion. Her voice is soft and friendly.

Must have dark hair (black or dark brown) to contrast with Mathilde, especially if both are played by one actor.

Mathilde de la Mole. About 20. Headstrong, spoilt and bored. Feisty, energetic, unconventional. "Very blonde" (says Stendhal). Very much a "woman on top" sort of girl. Her voice is brittle and commanding.

FRENCH PRONUNCIATION GUIDE ON LAST PAGE.

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ACT ONE

SCENE 1

JULIEN (*rings bell weakly at the front door of the Rênals' grand house and waits nervously. He is dressed in white shirt, sleeves rolled up, with a cheap black jacket on his arm and carrying a small bag containing his belongings. His accent is rather rough, but grows more refined with each scene. During the wait he has time to muse.*)

What a grand house the Mayor lives in! And here I am, a mere peasant lad, ringing at the front door like a gentleman. (*Pause*) Perhaps I should have gone to the servants' door. No, I refuse to be classed as a servant! (*Pause. New bout of nervousness. Wipes away anxious tears.*) I can still make a run for it, or say I've come to the wrong house. (*Resolutely*) No, Napoleon wouldn't have run away. I must just remember I'm going to get my board and lodging, clothing and three hundred francs a year. To arms! (*He rings again, more forcefully.*)

Mme. de Rênal appears on the other side of the door, flustered and anxious.

MME. DE RENAL

Oh, my goodness, that must be him! Oh dear, I wish he'd just go way! Perhaps my husband will forget the whole idea of having a tutor. I expect he'll be a coarse, churlish, unkempt creature, he'll scold and whip my three darling boys, simply because he knows Latin.

She squares her shoulders resolutely and opens the door. She and Julien are standing very close to one another. This is one of the great moments in literature, and must be held. The mutual attraction must be obvious, but mingled with astonishment and shyness.

MME. DE RENAL (*gently*)

Yes? What did you want, young man?

Julien is too dumbstruck to hear the question.

MME. DE RENAL (*still gently*)
What is it you want, my dear?

JULIEN (*stuttering*)
I ...I've c...c...ome to be tutor to the children here, Madame.

MME. DE RENAL (*bursts out laughing. He looks affronted, and makes as if to flee. She is aware that he has taken offence.*)

I'm sorry, you must excuse me. I'm laughing at myself, not you. At my fears. You see, I had imagined the tutor would be a dirty, bad-tempered priest. Do come in.

They enter the house.

Do you really know Latin, Monsieur?

JULIEN (*shyly*)
Yes, Madame.

MME. DE RENAL
And you won't scold them too much?

JULIEN (*surprised*)
Me, scold them? Why should I?

MME. DE RENAL (*fearfully*)
Or beat them?

JULIEN
Beat them! Oh no, I've had quite enough of that from my father. Only yesterday he lay into me again.

MME. DE RENAL
Why?

JULIEN
For reading a book instead of sweeping out the sawmill.

MME. DE RENAL
Sawmill? Tell me, is your name Sorel? Does your father own the mill? *Julien nods.*) I've seen my husband talking to him. You certainly don't take after him.

JULIEN

I should hope not, Madame. He's an uncouth bully who's glad to be rid of me. In fact, I often think he's not my real father. There is a rumour that my mother – I hardly remember her – had an affair with a nobleman.

MME. DE RENAL (*whispers to herself.*)

Good heavens – adultery!

JULIEN

That would explain why he's loathed me ever since I was born. My brothers on the other hand both resemble him: they're beefy brutes. They laugh when my father beats me. That's why I was shocked when you thought I'd beat your children.

MME. DE RENAL

So you promise me to be kind to them, Monsieur?

JULIEN

Of course, Madame.

MME. DE RENAL

And you really know Latin?

JULIEN (*annoyed, angry*)

Do you think I'm lying?

MME. DE RENAL (*confused by his reaction*)

No, I meant...

JULIEN

Here, I'll show you. (*He pulls a small Bible from his pocket*) Choose any page you want and give me the first few words.

MME. DE RENAL

The Bible? *She turns to the beginning of Mark's Gospel and reads haltingly:*

Initium Evangelii Iesu Christi, Filii Dei.

JULIEN

That's easy, the beginning of Mark's Gospel:

Sicut scriptum est in Isaia propheta: As it has been written by the prophet

Isaiah...

MME. DE RENAL (*laughing*)
All right, I believe you!

JULIEN *continues as if in a trance.*
Ecce ego mitto Angelum meum ante faciem tuam, qui præparabit viam tuam ante te...

MME. DE RENAL (*hands blocking her ears*)
Stop! You're making my head spin!
Do you know the whole Bible off by heart?

JULIEN (*rather smugly; false modesty*)
Only the New Testament, Madame.

MME. DE RENAL
That's very impressive. My husband can only quote a few lines of poetry in Latin. which he does over and over to impress guests and the servants. Horace, I think it is.

JULIEN (*disappointingly*)
A profane poet. My calling forbids me to read any profane Latin authors. Only the Bible. I hope to go to the Seminary. Father Chélan has been giving me theology tuition for two years now.

MME. DE RENAL
You want to become a priest? A good-looking boy like you? But why?

JULIEN
I want to better myself. Did you never want to do that? No, I suppose not. In the Emperor's time... (*Puts on a pious mien, suddenly aware that he is giving too much away.*) I mean in the Lord's time... I want to be worthy of Him; you see, I have such a deep faith and spiritual calling.

MME. DE RENAL
I'm sure you do. But you began by saying 'In the emperor's time'. Did you mean Bonaparte?

JULIEN (*unsure of what to say at first*)
I suppose so... I don't approve of all Bonaparte did, of course. But... in his time there were two ways of advancement for obscure and penniless young men like me: the red and the black.

MME. DE RENAL
Red and black?

JULIEN

Either the army or the church. When Bonaparte rose to fame from nothing, military distinction was necessary and fashionable. Today, in 1826, only eleven years after the defeat at Waterloo, it's a different story; a priest at forty can draw a stipend of a hundred thousand francs, three times as much as a divisional commander under Napoleon.

But I should keep my mouth shut about such things now. Here I am, praising Napoleon in a house like this! I should know better -- I've learnt my lesson the hard way.

MME. DE RENAL

Oh? The hard way? Did someone punish you?

JULIEN

Yes, Madame. I did.

MME. DE RENAL

What? Tell me.

JULIEN (*gathering more confidence*)

If you insist, Madame. One evening ... when I was still besotted by romantic ideas, you understand... It was at Father Chélan's; at a dinner party of priests, of all things, the curé had introduced me as an educational prodigy. I was goaded into uttering fervent praise of the Emperor. A big mistake, that! The stupidity of doing that twelve years after the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, and with the Church as powerful as before the Revolution! (*afterthought*) Heaven be praised.

So what did I do? I punished myself by binding my right arm across my chest, pretending that I'd put the arm out of joint when shifting a log at the sawmill. I kept my arm for two months in that painful position. After this drastic penance, I forgave myself.

MME. DE RENAL (*admiringly*)

You must have a very strong will.

JULIEN

But it sometimes makes me do foolish things. So you must forgive me, Madame, if I make mistakes and say the wrong things. This is the first time I've been in such a house as this, and I'm very nervous...

MME. DE RENAL

There is no need to be.

JULIEN

... not only that, I've never spoken to educated people before, except my cousin the army surgeon and Father Chélan. You see, I left school when I was eleven because my father didn't think education was necessary to cut up wood. So I shall need your protection and sympathy at first. Do you understand, Madame?

MME. DE RENAL (*sympathetically*)

Yes, yes, of course I understand.

Julien suddenly seizes her hand and kisses it. She is momentarily nonplussed, then shocked. She withdraws her hand quickly.

MME. DE RENAL (*briskly*)

Oh, by the way, my husband has ordered that everyone in this house is to address you as Monsieur, and you will be conscious of the advantage of entering a well-ordered household; you will eat your meals with the family of course, not with the servants (*Julien looks very pleased*) and, Monsieur, you are now to see Monsieur de Rênal who will take you to the clothier to be fitted with a new frock coat. Wait here please.
She exits.

SCENE 2

JULIEN (*wiping his brow*)

Whew! Nearly gave myself away then. Luckily for me Mme. de Rênal is too naïve to make head or tail of what I was saying and doing. No more impulsive actions! I shan't ever take her hand again unless I've thought it through carefully.

(He dons a frock coat, and goes on speaking to the audience.)

Over the following weeks as a member of the Rênal household, in this house of wealth and piety, I learnt that hypocrisy, to be useful, must be hidden.

You mustn't take a dim view of my rapidly acquired ability to mouth the phrases people wanted to hear.

But it was sometimes hard. Last night, for example, at a ceremonial dinner at the Rênal house, M. Valenod – he is M. Rênal's rival and pretends to be a liberal thinker -- was holding forth about the virtue of honesty. Everyone listened to him with servile respect, even though they

all knew that Valenod is corrupt -- he has been making a fortune out of running the workhouse. I couldn't stand it -- I had to escape to the garden saying I had to check on what mischief the boys were up to. All that praise of honesty from *him!*

And yet, I knew that at the same time I had to become like Valenod if I wanted to earn 20,000 francs a year. I'd have to buy success with a dirty conscience, by oiling up to bishops and wealthy people like Rênal and Valenod.

That was the golden rule in the high society I had joined. But I wasn't taken in by my own duplicity -- unlike Tartuffe, I was ashamed of it. I despised my lies, and I lied even to Mme. de Rênal. For example, although the three Rênal boys adored their new tutor, I didn't like them at all.

SCENE 3

Mme. de Rênal enters. She looks younger and very happy. She is wearing a dress which leaves her arms and a lot more of her bosom exposed.

MME. DE RENAL (*gaily, almost affectionately*)

Good afternoon, Julien. What a wonderful day. Every day seems wonderful to me lately.

JULIEN

It shows, Madame. You change dresses two or three times a day, and you're looking radiant, if I may make so bold.

MME. DE RENAL (*pleased*)

Why, thank you Julien.

JULIEN (*half to himself, but loud enough for her to hear.*)

I wonder why?

MME. DE RENAL

Well for one thing, I don't have any more worries about my boys. You get on with them so well, and they seem very fond of you. You do like them, don't you?

JULIEN

Yes, of course. They are very... sweet. They take after their mother, of course.

She looks flattered.

Now, if you will excuse me, we have a lesson and I mustn't keep them waiting.

MME. DE RENAL

What a pity. I enjoy our conversations.

JULIEN

So do I.

With a slight bow and a smile, he departs.

SCENE 4

MME DE RÊNAL (*Parts of what she says are musing to herself, and parts are narration directly to audience.*)

(*Musing*) I think I'm making an impression on that young peasant.

(*Narration*) I soon forgave him his extreme ignorance, which was an additional charm, and the roughness of his manners, which I'm succeeding in improving. He is very different from the men I'm obliged to meet socially. They're so coarse and brutal and money-grubbing – so is my husband, unfortunately – but I derive much pleasure from Julien's sympathetic nature. He has a proud and noble spirit.

For example, the other day a poor dog

was run over by a cart, as it was crossing the street. The tragic sight made my husband utter his coarse laugh, whereas I saw Julien's beautiful eyes wince under his finely arched black eyebrows.

Yes, I'm starting to think that generosity, nobility of soul, humanity, exist only in Julien. (*A thought suddenly assails her. She puts hands to cheeks, as if blushing.*) Oh my goodness! I sound as if I'm falling in love with him! Could I be?

(*Pulling herself together*) No, of course not. I'm ten years older than him! That sort of thing only happens in Paris. (*Pause*) Or in novels. Which I have not read, of course!

No, I'm convinced that all I feel for Julien is the sympathy and admiration which those virtues arouse in well-bred natures like mine.

Nevertheless, the idea of ... falling in love ... has made me feel quite odd.

(*A bell rings.*)

Dinner time already! (*Directly to audience.*)

And I must finish my packing – tomorrow we go to our country house at Vergy for the summer. I'm so happy to be escaping from this stuffy loathsome town.

She exits.

SCENE 5

In the garden of the Rênals' château at Vergy. Evening. Madame de

Rênal is sitting on a bench. Julien enters from the house.

MME. DE RÊNAL

Are the boys settled, Julien?

JULIEN

Oh yes. The country air and all that chasing about all day have quite worn them out. You looked very happy chasing butterflies with them. You look years younger than when I first saw you.

MME. DE RÊNAL (*flattered but embarrassed*)

Let's see if I can remember the barbarous name you taught me for butterflies: *lep-id—opt-era*. There, you see, you're educating me as well as the boys. (*They laugh. Pause.*)

I love to see you playing games with them as well. You must be tired out.

JULIEN (*moves as if to retire*)

Yes, well, perhaps I should...

MME. DE RENAL

Come and sit here by me and talk to me. If you're not anxious to get back to your books.

Julien sits on the bench, not too close to her. Awkward pause.

JULIEN (*cunningly*)

What a shame M. de Rênal had to return to Verrières.

MME. DE RENAL (*without either enthusiasm or regret*)

Yes, isn't it? Some crisis at the town hall.

(*Pause. She rests her hands each side of her on the bench.*)

He wants to cut down all those walnut trees at the bottom of the orchard, you know.

JULIEN

Cut them down! But they're magnificent! Why on earth...?

MME. DE RENAL (*imitating her husband*)

Each one of those damned walnut trees costs me a fortune. Wheat won't grow in their shade. Hectares of harvest they cost me! What doesn't bring in money shouldn't be allowed to grow!

They laugh. Pause. Julien slides closer to Mme de Rênal.

JULIEN

Do you come here every year?

MME. DE RENAL

Yes, as soon as the first warm days of spring arrive. We all pack up, the staff as well. I don't think it's a holiday for them. Elise complains she's run off her feet.

JULIEN

Your pretty maid?

MME. DE RENAL

(With a touch of disappointment) You think she's pretty? M. de Rênal is trying to marry her off to you. She has recently inherited quite a lot of money. What do you think of that?

JULIEN *(very coldly)*

Elise is not my type, Madame.

Mme. de Rênal looks very pleased that Julien is not attracted to another woman.

Your château is very grand, even bigger than your house in town.

MME. DE RENAL

My husband chose it because it is old and it has four towers and a garden laid out like the one at the Tuileries, the Paris residence of the king. He likes to ape royalty. And it puts him one up on M. Valenod. Like your appointment as tutor.

JULIEN *(not paying attention; double take)*

I beg your pardon, what did you say?

MME. DE RENAL

Did you not realise? Neither did I. I have only recently learnt that acquiring the most admired and brilliant young man in town to teach his boys was intended to annoy Valenod. And accidentally it's the most sensible thing he's done for years.

JULIEN

Because I made Valenod envious?

MME. DE RENAL

Well... no, not only for that reason. For the sake of the boys. You are so good to them, and you're doing a marvellous job educating them.

JULIEN (*his voice betrays his emotion*)

Is there no other reason? You see, I have the impression that I mean nothing to you personally, because I'm not well born.

MME. DE RENAL

Oh no, that's not true, Julien.

A church clock begins to chime ten.

She involuntarily moves her arm closer to Julien, who seizes her hand.

She quickly removes it from his grasp.

JULIEN

Then prove it!

He takes her hand again. She attempts to remove it and fails, finally letting it remain in his even when he opens his hand. They look into each other's eyes as the clock finishes chiming ten. THE TIMING IS IMPORTANT.

Pause.

MME. DE RENAL (*unsteady voice*)_

I suppose I should go and help Elise to put out the lights and lock up. Although I'd rather stay here, with you.

JULIEN (*strong, matter-of-fact voice*)

And I must check on the boys.

She gives him her hand to help her up. He kisses it. She smiles happily.

Puts her hand caressingly on his cheek. They do not kiss!

Good night, Madame.

MME. DE RENAL

Good night, Julien.

She goes indoors.

SCENE 6

Julien looks triumphant.

JULIEN *to audience.*

Well, that went pretty well according to plan -- the plan that I'd been nurturing all day: to make the lady willingly let her hand stay in mine, this very evening. Napoleon would have been proud of my strategy. I finally overcame my nervousness and emotion. Nevertheless, my voice

nearly gave me away as a quarter to ten arrived and I still hadn't made a move. My cowardice outraged me, so I said to myself, 'At the precise moment when ten o'clock strikes, I shall carry out what I have been promising myself all day long, or I shall go up to my room and blow my brains out.' I just made it!

It wasn't love that motivated me, it was *duty*. It was a heroic duty I'd set myself. It didn't give me much pleasure. In fact, none at all -- because it was a duty. And because I was afraid of ridicule and humiliation if I failed. I suppose it was a feeling of inferiority, especially after the insult of my bosses trying to marry me off to a mere servant-girl!

The next morning, I was awake at five, and didn't think for one moment about Mme. de Rênal -- which would've shocked her if she'd known. So I spent the morning reading my other Bible: *The St.-Helena Chronicle* -- the conversations between Napoleon and an admirer during his imprisonment.

When I went down for lunch, I expected to find a radiant Mme. de Rênal, and said to myself: I must tell this woman I love her.

But instead I found myself confronted by a very angry M. de Rênal. He gave vent to a stream of vulgar language, about the fact that I had been playing with the boys instead of tutoring them, and had taken the morning off. His wife was in tears.

When he'd finished berating me, I began by defending myself: 'I was ill this morning,' I said. Then I decided to attack.

[CONVERSATION BETWEEN JULIEN AND M. DE RENAL, ACTOR PLAYING BOTH] :

Julien: Monsieur, do you think your boys would have made such progress with any other tutor?

M. de Rênal: Probably not. What are you getting at?

Julien: If not, how dare you reproach me with neglecting them? I can make a living without you.

M. de Rênal (reluctantly): I'm sorry you are so upset, Monsieur.

Julien: That is not an adequate apology, Monsieur. Just consider the disgraceful language you directed at me -- and in the presence of your lady wife, the children and the servants too. I think you know where I shall be very welcome, and command more respect when I leave your employ.

M. de Rênal (blustering): Leave? Who said anything about leaving?

Julien: I'm not accustomed to making empty threats.

M. de Rênal : Let me think about this. (*Strokes his chin.*) Very well, Monsieur. How about if I were to make amends in a more tangible way.

Starting on the first of next month – the day after next – I can give you 50 francs a month. Is that *respectable* enough?

[END OF CONVERSATION]

(*To audience*) I was astounded. Double the wage I'd been getting! That's rich people for you: everything can be bought. Even so, I didn't give him my answer straight away. Let him stew for a bit. My opponent had been easily frightened and I'd won a battle. But Napoleon's example taught me that I must take advantage of it.

(*Musing to himself.*) I must crush that insolent man while he's in retreat. His wife had been blowing hot and cold since letting her hand rest in mine. Clearly she doesn't know what she wants to happen now. She suddenly seems more attractive to me. Even desirable: her beauty is unpretentious and touching – she's modest and innocent, even after bearing three children to that brute. And her skin... Real class there. I've never experienced this intensity of physical passion before... It's not love. (*Pause*) In fact I think I hate her.

He sees Mme de Rênal coming.

SCENE 7

She stops disconcertedly as she sees him, and speaks to him aloofly.

MME. DE RENAL

Have you decided to stay with us? The boys are afraid you'll go.

JULIEN

I haven't made up my mind. The trouble is... (*Pause.*)

MME. DE RENAL

Yes?

JULIEN

I have just heard that Father Chélan has fallen out with the bishop over a difference of opinion about doctrine; so I'm wondering if being a priest is such a good idea if it's so easy to get on the wrong side of influential people like bishops. I might take up an offer from my friend Fouqué – he has a plan that is bound to make a lot of money. It'd mean moving, of course.

MME. DE RENAL (*disappointed*)

Away? (*Julien nods.*) I see.

JULIEN

No, that's not what I want to say to you at all!
He impulsively kisses her. She is startled and affronted.

MME. DE RENAL

How dare you?

She slaps his face. He falls to his knees and bursts into tears.

Julien! Don't do that! I order you! Someone might see you.

JULIEN

Then can I come to your room at 2 o'clock?

MME. DE RENAL

You mean *in the morning!*

JULIEN (*standing up*)

I need to explain how I feel, how passionately I have fallen in love with you.

MME. DE RENAL

But I'm a virtuous married woman! And much older than you. And a mother and... This is the kind of thing that must happen in novels. If only I'd read more I'd know how to deal with you.

JULIEN

I'm glad you haven't. Neither have I. We're just two innocents, aren't we?

MME. DE RENAL

There's nothing innocent about adultery. *Adultery!* Oh my goodness!
She runs off, appalled at the thought.

JULIEN

At least she hasn't refused. A man like me doesn't give up so easily.

She said 'I order you'! She wouldn't have said that to one of her own class. Well, I may be only a peasant's son, but I won't be spoken to like that. I'll show her!

He goes off.

SCENE 8

Mme. de Rênal's bedroom. The church clock strikes two.

Julien approaches Mme. de Rênal's bedroom on tiptoe, stops, listens. She is lying in bed, but is awake. When she sees Julien enter her room, she springs out of bed and shouts at him.

MME. DE RENAL

You wretched man! How dare you!

JULIEN (*whispers*)

Ssh ! Elise will hear you!

MME. DE RENAL (*more quietly*)

I hope so! Go away! I'll call my husband! Get out!

Julien flings himself at her feet and clasps her knees.

JULIEN

Oh please don't send me away. I want to tell you how much I love you, what my heart is yearning to say to you.

MME. DE RENAL (*angrily*)

No! You are behaving like a monster. Go to your room... *Now!*

Julien bursts into tears. Mme. de Renal is at first disconcerted, then reluctantly cradles his head, and raises him up.

Julien comes forward, fully recovered, and addresses the audience. Mme. de Rênal does not react to what he says, and vice-versa.

JULIEN

As the novels say, some hours later I had nothing further to desire.

MME DE RENAL

His tears and despair had moved me intensely, but when I had nothing left to refuse him, I pushed him away indignantly, then immediately threw myself into his arms.

JULIEN

The unexpected charms she had shown to me...

MME DE RENAL (*dreamily*)

His kisses were filled with passion and such as I had never yet received... The passionate love and ecstasy he had released in me...

JULIEN

... had given me a victory that my inexperienced love-making alone could not have achieved.

MME DE RENAL

I believed I was damned beyond reprieve. I tried to shield myself from the blackest thoughts of hell by covering him with sensuous kisses. Then I was filled with fear that my husband might have heard any noise, and entreated ... my lover ... to leave.

JULIEN

When I got back to my room at dawn I asked myself, 'Did I play my part right?' Which part? The part of a man accustomed to brilliant success as a lover?

MME DE RENAL

Julien had become in an instant everything in the world to me.
She exits quietly.

JULIEN

I thought, my God, is that all there is to it? Being happy and being loved. On reflection, I didn't enjoy it. I remembered every detail, but I didn't yet have any memories.

The first night had been a victory but not a pleasure. The following night was even more rapturous. Except that my mistress kept harping on the fact she was ten years older than me, so how could I possibly love her? I couldn't understand her problem: she was looking prettier and prettier and was more and more angelic. It wasn't long before I was head over heels in love with her.

Time flew by. The king came to Verrières, accompanied by the marquis de la Mole, to see a relic in the old church. I was chosen to be one of the guards of honour, dressed up in a fine new sky-blue outfit with silver epaulettes and a sword. I owed this honour to Lord knows what intrigues by Father Chélan. He may have fallen out with the bishop, but the marquis has been a close friend for many years. All I know is the dignitaries of the town were furious because I'd been chosen over several noble sons. I must say I attracted a lot of attention from the girls as I rode horseback -- better than the others. Then disaster struck.

SCENE 9

Countryside noises. Evening. Mme. de Rênal, dressed for a country walk, joins him. Julien is preoccupied.

MME. DE RENAL

I love coming here with you as the sun is setting.

JULIEN

And where we're unlikely to be interrupted.

They sit on the grass. He lies back. Pause.

MME. DE RENAL

What are you thinking about?

JULIEN

Since you ask, I was thinking about two great and distressing problems.

MME. DE RENAL

Gracious me! Which ones? Are they about me?

JULIEN

Yes , or rather us. But I'd rather talk first about the problem which puts an end to boyhood and spoils the opening years of manhood -- the difficulty of taking on a profession when one has no money.

MME. DE RENAL

I'd rather know which problem concerns us both.

JULIEN

In a way they're connected. What does the future hold for me? (*He adopts his visionary tone.*) Ah! Napoleon was the man! He was sent by God to help the young men of France! Who's going to take his place? What will we poor wretches do without him? Even those who are richer than I am, the ones who can scrape enough money together to pay for a good education, but not enough to launch themselves in a career!
Mme. de Rênal looks increasingly disapproving during this speech.

MME. DE RENAL (*coldly*)

You're talking like a servant. Did you know we have to pay them extra so that they won't cut our heads off during the night? I'm told that it's young men from the lower orders with too much education who made Robespierre and the Terror of 1793 possible. Do you really want that to happen again?

Julien starts to object, then changes his mind.

JULIEN

Of course not. Look, I'm afraid we have much more...

MME. DE RENAL

I'm really astonished at the way you're going on about money. Either one has it or one doesn't. We happen to have it, so please stop being tedious,

you're giving me a headache.
She gets up and begins to stomp off.

JULIEN

There is another problem, remember? Your husband is suspicious.
She turns back.

MME. DE RENAL

What about?

JULIEN

Us. I'm afraid your maid Elise has been to confession with Father Chélan, and she told him you have a lover, probably me.

MME. DE RENAL

Good God ! I suppose she was jealous because you refused to marry her.

JULIEN

Apparently she told Valenod too. There have been anonymous letters to your husband. They do not reveal the man's identity, but threaten your husband with the humiliation of being publicly mocked as a cuckold.

MME. DE RENAL

So that's why he's been so moody. I thought it must be the elections next month. And perhaps it's why he's suddenly made me move my bedroom.
(She reflects.) But we can say Elise made it up out of pique.

JULIEN

Too late for that I'm afraid. Father Chélan demanded that I go to confession, and I couldn't lie to him when he asked if it was me. He's been so good to me. The outcome is...

MME. DE RENAL

Yes?

JULIEN

He has ordered me to go the seminary in Besançon.

MME. DE RENAL *(appalled at the thought.)*

When?

JULIEN

In three days time.

MME. DE RENAL (*bursting into tears.*)

Three days! Can't we make love one more time? Tonight?

JULIEN

No. It's too dangerous. Your husband is on the look out, and he's employing my enemy, André, to be on guard.

MME. DE RENAL

His valet? He's jealous of you, he'd love to catch you *in flagrante delicto!* But... Oh, please, don't let us part like this.

JULIEN (*reluctantly*)

Well... I could climb out of my window, it's on the ground floor.

MME. DE RENAL (*wailing*)

But my new bedroom is on the first floor!

JULIEN

That does pose something of a problem. No, a challenge! I shall find a way.

MME. DE RENAL

The window can't be more than three metres from the ground.

JULIEN

Good. But we shall have to be very quiet. Elise will no doubt have her ear glued to your door.

MME. DE RENAL

Tomorrow I'll sack her.

JULIEN

No, don't do that. She'd do us even more damage. Wait till she does something wrong.

MME. DE RENAL

You're so wise and clever. Till tonight! I shall leave my window open, and greet you with open arms, my dearest Julien.

She kisses him and goes off.

JULIEN (*to himself*)

And I shall have to turn myself into a burglar! The things we do for ...

(searches for the right word)... love.

SCENE 10

Mme. de Rênal's bedroom. The window is clearly visible. She has fallen asleep on the couch or chair. Julien's head appears above the window-sill.

JULIEN

Psst! Psst! *(Louder.)* Good God, it must be the wrong room! *(He starts to go down.)*

MME. DE RENAL *(awakes)*

Julien?

JULIEN *(crossly)*

Yes, of course. Who else would it be? *(Climbs in)*

MME. DE RENAL

I fell asleep. You're very late.

JULIEN *(plaintively)*

If you knew the trouble I've had getting a ladder! I had to buy it from a peasant, and carry it through the town, in the dark, climb over the walls your husband has had built round the garden, whistle to the dogs hoping they'd recognise me and not tear me to shreds. And you complain that I'm late!

MME. DE RENAL *(placatingly)*

I'm sorry, my love. I had no idea. You're very brave. *(She kisses him. Julien suddenly remembers the ladder.)*

JULIEN

Here, give me a hand up with it.

MME. DE RENAL

With what?

JULIEN

The ladder of course!

MME. DE RENAL

Can't we just leave it there? You'll need it to go down.

JULIEN

No we can't! Somebody might see it.

They lift the ladder over the sill. It is light and short – not more than 2 metres tall.

MME. DE RENAL

Where are we going to put it? Elise might come in.

JULIEN

Under the bed. *(He hides it under the bed.)*

MME. DE RENAL

Is there room for you and the ladder?

JULIEN

What? *(Looks.)* No. I'll hide in the closet. If absolutely necessary. So long as I go before dawn, it should be all right.

MME. DE RENAL

My poor darling. My last sight of you will be fending off the dogs with a ladder under your arm. *(They begin to laugh, then to embrace and kiss.)*

BLACKOUT.

Mme. de Rênal exits.

SCENE 11

JULIEN

Julien comes forward and addresses the audience.

The next morning, with the wisdom that comes when passion climbs out of the window, I realised that the scandal of seducing the master's wife could have grave consequences for my reputation as a man of the church. And I realised that the months spent at Verrières and Vergy had been a waste of time as far as my ambition was concerned. I was no further advanced on the religious road to fortune than on that fateful day in September last year when I entered the Rênal house and showed off my Latin. So the logical thing to do, was to leave Verrières with a glad heart. It was all for the best.

My arrival at the seminary was just as inauspicious. Again I approached the portals with trepidation. But instead of the ravishing sight of a

beautiful woman, I was confronted by the sinister figure of a pale man dressed in black, with thin lips and green cat-like eyes totally devoid of sympathy.

There were 320 other seminarists, and they disgusted me. They were all sons of peasants, so they despised me for my white hands and cleanliness. To them I was a snobbish bourgeois. Me! I realised that they hated my intellectual superiority. They even called me Martin Luther because of my infernal logic! I tried not to come first in class *all* the time. But it was too late. My attempts to make friends were treated with scorn and derision. I applied myself to long pious exercises but in vain. I was in danger of failing at a career that I found increasingly ugly. And I found it distinctly discouraging that my mistress had obviously forgotten all about me.

Fortunately, after eleven unhappy months in that prison called a seminary, I benefited again from intrigues – the thought that people in high places were interested in me amazed and amused me. I went to give thanks at Mass in the cathedral.

Julien goes off.

SCENE 12

Mme. de Rênal enters. She is haggard and visibly unwell.

MME. DE RENAL (*to the audience.*)

I wrote to Julien many times but never had a reply. I don't suppose he ever received my letters. Although they were very discreet I expect my affection showed through. My youngest boy, Stanislas, was taken seriously ill, and I believed that I was being punished for my sins. I became ill and expected I was going to die, so I wrote Julien a farewell letter. No reply. Then for weeks I went to confession at the cathedral of Besançon. My son recovered, but I was still very weak.

SCENE 13

In the Cathedral. Organ and choir music. She sinks to her knees to pray. Julien enters and prays, but does not see her. The moment she sees him she nearly faints with emotion and stays seated.

Julien finishes praying, stands, and sees her. He looks surprised (but not overjoyed) and joins her, helps her to her feet.

JULIEN

Let's go over here. The pillar will shield us from prying eyes.

MME. DE RENAL

I've missed you so much, Julien. I've been very ill. So has Stanislas.

JULIEN

I'm very sorry to hear that. I thought you'd forgotten all about me.

MME. DE RENAL

I wrote to you many times. You never replied.

JULIEN

I haven't received one letter from you. But I did receive a letter yesterday that filled me with joy. My passport out of this ghastly place.

MME. DE RENAL (*apprehensively*)

What do you mean?

JULIEN

I've been offered the post of secretary to a very rich and powerful aristocrat.

MME. DE RENAL (*perking up*)

You're giving up the seminary? You're not going to be a priest?

JULIEN

I've already said farewell to the bishop. I depart for Paris immediately.

MME. DE RENAL (*anxiously*)

Paris! You're leaving Besançon?

JULIEN

Yes, Madame. I'm entering the service of the Marquis de la Mole as his secretary. You remember him – he accompanied the King when he came to Verrières.

MME. DE RENAL

I know him; a very powerful man.

JULIEN

I must have impressed him in my sky-blue uniform.

MME. DE RENAL

Which I bought for you.

JULIEN

I didn't know that.

MME. DE RENAL

But beware, Julien. I know that world. I was brought up in it. It's not only the nobles you have to be on your guard against. They will be merciless about your low birth, as you'd expect. But the servants and lackeys can be even more cruel. They will resent the fact that a peasant has been given a post higher than theirs. They'll be watching your every move, just hoping you will make a mistake or say something wrong. And whenever you do, they'll snigger behind your back and treat you with contempt to your face.

JULIEN

I defy them all! You have trained me well in the Rênal household.

MME. DE RENAL

We *trained* you? Is that all we mean to you?

JULIEN

Not all *you* mean to me. You're the only woman I've ever loved. The memory of the love shining in your enchanting eyes, and the whiteness of the pretty hand I'm taking (*he takes her hand*) will always be with me. I'm leaving you now for a very long time.

Mme. de Rênal stifles a sob, then throws caution to the winds and her arms round his neck. She presses herself against him. Julien is dismayed and keeps an eye out for possible unwanted spectators while being kissed passionately.

Without a word she walks away from him with great dignity.

Julien gives a smile of self-satisfaction and exits in a different direction.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE 14

Paris, in the library of the château of the La Mole family. Julien is dressed very smartly in black, but not as a priest. He is sitting at a table, surrounded by papers. He continues to write a half-completed letter.

Mathilde, dressed in mourning black, enters quietly behind Julien, and is surprised to see him. Her voice is drawling, sharp and abrupt. Her manner is overbearing but softens by the end of the scene. Julien stands the moment he sees her. [Her dress can be velcro-ed over her ball dress for a quick change for her next scene.]

MATHILDE

Oh! You must be my father's new secretary. I'm Mathilde de La Mole.

JULIEN

Yes, I saw you at dinner, surrounded by young men. Julien Sorel, Mademoiselle. *(He makes a slight bow.)*

MATHILDE

I came to borrow a book from my father's library. *(She starts to search for a particular book.)*

JULIEN

This is the place to come, then. What are you wanting to read? *(She ignores the question and leafs through a book.)*

MATHILDE

Even after some months here, you are still overawed by Paris, I suppose, coming from the *provinces*. *(She makes it sound as if the word stinks.)*

JULIEN

On the contrary, I don't admire today's Paris at all. It's very superficial. Of course I'm very happy to be working and living in the château of marquis de la Mole, one of the greatest noblemen in France. But Paris is the centre of intrigue and hypocrisy, and I don't care for that. True passions, it seems to me, are considered ridiculous in Paris. All true passion is bound up in itself, but in Paris your neighbour insists that you think mainly of him. *(Pause. She raises one eyebrow, surprised at his refusal to be dominated by her.)*

I'm surprised to see your father has Voltaire and Rousseau, since they're both on the church's Index of banned authors.

MATHILDE

I suppose he thinks it wise to explore enemy territory. I've read *The Social Contract* and *Julie*. You've read them, of course?

JULIEN *(tersely)*

Of course. *(picks up his pen and starts to get on writing.)*

MATHILDE

What do you do all day?

JULIEN (*sighs, puts down his pen and decides to be sociable and converse.*)

Each day, at noon, take my seat here in the Marquis's library. My job is to write letters to do with lawsuits and other business. When I started here the marquis used to jot down briefly, in the margin of each letter to be answered, the kind of reply it required. But I have learned to write these replies myself now, ready and waiting for him to sign. In the evening, at eight o'clock, I tidy his study, and at ten I am free.

MATHILDE

So, what are you doing here here at this late hour, Monsieur Sorel? It's nearly midnight.

JULIEN

Your father is giving me more and more responsibility in handling his affairs. I'm trying to catch up with correspondence, Mademoiselle. Mainly legal wrangles your father is involved in, and recommendations for posts and titles – and decorations. I'd no idea he is such a powerful man. Things have piled up during my time away. (*She picks up the letter he is writing and begins to read it.*)

MATHILDE

You are very energetic – I admire that. Father tells me you are in charge of administering his estates now.

JULIEN

Yes. I enjoy working with him. And I want to do well. He seems to appreciate the new accounting methods I have introduced. They're saving him a fortune – his broker was robbing him.

MATHILDE (*impressed.*)

Really? (*Still reading the letter.*) *Possession* is spelt with double S twice. I have been away too, with my mother. To Hyères.

JULIEN

I hope you don't mind my reminding you, Mademoiselle, but it is impolite to read another person's private correspondence. Where's Hyères?

MATHILDE (*She puts the letter down and picks up a book.*)

Touché! It's an island. In the Mediterrean. Very fashionable. Very boring. *There is an uncomfortable pause. She affects indifference.* Where've you been?

JULIEN

London. Very fashionable. Very boring. *They laugh.*

MATHILDE

That's why you look pale and thin. Why did you go there?

JULIEN

Your father sent me on a perfectly futile mission. I suspect it was just to educate me and teach me some manners by mingling with English fops and dandies . The English try to compensate for their terrible food with exquisite manners.

MATHILDE

He has arranged for you to have dancing and fencing lessons as well, hasn't he? (*He nods.*) I know he finds you more amusing than my brother, Norbert.

JULIEN (*bristling*)
Amusing!

MATHILDE

Now don't take offence. I meant intelligent.

JULIEN

That's all right then. I'd hate to think I'm regarded like a court jester..Apparently the marquis hopes that I will become friends with your brother Norbert -- teaching him a few ready-made phrases about Cicero and Virgil, no doubt.

MATHILDE

My father thinks you have an original personality and a resolute character. Perhaps he hopes something will rub off. And above all, he trusts you. He was astounded to find you have ideas in your head. He's never found any in my brother's head. He and Norbert get on very well, but have nothing to say to each other. I despise my brother, and all the foolish young men I'm landed with at dinner. Totally boring.

JULIEN

Even the marquis de Charpentier?

MATHILDE

My fiancé? I despise *him* too.

JULIEN

Then why?...

MATHILDE

Because my parents are making me marry him on account of his title and fortune.

JULIEN

I know someone like that. But I can't imagine anyone making you do anything you don't want to.

MATHILDE

Well, we shall see, shan't we? My parents are quite formidable, you know. And they hold all the trump cards.

Pause. Mathilde reads a book. Julien writes the spelling correction in, and then arranges the letters in a pile.

JULIEN

I've asked Father Pirard if it's part of my duties to attend those boring dinners. He was astounded that I don't think it's a great honour.

MATHILDE

That's the subservient reaction of someone dragged up from the lower classes. He's a *parvenu*. I'm glad you don't think like that. And what an ugly face he has!

JULIEN

He's been very good to me. Apparently I owe my new position to him. I – and your father -- regard him as a friend. In fact, as my new guide and mentor he gave me excellent advice on the sort of life I shall be leading here.

MATHILDE

Such as what?

JULIEN

Father Pirard warned me not to fall for any attempts at bribery, even from little old ladies, in return for passing on secrets. He advised me to speak as little as possible, and avoid long sentences – (*mimicking her*) they are so *provincial*, you know. And above all, I should never speak of matters of which I know nothing, or I'm bound to be caught out and mercilessly humiliated.

MATHILDE

Very true.

JULIEN

I was so grateful to Father Pirard for his advice that I flung myself into his arms and said to him, 'I have been hated by my father ever since the cradle; but I shall no longer complain of my luck. I have found a new father in you, Sir.'

My new father was embarrassed and said; 'Come, come, you must never say *luck*, my boy, always say *Providence*. For example, the interest the marquis is showing in you is mysterious, therefore *providential*.
They both laugh.

MATHILDE

I'm glad to see you are loyal to your friends. Someone with less spirit would just agree with me about Father Pirard.

But do the dinners really bore you?

JULIEN (*drily.*)

The plain truth is. I can never think of anything to say. The conversation is in a foreign language which I understand, but can't speak.

MATHILDE

Perhaps you still regard too many things as serious and important. You ought to lighten up a bit. In Paris you must be more trivial -- but not dull. Sparkle more.

JULIEN

Thank you for your advice. There are many things that mystify me. For example, why are you the only one dressed in black, in deep mourning, this evening?

MATHILDE

What! Is it really possible that you do not know what happened on this day, the 30th of April, in 1574?

JULIEN (*trying to keep a straight face.*)

I'm afraid not.

MATHILDE (*becoming more and more enthusiastic as she tells the story.*)

One of my more interesting ancestors, Boniface de la Mole, was the lover of queen Marguerite de Navarre. Her first name was Mathilde, and I'm named after her. Queen Catherine de Medici was keeping his friends -- the princes -- prisoners, and La Mole tried to rescue them. He failed and was beheaded. I'm not boring you, I hope? (*Julien shakes his head.*)

Queen Mathilde-Marguerite asked the executioner for her lover's head. And the following night, at midnight, she took the head in her carriage, and went to bury it with her own hands. That was on the 30th of April 1574, and I commemorate that every year. You don't get heroism like that nowadays.

JULIEN

What a way to be remembered! But surely there were heroes in Emperor Napoleon's time?

MATHILDE

Ah, but it was different then. In your emperor's time, everyone wanted just to win a stupid cross or medal. In truly heroic days there was less egoism and pettiness. I love that period. I should have been born then.

JULIEN

And Boniface de La Mole was your hero? (*She nods.*) At any rate he was loved the way I'd like to be loved. Women alive today would be horrified even to touch the head of a decapitated lover?

MATHILDE (*pensively, to herself.*)

You may be right.

JULIEN

Now, if you will excuse me, I have to take these letters for your father to sign first thing in the morning.

(*He gathers up papers.*)

MATHILDE

It has been invigorating to talk to you, instead of those insipid young men. (*Julien bows politely. As he is about to exit, she has an afterthought.*) Perhaps you'd like to join me in the garden after dinner now the summer is upon us. We can continue our conversation.

JULIEN

I'd like that very much, Mademoiselle. Good night.

He exits.

SCENE 15

Mathilde addresses the audience.

That young man is starting to impress me. His conversation is still far too serious and assertive. He lacks a touch of flippancy. On the other hand, he has no trace of subservience. He'll defend to the death his point of view. And he never acts as one expects him to. I admire unpredictability. Although, I must admit, politically he is beyond the pale.

(She exits, book in hand.)

SCENE 16

Julien enters, dressed in a blue satin coat, jabot, and cuffs with frills.

JULIEN *(to the audience.)*

The real reason, I have recently discovered, why I was sent to London was so that the marquis could find an excuse to give me a cross of the Legion of Honour – “for diplomatic services rendered, et cetera”, the usual nonsense. No doubt it adds to his prestige, to have a secretary with an honour.

I've just been invited to a ball. I don't know why. Mlle. Mathilde just said to me, in that haughty, curt way upper-class young women adopt, ‘You are to accompany my brother to the ball this evening. My father will see you are suitably dressed.’

So that's why I have this beautiful suit. He called me into his study and said, ‘Allow me, my dear Sorel, to make you a present of a blue coat.’

Then he said a strange thing: ‘You'll be in my eyes the young son of my old friend, the Duc de Chaulnes’ [pron. *shown*]. I took it as one of the whimsical remarks he sometimes comes out with, but the thought has crossed my mind that I'm the butt of some sort of family joke. One minute she and the marquis treat me as an equal, the next minute they order me about. *(cont.)*

SCENE 17

The recorded sound of a small orchestra is heard quietly in the background, playing a waltz.

(JULIEN continues)

I didn't know such magnificence was possible. By chance I was standing in the crowded ballroom, which was decorated like the Alhambra in Granada. I was cheek by jowl with two foppish young men, discussing one of the women dancing the quadrille. I couldn't see the dancers because of the crowd.

MATHILDE enters dressed in a striking off-the-shoulders ball gown, and mimes talking, and dancing in a way consistent with the following dialogue.

(JULIEN mimics the young men.)

The young man with moustaches said: ‘She's the belle of the ball, no doubt about it.’

I saw then that they were talking about Mathilde.

The other man said: ‘Anyone would think that she was afraid of attracting whoever she is speaking to.’

‘Precisely! That is the art of seduction.’

‘And those big blue eyes which droop so slowly just as they're going to reveal their secret,’ his companion added.

'Pon my word,' said the first, 'she's a crafty one. There is a good deal of coquetry under that aristocratic reserve of hers. Who could be worthy of the sublime Mathilde?'

'Some reigning Prince, handsome, clever, well made, a hero in battle, and aged twenty at the most.'

Then I moved to get a better view. Up till then I'd decided I didn't like her at all, but since these popinjays thought so highly of her, I gave her a second chance. I saw Mathilde beckoning to me.

Mathilde beckons to him urgently. He approaches her.

MATHILDE

Quick, save me! My fiancé is coming to ask me to dance, and he's so boring I shall be reduced to fainting, to escape. Take me out to the terrace.

SCENE 18

They go to the terrace. The sound of music gets weaker.

JULIEN

I'm glad to escape too.

MATHILDE

You seem to observe the ball like a philosopher, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, say.

JULIEN

Rousseau is nothing but a fool in my eyes when he takes it upon himself to criticise high society; he didn't understand it, and approached it with the heart of an upstart flunkey.

MATHILDE

You are a wise man, Monsieur Sorel.

Pause.

I can see nothing but a sentence of death that distinguishes a man. What do you think of my witticism?

JULIEN

I can only think of one word: why?

MATHILDE

Because it is the only thing that is not to be bought. A title of Baron, or Viscount, that can be bought. To secure a fortune, one sells oneself and marries a rich man, or his daughter. My remark is really profound, don't you think? A death sentence is still the only thing which no one has ever thought of asking for.

JULIEN

You are in a strange mood this evening, Mademoiselle. You can allow yourself the indulgence of idiosyncrasy. You are the queen of the ball, successful, you're intelligent, rich and beautiful...

MATHILDE (*dismissively*)

... But all that doesn't interest me. Yes, I have a dazzling reputation, fortune, youth.

Everything except happiness. To you I'm probably just a spoilt rich girl, but my happiness has to be worthy of me.

JULIEN

Not "just" a spoilt rich girl. I think you're remarkable in your own right. But I can't imagine your brand of happiness. What would make you happy?

MATHILDE (*reflects before answering*)

Mmmm... For example, falling in love with a man as far below me as possible, measured by his social position. That would be a great and audacious thing to do. Exotic and unusual. Everything must be extraordinary for a girl like me.

I can't imagine that happening with someone like the marquis de Charpentier. What a colourless existence I shall lead. What a masterpiece of this country's upbringing he is; an ideal man, always polite and brave and pleasant. But so predictable and conventional I could scream! I view my future with repugnance – passionless and loveless.

JULIEN

I agree with you. There is no longer any possibility of passion.

MATHILDE

Do you? Do you really think that? You know there is no one else I can share these thoughts with. But you are so cold. Like an Englishman.

JULIEN

Tell me something, Mademoiselle: are you and your friends playing an elaborate game with me?

MATHILDE (*appalled*)

Game? What do you mean?

JULIEN

A few days ago, I again caught you, your fiancé, and your brother talking about me. When I approached there was an embarrassed silence. That's not the first time. I often have the impression you're all trying to set me a trap and making fun of me on account of my poverty and humble birth.

MATHILDE

Never! On the contrary, those young idiots are afraid of you. They think you'll have them all guillotined if another revolution starts up.

JULIEN

And you?

MATHILDE

Me? I think you're too fond of acting on your own to join others you despise. In fact, you are... (*she stops short.*)

I wish to go now. Would you have my carriage called please?

JULIEN (*formally*)

With pleasure, Mademoiselle.

He exits.

MATHILDE (*reasoning to herself*)

A moment more and I'd have declared myself! Not yet. I must be sure. My little Julien only likes acting on his own. He would not think of relying on others to support and help him because he despises others. That's why I don't despise him! His poverty and low birth are... not drawbacks, they're his essential assets; grand passions thrive on challenges! And he's *very* handsome, when he drops that ecclesiastical expression. I can just imagine him in an officer's uniform.

(*She does an excited pirouette.*) I'm no longer feeling bored. At last I have something to be passionate about!

She exits.

SCENE 19

In the library, a few days after the ball. Julien enters, dressed in his black garb again.

JULIEN (*to audience*)

Mlle. Mathilde keeps gazing at me in the strangest way since the ball, especially at dinner. It's very embarrassing, as if she in love with me. But I still have the cruel suspicion she is play-acting, singling me out simply in order to make fun of a poor devil of a secretary. Do people like her have passions? I doubt it.

I confess I now find her very attractive, sublime in fact; I could fall into the trap and fall in love with her. I've begun to have fantasies about making love to her. She does have a beautiful body, and she moves enticingly. Spellbindingly. (*He pauses, lost in an erotic daydream. Then he shakes himself out of it.*)

I'm not that much of a fool. Every man for himself in this desert of egoism they call life. So I've decided to go to the south of France for a few weeks, to visit an estate the marquis has there. I leave tomorrow morning.

SCENE 20

Mathilde bursts in. She is very emotional and upset.

MATHILDE

I have just heard you're going away.

JULIEN (*coldly.*)

That is correct, Mademoiselle.

MATHILDE

But you can't do that!

JULIEN

Can't, Mademoiselle? I have your father's permission, and I'm going on *his* business.

MATHILDE

I realise how easily you persuade him, but he's really unhappy that you are not going to be here to help with the Normandy lawsuits. You know how much he depends on you now.

Oh, what's the use? The truth is, I don't want you to go. It would be more than

my strength could bear. (*Julien turns so that she cannot see his face, but the audience can. His expression is hideous: part triumphal, part joyful, part vengeful.*)

JULIEN (*turning to her.*)

I'm not quite clear what you mean.

MATHILDE

I'm daring to say face to you that I love you. If you come to my room at one hour after midnight, I shall prove it to you. Do you realise that I run a great risk of dishonouring myself in speaking to you like this?

JULIEN

On the contrary, Mademoiselle, if I ventured to tell your father or your brother that you'd tried to seduce me, you would say that I had tried to rape you, or that I had misunderstood friendship for love. Or that this was a joke to see how vain I was, believing that a great lady would lower herself to make love with one of the lower orders. In any case, I'd be flung out of his house and into prison on some trumped up charge.

MATHILDE

Well, I shall be able to judge if you're a coward, or worthy of me. Take the ladder from beside the well, and climb up it to my room. There's a full moon, so you won't mistake the window or get lost. I hope to see you at one o'clock!

She moves to one side of the stage so that they are physically and audibly separated. They are both agitated.

JULIEN (*to himself*)

Oh no, not another ladder!

MATHILDE (*to herself*)

I doubt if he realises what a struggle it was for me to declare my love.

JULIEN

Climbing up a ladder like that lit up by a full moon... it's the height of folly.

MATHILDE

It's the first time in my life I've been carried away by a passionate sentiment. I'm on the verge of being happy.

JULIEN

But what if she's in good faith?

MATHILDE

But what if he doesn't come?

JULIEN

I shall have proved to her that I'm afraid. Made of inferior stuff! Peasant stuff!

MATHILDE

Then I'll see that he has only the outward appearance of a superior being. A hollow

shell.

JULIEN

If I do make love to her, I shall have scored a victory over the snobbish marquis de Charpentier!

MATHILDE

I really don't know him at all! And he's about to become my lover – perhaps my lord and master!

JULIEN

Right, I'll teach him to look at me in that *superior* way. To arms!

MATHILDE

Perhaps he doesn't feel any love for me at all.
She exits.

JULIEN

And she *is* frightfully pretty... I'll go and see how heavy that ladder is.
He exits.

*MUSIC DENOTES LONGER PASSAGE OF TIME – SEVERAL MONTHS IN FACT.
NO HOUSE LIGHTS.*

SCENE 22

In the library. Julien enters in black jacket. He is now 22. A red Hussard uniform is hanging up.

JULIEN

My life has been turbulent for the past few months. Not only *my* life, for revolution is in the air. My employer, the marquis de la Mole, took it into his head to use me to take notes of what was said at a secret meeting attended by a small group of very powerful men– bishops, ministers and nobles. They are hatching a plot to get support from the nations that beat Napoleon – England, Austria and so on. Just in case our very unpopular King Charles the Tenth is forced to abdicate. Or is beheaded.

But what is concerning me mainly is my relationship with Mathilde. Since the night of the ladder – there have been several more since the first one – she has been blowing hot and cold alarmingly. I don't know from one day to the next where I am with her. Does she love me or hate me? I don't know. Sometimes she says she's my bride, calls me her husband and invites me to her bed, where she yields her body to me passionately. Next day she abuses me. There's a dose of madness in this family! I must not show her how much I love and want her. I have to do my duty to myself if I want to succeed!

SCENE 23

Mathilde bursts in..

MATHILDE

Oh, there you are, my love! (*She kisses him warmly. He does not respond.*) Julien, I have offended you. I am so very sorry. And I've made you unhappy and mistrustful.

JULIEN

That's true. I never know what to expect from you. And I find it hard to forgive you for saying you regret giving yourself to the first comer, a domestic.

MATHILDE

Did I say that? I must have been mad.

JULIEN

That's true. But the madness might descend on you tomorrow again.

MATHILDE

You want guarantees, my love. I can understand that. Well, I have one for you: I'm pregnant. *(Julien looks happy and is about to say something, but she covers his mouth with her fingers and stops him.)* That should cure your doubts. I'm your wife and your slave for ever. *(She goes down on her knees.)* And you are my master. I deserve to be punished for my arrogance and pride. I've been so afraid.

JULIEN

What will your father say? You're going to marry Charpentier in a few weeks time.

MATHILDE

I have just told father.

JULIEN *(startled.)*

You told him who your lover is?

MATHILDE

Yes. I told him I did the seducing, and that you had always respected me. At first he was furious, called you a monster, and said he was going to have you whipped and turn you out of the house right away. I said if he did that I'd give you my arm and we'd go together. There would be a great scandal. I told him I love you deeply, and I love him too, and I hoped he wouldn't reject me. If he tries to force me to marry the marquis de Charpentier, I told him I'd kill myself. He knows how determined I can be.

He flung himself in a chair, and thought for a long time. Finally, he muttered "He's not really a bad man. And I like having him around."

He then reasoned: there are two objections to our union, You are poor, and you haven't a title.

JULIEN

We know that. They are insuperable obstacles.

MATHILDE

He then went to a table and wrote you a letter. *(She produces a letter and hands it to him.)* I don't know what's in it.

JULIEN *(opens the seal and reads the letter aloud.)*

"To M. Julien Sorel

"I possess an estate in Languedoc that brings in 20,000 francs a year."

I wonder why he's telling us that?

MATHILDE

I don't know! Perhaps he explains in the letter. Just *read* it!

JULIEN

Very well milady.

"I hereby give 10,000 francs to my daughter and 10,000 to M. Julien Sorel. (*He is about to make a comment, but Mathilde gives him a hard look and he goes on reading.*)

"I also donate the estate itself to you, M. Julien Sorel, always provided that you promise to marry my daughter Mathilde honourably, within one month. (*Mathilde gives a shriek of joy.*) Instruct my solicitor to draw up the two separate deeds of gift and bring them to me tomorrow.

LA MOLE.

JULIEN

Wait. There's another bit:

"P.S. The estate brings with it the title of Chevalier de la Vernaye. I shall accept you as the illegitimate son of a marquis with whom I have been acquainted since our youth. Furthermore, providing you do not commit more acts of folly, I enclose a lieutenant's commission in the Hussars for M. le Chevalier Julien Sorel de la Vernaye. You must present yourself to the colonel of your regiment in Strasbourg immediately. I am doing all this out of love for my daughter and esteem for you." (*Julien is delighted; Mathilde is not.*)

MATHILDE

Strasbourg! Immediately? I will not let you go so soon. (*She throws her arms round his neck.*)

JULIEN

Now, be reasonable. He is being incredibly generous – and forgiving.

MATHILDE

And he's made sure his daughter is married honourably to someone acceptable to society. The cunning old...

JULIEN

... father-in-law!

MATHILDE

I'll go and thank him before he changes his mind.
She runs offstage.

JULIEN (*To himself.*)

But I wonder what he really means by "the illegitimate son of a marquis".

SCENE 24

JULIEN

(To the audience He takes off his black jacket and dons the red army jacket.)

Anyway, That is how I became the wealthy chevalier de Vernaye, and about to be married into one of the most powerful families in France.

I had been in Strasbourg only for a couple of weeks, thoroughly enjoying myself with important matters like horses and uniforms, and thinking that at 23 I should be more than a lieutenant if I was going to a general at 30. I was surprised to receive an urgent message from Mathilde. It said "All is lost. Come back as quickly as possible. Desert if you have to. I love you."

I got leave from my colonel, and rushed back to Paris.

SCENE 25

Mathilde rushes on and flings herself into Julien's arms.

MATHILDE

Darling! Father is refusing to let you marry me next week because Mme. de Rênal has written him a letter. She says you're poor and grasping and hypocritical, and accuses you of seducing me because I'm rich.

JULIEN *(coldly)*

Is he at home now?

MATHILDE

No, he went God knows where during the night so as to avoid having to talk to you. He wrote to me that he is willing to give you 10,000 pounds a year if you go to Australia and I renounce you.

JULIEN

Where's Mme. de Rênal's letter?

MATHILDE

Here.

JULIEN *(reads the key words.)*

"... guided by my young new confessor... holy cause of religion and morality... resorted to the seduction of a weak and unhappy woman... gaining control over the master of the house... leaving behind him a trail of suffering..." *(His voice becomes expressionless as if he is hypnotised.)* The rest is obliterated by tears.

I don't blame your father. He's a fair and prudent man. *(He pauses, unsure what course of action to take. (He is in fact mentally traumatised.) Then in a daze, he turns to go.)* Goodbye!

He walks off. Mathilde goes to follow him, calls his name, takes a few steps, but exits sobbing.

Agitated music.

THEN EITHER

Two pistol shots are heard. Silence.

OR:

[SCENE 25A.

THIS SCENE MAY BE OMITTED IF NOT FEASIBLE. IT MAY BE SUPERFLUOUS ANYWAY AS JULIEN DESCRIBES THE SHOOTING IN SC.26.

In the church of Verrières. Choir music. Mme. de Rênal, in black, wearing a large hat, kneels to pray. Julien enters and stands some distance behind her. She does not see him. His hands are shaking. He draws two pistols from his cloak. He fires one and misses. Music stops. She turns and sees him. He fires again. She cries out and falls.

Julien walks off.]

SCENE 26

Besançon prison. Julien is asleep and talks incoherently.

Offstage (out of sight) Mathilde is dressed in hood and cloak like a peasant girl. She is speaking to the gaoler in a rustic (Mummerset) accent.

JULIEN

... letter... killed her... all is lost... praying on her knees... two shots... why?... in God's name, why?... she didn't need...

MATHILDE

... but Oi'm 'is woife, an' Oi've a roight ter see 'im! An' this is fer you, fer bein' so koin'd to a simple girl in distress.

Clink of coins as they change hands. She comes in. Julien half wakes up. He is still not functioning properly.

JULIEN

Who are you? *(He groans and holds his head between his hands.)*

MATHILDE *(taking off hood.)*

It's me, my love, Mathilde. Your wife, or as good as.

She throws herself into his arms. He does not respond.

JULIEN *(coldly, still dazed.)*

Mathilde! I'm surprised to see you. You should be as disgusted as your father.

MATHILDE

On the contrary. I love you more than I've ever done. It's taken me ages to find you. I went first to Verrières, only to find you'd been transferred to Besançon prison.

JULIEN

To await trial. That great fat giant, my gaoler, tells me I'm a murderer. *(Mathilde tries to interrupt, but Julien is unstoppable.)* I've killed Mme. de Rênal apparently. In the church, in Verrières, while she was praying. The church bell was ringing three chimes, which signals the start of Mass, and the church was all red, because of the light streaming through the curtains. Until the gaoler told me, I thought it was a bad dream. How I got here all the way from Paris, I've no idea. I've done nothing but sleep since I was brought to prison. It's a pity that ordinary citizens who read about me in the press, will look upon me as just a common murderer.

MATHILDE

What you did was noble and heroic, my love. But...

JULIEN

No, no, not at all! I should think a mediocre act like murder would have knocked those romantic ideas out of your head. You were made to be alive at the time of the heroes of the Middle Ages.

I've been thinking about remorse, you know, but I don't feel any.

MATHILDE

I've been trying to tell you, you didn't kill her.

JULIEN

What! She isn't dead! Oh! Thank God! (*He clasps his hands together, genuinely relieved.*) I've heard that she was urged to write that letter by her confessor. It's him I should have shot.

MATHILDE

Perhaps, but she's getting better. Your first shot went through her hat...

JULIEN

I'm, not surprised, my hand shook the moment I saw her.

MATHILDE

...then you shot her in the shoulder. Because of her we've lost all possibility of happiness. So you avenged yourself, you intended to kill her, that's the important thing.

JULIEN

Yes. I've taken my revenge! I've done my duty, and I shall soon pay for it. I intended to kill so I must be killed. Intention and premeditation, that's what count.

MATHILDE

I know. In that case, I shall kill myself to be with you, dearest Julien.

JULIEN

No, you won't. One year after my death, you will marry Charpentier.

MATHILDE

But...

JULIEN

I know you'd prefer to do something dramatic and heroic, but as your husband I order you to do this.

MATHILDE

But Charpentier is dead! He died fighting a duel defending my honour.

JULIEN

I'm glad... and surprised... to hear he did that. He behaved heroically, for once.

MATHILDE

The least he could do. But listen darling, you're taking it for granted the jury is going to demand the death penalty. Well, I've been doing a bit of lobbying. Father Frilair, the vicar-general, hopes to be made a bishop, and baron Valenod has the ear of...

JULIEN

Did you say *baron Valenod*? (*Mathilde nods.*) Pretends to be liberal, a real rogue destined to be a leader of fools. He's capable of thrashing any juror who won't vote his way. And Father Frilair? (*Mathilde nods.*) I remember writing letters to him about your father's legal dispute with him.

MATHILDE

Yes, Valenod is the new mayor of Verrières. He replaced your former mistress's husband. And M. Frilair is keen to be reconciled with my father, who doesn't want the scandal of your execution. They have lots of friends on the jury, all hoping for some political or religious preferment. So you see, all is not lost, my darling. I might as well take advantage of being a member of one of the most wealthy and powerful families in France.

JULIEN

You *have* been busy. But I feel uneasy about depending on men like Valenod.

MATHILDE

Ah! You still the superior man I fell for. I love you so much, Julien.
She kisses him passionately and he responds.
Julien exits.

MATHILDE (*to audience*).

I've been to see Julien very day. He swears he's not going to make a speech to the jury, just leave it to his counsel. I've tried to convince him his handsome face will have the women in the public gallery on his side, and if he spoke in his own defence everyone would be sympathetic. But he refuses. Nothing more I can do.

Today, the eve of the trial, I went to the all-powerful vicar-general armed with a letter from the head of the church in France asking for Julien's acquittal. This was my trump card! Father Frilair said to me: "I can answer for the verdict on premeditation. I'm certain of a majority of votes, and baron Valenod will make sure of the rest of the jury." I found this quite reassuring really.

She exits.

SCENE 27

Besançon assizes. 9 o'clock chimes. Julien enters, looking very young, dressed elegantly but simply. His hairstyle is very fetching. He does not stand on the accused's platform yet.

JULIEN (*to audience*.)

What struck me most when I entered the courtroom was the elegance of the architecture. It was pure gothic, with a number of charming little pillars carved in stone with the most perfect finish. I imagined myself in England. But presently my whole attention was taken up by about a dozen women in the three galleries above the

bench and the jurybox. On turning round towards the public seats, I saw that the circular gallery was filled with women; most of them were young and seemed to me extremely pretty; their eyes were bright and full of concern. In the rest of the court, the crowd was enormous; people were fighting to get in, and the sentries were unable to preserve silence.

Mathilde enters, dressed elegantly. Julien is not aware of her.

MATHILDE (*to audience*)

One would have said that morning that he was not yet twenty; I heard people say on all sides:

'Lord, how young he is!'

'But he is just a boy.'

'He is far better looking than his portrait.'

He was dressed quite simply, but with a perfect elegance; the arrangement of his hair over his forehead was very charming; I had insisted on presiding in person over his appearance. He was extremely pale.

JULIEN

The witnesses were quickly heard. At the first words of the speech by the counsel for the prosecution, two of the ladies seated on the little balcony burst into tears. He was making heavy weather, in bad French, of an pathetic point about the barbarity of the crime that had been committed. His insipid eloquence disgusted me. So far I felt extreme contempt for all the men who were taking part in this trial.

I caught an insolent glance from baron Valenod among the jury.

'Heaven knows what he will say about me to Madame de Rênal!' I said to myself. That's all I cared about. Her opinion of me. I could think only of her, and realised how much I loved her.

MATHILDE

I could see Julien was pleased with the resolute expression of his own counsel. Indeed, he had not been speaking for five minutes before almost all the ladies had their handkerchiefs in their hands.

JULIEN

As the presiding judge began his summing up, midnight struck. 'Here begins the last day of my life,' I thought. Then I felt myself exalted by a sense of duty. I had kept my emotions in check until then.

MATHILDE

When the judge asked Julien if he had anything to say, I wondered if he would maintain his determination not to speak; but to my relief, he rose.

JULIEN (*goes to accused's platform. He begins softly.*)

Gentlemen of the Jury,

My horror of scorn, which I believed I could endure at the moment of death, compels me to speak. Gentlemen, I have not the honour of belonging to your class. You see in me a peasant who has rebelled against his lowly station. (*His voice gets stronger.*)

I ask you for no mercy, I am under no illusion; death is in store for me; it will be a

just punishment. I have been guilty of attempting to kill the woman most worthy of everyone's respect, and esteem. Madame de Rênal had been like a mother to me. My crime is atrocious, and it was *premeditated*. I bitterly repent it. I feel only respect and filial adoration for my victim, Madame de Rênal.

I deserve death, Gentlemen of the Jury. But, even if I were I less guilty, I see before me men who will seek to punish in me, and to discourage forever this generation of young men. Young men who, born in an inferior class and ground down by poverty, have the good fortune to secure a decent education, and the audacity to mingle with what rich people arrogantly call society.

That is my crime, Gentlemen, and it will be punished all the more severely as I am not actually being tried by my peers. I do not see, anywhere among the jury, a peasant who has grown rich, but only outraged members of the bourgeoisie.

(He stands down. The light goes off him as he crosses to his cell bed.)

MATHILDE

One o'clock struck as the jury retired to their room.

Just as two o'clock had struck, a general stir was audible. The little door of the jury-room opened. M. le Baron de Valenod advanced with a grave, theatrical step, followed by the rest of the jury. He coughed, then declared that the unanimous opinion of the jury was that Julien Sorel was guilty of murder.

with premeditation: this verdict carried with it a sentence of death; it was pronounced a moment later.

Julien had signed his own death warrant. Heroic but foolish.

She exits.

SCENE 28

The death cell. Julien is lying on his bed.

JULIEN

It is strange, the verb to guillotine cannot be conjugated in all its tenses; one can say: "I shall be guillotined", but one cannot say: "I have been guillotined." Why not, if there is another life?

Pause.

A mayfly is born at nine o'clock in the morning in high summer, and dies at five o'clock in the afternoon; how could it understand the word *night*? Give it five hours more of existence, and it will see and understand what night is. Death, life, eternity, things like that would be quite simple to anyone who had sensory organs vast enough to conceive them.

Pause.

Where is Truth? In religion?... perhaps in true Christianity, whose priests would be unpaid like the Apostles. A true priest would speak to us of God, but not the God of the Bible, a cruel little vengeful tyrant, I never loved him. If I meet the Christian God, I am lost... But the God of Voltaire, just, good, infinite...ah! He will say to me perhaps: "Much

shall be pardoned thee, because thou hast loved much ..."

Pause.

Have I loved much? Ah! I did love Madame de Rênal, I realise that now. I have so few days left of life ... and she's not here; perhaps her husband will not allow her to come to Besançon again.

Ah! If a just God existed, I'd fall at His feet. "I have deserved death," I'd say to him; "but, Almighty God, bountiful God, merciful God, give me back the woman I love!"

He sinks to his knees in prayer.

Slow fade down and up. Some time has passed.

SCENE 29

Julien is asleep on the bed. Madame de Rênal enters. She has her right arm in a sling. She gently awakes him. At first he is startled. She calms him and takes him in her arms.

JULIEN

You're real! I can't believe...

MME. DE RENAL *(kisses him. She speaks with forced gaiety.)*

Sssh, my love. I have run away from Verrières because my first duty is to you. I've got permission to see you twice a day. Amazing what a lot of gold will do! I've never done bribery before. I find I quite enjoy it.

JULIEN

No words can express...

He is beyond words.

MME. DE RENAL *(comforts him, cradling his head.)*

I know, my love.

JULIEN

The happiest days of my short life were the ones we spent together walking in the woods at Vergy. And I've ruined everything chasing the rainbows of ambition, fortune, rank. I know now... too late... how much I love you. *(He holds her tightly, inadvertently hurting her wounded shoulder. She lets out a little scream.)* Oh! I'm sorry, my darling. You see, I can't help hurting you.

MME. DE RENAL

It's nearly healed. The scar will be like a badge of honour. If only I hadn't listened to that priest and written that terrible letter. I must admit I was feeling rather jealous too, when I read of your coming marriage to Mlle. de La Mole. I'm glad to say the arrangements I've been making for my visits are making your aristocratic lady love madly jealous in turn. She's even taken to have me followed.

JULIEN

Good heavens! Be careful, she's unpredictable. I'll try to convince her I'm encouraging you because your visits will help my appeal.

(Mme. de Rênal stands, preoccupied.)

My confessor says it would help if I became converted with great show. I said it would be an act of cowardice, and I'm not willing to despise myself at the end of my life.

MME. DE RENAL

I shall have to tell you. I have bad news. I've tried to forget it, and shield you from it, but you have to know. Better coming from me and not from the gaoler. Your appeal has been rejected. You are to be executed tomorrow. Oh, let us be happy for the few last hours we have together.

Julien stands and moves away from her. Light fades on her as she exits.

SCENE 30

Next day

JULIEN

So this is the last day of my life. I'm glad it's a sunny day. It will be a relief not to have to put up with the foul air in this cell. I'm not afraid.

He walks resolutely, head held high, and exits.

Swishing sound of guillotine blade descending. Bell tolls.

NO BLACKOUT. Otherwise the audience will think it is the end. Pass on quickly to

SCENE 31

Julien's corpse is [wheeled in?] laid out on a table, covered with a sheet. On a smaller table is [a plaster cast of] his severed head.

Mathilde enters, with wild eyes. She sinks to her knees beside the head. With trembling hands she picks it up, kisses it, and walks slowly offstage with it, holding before her the head of the man she had loved so much.

THE END

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

I shall coach the actors if necessary. Here are some traps:

French words are slightly STRESSED on last syllable.

~ means nasalised vowel before -n or -m.

--COLIN DUCKWORTH

Julien: the French way – not Jewlian. French [j] is not [dj]: [juliĒÑ]

Sorel: [sorEL]

Madame: [ma- DAMN] – not Eng. Madam.

Mademoiselle: [mademwoz-EL]

de Rênal: [d(e) renAL]

Chélan: [shay-LÃÑ]

Verrières: [very-AIR]

La Mole: [la-MOL]

Besançon: 2 different nasal vowels – [b'zãñ-SSÕÑ]

Mathilde: [matEELD]

Valenod: [val-NO]

baron: as in English

comte: [coñt] not [kont]

marquis: either English pron. [marqwiss] – marquess; or French [marKI]

Fbut not like Eng. marquee!

Charpentier: [sharpeñ-tyai]