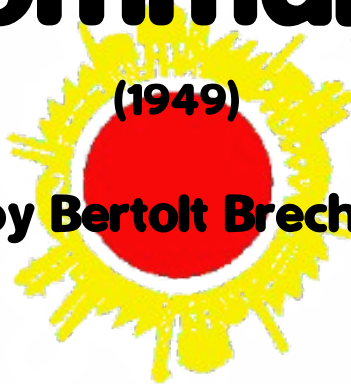


The Days of the Commune

(1949)

by Bertolt Brecht



*Liberated from
capitalist control
to educate the masses
by
Socialist Stories*

Characters:

Mme Cabet, seamstress · Jean Cabet, her son · Babette Cherron, his girlfriend · François Faure, seminarist, National Guard · Philippe Faure, his brother, Government Forces · Geneviève Guéricault, a young teacher · Papa, a National Guardsman · Coco, his friend · Portly gentleman · Waiter · Two children · Wounded German cuirassier · Pierre Langevin, a worker · Mme Pullard, the baker · Three women · Thiers · Jules Favre · Manservant · Bismarck · Beslay, Varlin, Rigault, Delescluze, Ranvier, delegates of the Commune · Four mayors · Delegates of the eleventh arrondissement · Tax-collector · His wife · Newspaper seller · Functionary · De Plœuc, Governor of the Bank of France · An aristocratic woman · Her niece · Servants · Street trader · Sergeant · Porter · Fat churchman · Old beggar · Officer in the National Guard · Wounded woman · Stretcher-bearers · Guy Suitry, Geneviève's fiancé · A nun · Ladies and gentlemen · National Guardsmen · Commune delegates · Government Forces

Around 19 January 1871. A little café in Montmartre in which a National Guard recruiting station has been set up. Outside the café a portly gentleman in a thick coat is sitting at a table in conversation with the waiter. Two children carrying a cardboard box are conferring together. Noise of artillery.

WAITER: Monsieur Bracque was here three times asking for you.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: What, Bracque here, in Paris?

WAITER: Not for very long. Here's a message, monsieur.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN *reading*: There's no peace and quiet in Paris these days. Prices, percentages, commission! Well, that's war, everyone contributes in his own way. Do you know anybody who would be willing to run certain errands for me? Somebody with nerve, but reliable. They rarely go together, eh?

WAITER: We'll find someone. *The portly gentleman gives him a tip.* And monsieur really prefers to wait out here in the cold?

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: The air in your place has got very bad lately.

WAITER *glancing at the notice, 'Citizens, your country is in danger, join the National Guard'*: I understand.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: Do you? If I pay 80 francs for my breakfast I don't want the sweat of the slums up my nose while I'm eating it. And kindly remain where you are and keep that vermin – *he points at the children* – away from me.

Enter a poorly dressed woman and a young worker, carrying a basket between them. The children approach the woman.

MME CABET: No, I don't want anything. Yes, I do. Later

perhaps. Rabbit, you say? Jean, what about a Sunday dinner?

JEAN: That isn't rabbit.

MME CABET: But he wants 14 francs 50 for it.

CHILD: The meat is fresh, madame.

MME CABET: First of all I have to see what they'll pay us today. Wait here, children. I might take the meat. *She makes to move on and a few cockades fall out of the basket.* Be a bit more careful, Jean. I'm sure we've lost some already along the way. Then I'll have to talk ninety to the dozen so they won't notice when they count.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: Business all around! Business, business, while the Prussians make war.

WAITER: Small scale and large, monsieur.

Noise and the tread of marching men in the background.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: What's that? You, run and see what's happening now. I'll give you five francs.

One of the children runs off.

MME CABET: We've brought the cockades, Emile.

WAITER: The gentleman has a little errand for your Jean, Madame Cabet.

MME CABET: Oh how kind of you! Jean has been out of work for two months. He's a stoker and of course the trains aren't running any more. What do you say, Jean?

JEAN: I'm not one for errands, mother. You know that.

MME CABET: I'm very sorry. Jean is the kindest person in the world. But he has opinions. He's a bit like his late father. *They carry the basket into the café.*

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: This war won't last much longer. Aristide Jouve says so. All the business that could be done with this war has been done. There's nothing left in it. *Three National Guardsmen come limping down the street from the fighting at the forts. The first, Papa, is a building worker in his middle years; the second, Coco, a watchmaker; the third, François Faure, a young seminarist with his arm in a sling. They are escorting a captured German cuirassier with a dirty bandage around his chin.*

CHILDREN: A Fritz! Did you get a thrashing, Fritz? Can we tug his epaulettes?

PAPA: Why not?

CHILDREN: Is it going well at the front?

PAPA: Yes, for the Prussians.

CHILD: But the Governor won't capitulate, so they say.

PAPA: At least not to the French, my son. How does it go?
Down with the Gov . . .

CHILDREN: . . . vernor!

PAPA *to the waiter*: Three Pernods. No, four.

WAITER: Very good. But the *patron* insists you pay in advance. Four Pernods, that's twelve francs.

COCO: Man, can't you see we've been in the battle?

WAITER *softly*: Twelve francs.

COCO: They're out of their minds.

PAPA: No, they're not out of their minds. We are, Gustave. You'd have to be to fight for one and a half francs a day. That's exactly half a Pernod in this place, isn't it? And what do we fight with? And how? *He thrusts his weapon under the portly gentleman's nose*. That's a breech-loader from the forties. Good enough for the new battalions. A decent chassepot, that cost the state seventy francs, would cost two hundred now. But we'd hit the mark with it, monsieur.

COCO: Fetch the Pernod, you swine. Or there'll be trouble. We're defending Paris and you cut-throats are making a killing on the drinks.

PAPA: Monsieur, we didn't get rid of the Stinker, declare a republic and form the National Guard so that you could make money on our efforts.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: There we have it! Anarchy! You're not interested in defending Paris, you people. You want to conquer her.

COCO: Oh really? And you and your sort own her, do you?
To Papa: Nice, isn't he? Nice and fat. He doesn't look bad on the siege, does he?

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: Messieurs, you seem to be forgetting where the front is.

The child that ran off now returns.

PAPA: What's that? *To the third National Guardsman, a young man with a bloody bandage round his head*:

François, the gentleman thinks you've forgotten where you got your scratch.

COCO: The gentleman thinks we should keep our minds on Fritz when we can't get any beer. Fritz, what do you think? You're not a fat man, that's for sure. Waiter, a Pernod for Fritz or we'll wreck the place. Four Pernods for two francs, do you hear?

WAITER: Very good. *Exit.*

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: Stay where you are, do you hear?

CHILDREN *singing*: Fritz is not a fat man! Fritz is not a fat man!

CHILD *who returned*: Monsieur, what you can hear is the 207th Battalion. They are very discontented and are marching to the Hôtel de Ville, to hang the generals.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: Messieurs, while the Prussians . . .

PAPA: Oh yes, while the Prussians . . . The siege! The ring of iron! Break out, beat the Prussians and you'll have potatoes again. We're beginning to see who's really besieging us. You and your ilk most of all. Or is it the Prussians putting up the price of potatoes?

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: Messieurs, I hear you discussing the price of potatoes even as men are fighting on the ramparts . . .

PAPA: Fighting! Dying, you mean! Do you know what's going on? We lie all night in the rain and the muck in the fields around Mont Valérien. Me with my rheumatism! The attack begins at ten o'clock. We take the fort at Montretout, the park at Buzenval, we take St Cloud, we advance to Garches. Of 150 guns only thirty are in use, we take Garches without artillery cover, we're through, the Prussians are running for their lives. Then come orders from the rear: Halt! We wait two hours. Then come orders from the rear: Fall back! And Trochu evacuates Montretout and all the positions we took. What is the meaning of that, monsieur?

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: I assume your generals know where the enemy will concentrate his fire.

COCO: They know all right. That's where they send the National Guard, monsieur.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: Enough. Have you any idea what you are saying? Are you accusing your commanding officers, France's generals, of treason? May I perhaps ask you for proof?

PAPA: He wants proof, Gustave. And we have none. Except death. Except that we die like flies. Fine, you are dead, Monsieur Whatsyername. Be so kind as to prove you've been hit over the head. Say the word and we'll open proceedings. Ah, nothing to say? I politely enquire what your demands might be, Monsieur Whatsyername, and you don't move a muscle.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: We know all about your demands and your demonstrations at the Hôtel de Ville. The Commune and its extortions!

COCO: Carry on, carry on. We've got time. We're still waiting for the 101st. It won't start till then.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: The long and short of it is you don't want to pay your rents. France is fighting for her life and all you think about is your pay and your pensions. Butter's too dear! But be warned: Paris is losing patience.

The National Guardsmen stand in silence.

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: You are the traitors. But take note: We don't find your newspapers amusing any more. We've had enough selfishness from the mob. Quite enough.

The waiter comes back with four Pernods and a casserole covered by a serviette. The portly gentleman waves him away.

WAITER: Your chicken, monsieur.

COCO: Monsieur, your chicken!

PORTLY GENTLEMAN: I'll have you thrown out. I've had enough of you and the whole National Guard. Don't you dare . . .

The portly gentleman exits hastily.

CHILDREN: Monsieur, the five francs! *They chase after him.*

WAITER: Messieurs, permit me to offer you some refreshment.

COCO offering the cuirassier a glass: There you are, Fritz. Oh damnation, you can't, can you? Poor devil. Your good health then. *They drink.*

Mme Cabet and her son come out of the café, still carrying the basket.

JEAN to the waiter: Where's the man who had an errand for me?

The waiter motions him to be silent. Then the young Guardsman who has been wounded recognises the Cabets.

FRANÇOIS: Madame Cabet!

JEAN: François!

MME CABET: François, are you wounded? I must ask you to pay your share of the rent on the room. You know the government is making us pay all the arrears. And in there now they won't take my cockades. I'm ruined, we'll be on the streets.

FRANÇOIS: But Madame Cabet, I haven't been paid for three weeks. Things are a bit tight for me as well at the moment.

MME CABET: But when will you pay? Messieurs, it's no laughing matter. He's my lodger.

COCO: Yes, François, when will you pay? Madame, we understand your worries. All we can say is that two battalions, back from two days' fighting outside the walls, are just on their way to the Hôtel de Ville, to put a few ticklish questions to the government.

PAPA: And one among them might well be the remission of all our rents. Meanwhile all we can offer you, as a small mark of our sympathy, is the gift of this chicken here that a gentleman ordered but did not eat. *They conduct Mme Cabet to the table in front of the café, take the casserole from the waiter's hands and serve up the chicken elegantly to Mme Cabet.* Garçon, the patron would do well in future to insist that the better class of customer pay in advance. It might be that circumstances will arise which make it impossible for them to breakfast satisfactorily. Will you get into trouble?

WAITER: Indeed I will, monsieur. Serious trouble. I shall be obliged to decide to join you. Perhaps the government will pay for Madame Cabet's chicken? Two battalions of the National Guard should surely be enough to push through such a demand.

COCO: Your good health, madame.

PAPA: Bon appétit! The 101st are honoured to entertain you.

MME CABET: Messieurs, you are very kind. As it happens, I don't have all that much in my belly today. Chicken is my favourite dish. Will you allow me to share it with my son Jean?

JEAN: Present company might be interested to know why they've stopped taking cockades in there. The officials inside, after new directives from above, consider recruitment to the new battalions of the National Guard to be at an end.

COCO: What's that? Did you hear that, Papa?

PAPA: I'm not too bothered. She'll come with us to the Hôtel de Ville.

COCO: Do you understand, madame? Papa wants you to come with us to the Hôtel de Ville to show your cockades that are not needed any more. Put your chicken with them in the basket.

FRANÇOIS: And now here come the 101st!

Behind and above the wooden fence the 101st Battalion can be seen passing. Bayonets with loaves of bread impaled. Flags. The National Guardsmen help Mme Cabet to her feet and take her with them.

PAPA *pointing to Jean*: What's the matter with him? Why isn't he fighting? Are we too far to the left for him in the new battalions?

MME CABET: Oh no, monsieur. I'd say a bit far to the right, I do beg your pardon.

PAPA: Ah!

JEAN: And consider me one of yours from now on, messieurs. I like the way you're heading.

Papa takes François' képi and puts it on Jean Cabet's head.

FRANÇOIS: I've been very bored without you.

They leave. The waiter flings the serviette on to the little table, turns out the lamp and is about to follow them when he catches sight of the cuirassier, who has been forgotten. He shoos him away, driving him after the National Guards.

WAITER: Quick march, Fritz, quick march!

25 January 1871. Bordeaux. Thiers and Jules Favre in conversation. Thiers, still in his dressing gown, is testing the temperature of his bath water and directing his manservant to add hot or cold.

THIERS *drinking his morning milk*: This war must end, it is becoming an abomination. We fought it and we have lost it. What are we waiting for?

FAVRE: But the Prussian demands! Herr von Bismarck speaks of five billion in reparations, the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, the retention of all prisoners-of-war and the continuing occupation of the forts until everything is concluded to his satisfaction. It will be our ruin!

THIERS: But what the Parisians are demanding, won't that be our ruin?

FAVRE: Certainly.

THIERS: Will you take coffee? *Favre shakes his head*. Then milk, like me? Not allowed even that? Ah, Favre, would that we still had stomachs! For we do still have appetites. But back to Herr von Bismarck. A student of the bierkeller, now demented. He racks up his demands because he knows we must accept them, all of them.

FAVRE: Must we really? What about the iron and tin mines in Lorraine? They are the future of French industry.

THIERS: What about our secret agents? They are being thrown in the Seine. What use are iron and tin mines to France if the Commune is in Paris?

FAVRE: Five billion! All our trade!

THIERS: It is the price of order and stability.

FAVRE: And Prussia's lead in Europe for three generations.

THIERS: And the securing of our rule for five.

FAVRE: We shall be a nation of peasants, in these modern times.

THIERS: I'm counting on the peasants. They are the cornerstone of peace. What do they care about Lorraine? They don't even know where it is. Favre, you ought at least to take a glass of water.

FAVRE: Is it really necessary, I ask myself.

THIERS: Even a sip of water is a sign of life. Just the swallowing of it. Oh, I see. Yes, the other is necessary too, absolutely. The price of order and stability.

FAVRE: The National Guard will be France's downfall. We made a patriotic sacrifice and armed the mob against the Prussians. Now they have weapons for use against us. That is the truth. But is it not also the case, can it not also be said that these people are defending Paris, that they are actually fighting?

THIERS: My dear Favre, what is this thing Paris? They speak of Paris in those circles as a holy place that they'd rather burn than surrender. They forget that Paris consists of valuables, they forget because they have no valuables themselves. The scum are quite prepared to blow everything up. But it doesn't belong to them. They are screaming to be given petroleum, but for the authorities, for us, Paris is not a symbol but a possession. You don't defend it by setting fire to it.

Sound of marching men. Thiers and Favre freeze. Thiers, too agitated to speak, waves his manservant to go to the window.

MANSERVANT: A company of the marine, monsieur.

THIERS: If they suppose I could ever forget those humiliations . . .

FAVRE: Bordeaux is quiet, is it not?

THIERS: What does quiet mean? Perhaps quiet is too quiet. Such a bad example! Favre, we must exterminate them. We must smash their unwashed faces on the cobbles, in the name of culture. Our civilisation is founded on property. Property must be protected at all costs. They have the nerve to dictate to us what we must give up and what we can keep? Get me sabres, get me cavalry! If it takes a sea of blood to wash Paris clean of its vermin then let us have a sea of blood. My towel!

The manservant hands him his towel, Thiers wipes the foam from his lips.

FAVRE: You are becoming agitated, think of your health, so precious to us all.

THIERS *choking*: And you armed them! From that moment

on, from the morning of 3 September on, I've had only one thought in my head: how to end the war, quickly, at once.

FAVRE: But they fight like devils, alas. Our good friend Trochu is right: the National Guard won't see reason until ten thousand of them have bled to death. Dear, dear. He sends them into the fight like cattle, to dampen their ardour.

He whispers into Thiers' ear.

THIERS: No, no, he is free to listen. Hippolyte is a patriot.

FAVRE: I can assure you, Monsieur Thiers, that in this matter at least you have Herr von Bismarck's entire sympathy.

THIERS *drily*: Delighted to hear it since he thinks me, so I am told, less capable than the average horsetrader, and that after meeting me in person.

FAVRE: Mere boorishness, not at all his real opinion of you.

THIERS: I think I may say that I have risen above the personal, my dear Favre. What interests me is how Herr von Bismarck proposes to help us.

FAVRE: He suggested to me personally that as soon as there is a ceasefire he might permit some provision of foodstuffs to the people, but would then put them back on half-rations until they give up their weapons. He thought such a procedure might be more effective than a continuation of hunger.

THIERS: Not bad. We remind our Parisians what meat tastes like. I've never denied that Herr von Bismarck has talent.

FAVRE: He will even restrain the firms in Berlin who are looking to supply Paris with food.

THIERS: Talent and courage go together, do they not, Favre? And by the way, the Prussians must undertake to occupy those *quartiers* in which the National Guard have placed their guns.

FAVRE: A very good point. Excellent.

THIERS: I daresay Herr von Bismarck is not the only one with talent. We shall, for example, also get it written into the capitulation treaty that the first instalment of reparations, 500 million, won't fall due until after the pacification of Paris. That will give Herr von Bismarck an interest in our victory. And incidentally, I should be glad if the word *pacification* were used more often. It is one of those words

that make everything perfectly clear. Ah yes, the reparations. Hippolyte, you can leave us now.

MANSERVANT: Your bath is at the right temperature, monsieur. *Exit.*

THIERS: What is their thinking about these sums of money?

FAVRE: It has been proposed that certain German firms, especially Herr von Bleichröder, Herr von Bismarck's own banker, should finance the reparations. Commission was mentioned . . . As a member of the government I did of course refuse to accept any percentages.

THIERS: Of course. Did they give figures?

Favre writes a figure on a scrap of paper which Thiers takes and reads.

THIERS: Impossible.

FAVRE: As I said.

THIERS: We must have peace. France needs it. I hope I shall have the power to carry it through.

FAVRE: Your election is absolutely secured, Monsieur Thiers. Twenty-three departments are for you, all the rural ones.

THIERS: I shall need that power. The forces of disorder are armed.

FAVRE: Monsieur Thiers, France trembles for your health. Only you can save her now.

THIERS *matter-of-factly*: I'm aware of that. That is why you see me drinking milk, which I detest, my dear Favre.

3

Night of 17-18 March in the rue Pigalle. There is a cannon on the street.

a

One o'clock in the morning. François Faure and Jean Cabet, seated on cane chairs, are guarding the cannon. Babette Cherron is just getting up from Jean's lap.

BABETTE *stroking the barrel of the gun*: Good night, my love.

Makes her way slowly to a house at the lower end of the street and enters there.

JEAN: Girls have to be given things. They are materialists, it excites their senses. It used to be a pretty dressing table, nowadays it's a cannon that Monsieur Thiers wanted to give to Herr von Bismarck.

FRANÇOIS: And he'd have it now if we hadn't fetched it here.
- Geneviève isn't a materialist.

JEAN: The little teacher girl? No, she's pure spirit and that's why you want to go to bed with her.

FRANÇOIS: I don't want to go to bed with her.

JEAN: Babette says she's got a nice body.

FRANÇOIS: How can you two discuss her?

JEAN: They live together, don't they? Incidentally, she's engaged. He's a prisoner-of-war, a lieutenant. Her breasts are her best bit.

FRANÇOIS: You're trying to annoy me, aren't you?

JEAN: The way you talk about girls no one would ever guess you're from the country. But you'd surely had it with a dairymaid by the time you were fourteen.

FRANÇOIS: You won't annoy me.

JEAN: Won't I? Well anyway I told Babette to tell Geneviève you're interested. It might amuse her to wind a priest around her little finger.

FRANÇOIS: I'm a physicist.

JEAN: OK, a physicist. Isn't physics the science of bodies?

FRANÇOIS: But you said yourself she loves a lieutenant.

JEAN: I said she's engaged to him.

FRANÇOIS: Same thing.

JEAN *laughing*: You've got the wrong idea. As though you only want to go to bed with a person because you love them! Truth is, some days you know first thing when you get up: I've got to have a woman today. Why should it be any different for women? It's a need. Not necessarily brought about by the sight of a particular pair of breasts, but just so. And thereupon you find her breasts particular. It's the same for women. In a word, seize hold of such a day, and you are Mr Right. Even with Geneviève.

FRANÇOIS: Quite wrong. And now I'm off to bed. *He stands up.* I'm very glad I've got my little room with you again. JEAN *likewise standing up*: I don't think we need keep guard any longer either. If they were going to raid us it would have to be in the middle of the night. White bread tomorrow, so I hear.

FRANÇOIS: By the way, Jean, since we were talking about physics: I suppose my microscope and my Lavoisier are safe at your uncle's?

JEAN *in embarrassment*: At my uncle's? At Langevin's?

FRANÇOIS: Your mother gave them to him, to look after.

JEAN: Oh yes. Yes, of course. They're absolutely safe at Langevin's.

FRANÇOIS: It's just that I could do with the Lavoisier.

JEAN: Of course.

They carry the chairs into the house.

b

Five in the morning. Women, among them Geneviève Guéricault and Babette, are queuing outside a baker's not yet opened.

WOMEN: White bread from Papa Thiers! That's supposed to make his sell-out taste better. – Paris for ten tons of flour! – And no trains come in either. The flour was here all along. – But they took my old man's leg off just last week. Shrapnel. At the same time they were already doing a deal. – Now they must have something else up their sleeves. They never give us anything for nothing. Lady Muck that I used to do the washing for, if she ever gave me a pair of her old knickers I knew she'd reported my Emile for remarks he'd made. – My old man told them he'd take his leg home with him or they'd tell him at the pensions place he never did have two. – Thiers is getting five million from the Germans. – And how much from some Frenchmen I could name? – They're capitulating though there's more than 300,000 National Guard in Paris alone. – *Because there's 300,000!* – And they're quite happy to let the Prussians keep our

prisoners till we've paid. – To hell with their filthy war! Good thing it's over. – But who'll pay for the peace? – We will, citizen. Who else? The ones with nothing pay. – So we've got nothing? We've got 200,000 bayonets, madame. – I tell you it's only a ceasefire, they'll never take our streets, the Prussians won't and neither will Thiers. – He didn't risk coming into Paris, Herr von Bismarck, did he? Paris wasn't for sale. – Well, you're up early! The old lady wanted to be on her own, I suppose. Someone else putting it up for a change? *A man has arrived with a poster. He puts it up and goes away again. Babette leaves the queue and reads it out.* From Monsieur Thiers! 'Peace means order and stability. Citizens of Paris, trade is languishing, demand is falling off, capital is being frightened away. Those to blame must be handed over to justice. Order must be restored at once, fully and unassailably.' Oh là là!

The baker has begun removing the iron bars from her shop door.

WOMEN: Have you heard, Madame Pullard? Business is bad even though there's a war. – How true! It's a week since I had an order for a locomotive. And all my capital has been frightened away by the National Guard and their carryings-on. Hasn't yours?

BAKER: Demonstrations, demonstrations, demonstrations! I should have thought the government's white bread spoke louder than that, ladies.

WOMEN: White bread for order and stability, eh? For paying the rent.

BABETTE: The print's still wet. Seems they're in a hurry.

WOMEN: Wind even before we eat any bread! They can't give us a mouthful without farting out something about order and stability. – Watch your language, citizen. Order! What will Mademoiselle Guéricault say, her being a teacher and not knowing anything about wind? – Leave Mademoiselle Guéricault alone. There's nothing wrong with her. She agrees with what I said and she did her bit with the others when the Cabets and Papa fetched the cannon in from Clichy before the Prussians came. – And do *you* think

Monsieur Thiers only let the Prussians have Clichy because our guns were there?

GENEVIÈVE: Yes, I do, citizen. The Central Committee of the National Guard had reports to that effect.

WOMEN: She's political. — Suppose she is, does that mean she's not telling the truth? — My old man says it was politics took his leg off, not grapeshot. That's why he's political and reads *La Patrie en danger*.

A few government soldiers, among them Philippe Faure, have appeared near the cannon. Babette, still standing by the poster, addresses Philippe.

BABETTE: Oh Philippe, are you back? You're just in time, the bakery's open again.

PHILIPPE: Shush, Babette. I've not come to say hello in there. *He and his comrades busy themselves with the cannon.*

BABETTE: What do you want with the cannon?

PHILIPPE: It's going to Versailles. Orders.

BABETTE *calling to the women*: Hey! They're stealing our cannon.

WOMEN: They're doing what? Them and who else?

GENEVIÈVE *hurrying over*: Philippe! You should be ashamed of yourself.

BABETTE: It's the baker's lad. He led them here, he knows his way around these streets.

PHILIPPE: What are you doing out so early? Hold on a minute before you murder us.

GENEVIÈVE: They were giving us white bread, so that we'd give you the guns, like sheep for shearing.

The women run across.

WOMEN: Hey you! Those are ours. They were bought with our money. Our district collected for them.

PHILIPPE: But the war's over.

GENEVIÈVE: Oh so now you want to start a war with us?

PHILIPPE: The guns have to be given up to the Prussians.

WOMEN: Then let the Prussians come and get them. Hands off! You dare touch them, you shit-arses! Fetch the guard from Cabets'!

Geneviève runs to the Cabets' house. Rings the bell. Mme Cabet looks out from an upstairs window.

GENEVIÈVE: Wake Jean! They're taking your cannon. *She runs back.* They're not for the Prussians, they're for Monsieur Thiers. He needs them against us, don't let him have them, citizens!

WOMEN: Hands off that cannon! It's Madame Cabet's cannon. *Jean and François rush from the house in shirt and trousers.*

BABETTE: Jean, they've come for the cannon. Philippe led them here.

Noise from the streets nearby, rifle fire and, later, alarm bells.

GENEVIÈVE: There are cannon in the rue du Tabernacle too. It's a raid on the whole quarter. Now we know why they're giving us white bread.

JEAN *calling back*: François, your brother's here, for Thiers.

PHILIPPE *in among the women*: Now, now, ladies. Move aside, will you? I've got my orders.

JEAN: Yes, move aside, let us get at them.

FRANÇOIS *running up with fixed bayonet*: Leave the gun where it is, Philippe, it doesn't belong to you.

BAKER *from inside her shop*: You carry out your orders, Philippe, or I'll not have you back in the bakery.

PHILIPPE: How long have you been in the National Guard?

FRANÇOIS: College is shut. Move aside.

The women step back. François levels his rifle.

PHILIPPE: Put your gun away, kid.

BABETTE: Shoot him.

GENEVIÈVE *flinging herself in front of Philippe*: No bloodshed!

JEAN *dragging her out of the line of fire*: You keep out of it.

PHILIPPE *levelling his rifle*: Put your gun down, kid.

FRANÇOIS: Make one move and I'll fire. Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. *Continues to pray, all the while aiming at Philippe.*

WOMEN: So you'd massacre us just because your scabby generals tell you to?

GENEVIÈVE: Oh you poor fools! You can't take the cannon without horses. We'll throw ourselves under the wheels.

PHILIPPE: I'll count to three. One.

MME CABET *coming out of the house with Papa*: Philippe, put

that gun down at once. You know very well you've had no education, what are you thinking of, answering your brother back who's studying physics? And I've brought some wine for you all. I'm sure they sent you off without any breakfast.

PHILIPPE *looks round at his comrades, who have not taken aim, and slowly puts down his rifle*: Madame Cabet, you are preventing me from carrying out an order.

WOMEN *laughing, and surrounding him*: That's the way, baker. They can't ask you to shoot your own brother, now can they?

BAKER: You're sacked, Philippe. I don't give employment to traitors.

BABETTE *kissing Philippe*: That's for your treachery.

PHILIPPE: I'm nobody's brother, ladies, and I'm not a baker. I'm under orders.

FRANÇOIS *uncertainly to Genèvieve*: Don't I get anything?

GENEVIÈVE *in high spirits*: Take what you want.

FRANÇOIS: That's not an answer.

WOMEN *in among the soldiers*: How dare you fall on the women when you've no dishonourable intentions? You should be ashamed of yourselves!

SOLDIERS: The war's over. We want to go home.

WOMEN: Oh là là! He wants to go home. And where's home, sonny boy?

SOLDIER: The Auvergne. And soon it will be seedtime. You damn city people never think of that.

WOMEN: Have a drink, sonny boy. - Turn up your rifles. Have you got nothing else that's stiff? - Madame Cabet, give them blankets, they're quaking with cold, loving's impossible.

GENEVIÈVE: This cannon belongs to Madame Cabet. She lives here. You can't take it off her any more than you can her saucepans.

PAPA: Long live Madame Cabet, sole owner of the cannon of the rue Pigalle! *He lifts her up and sits her on the cannon.* *To the soldiers*: You see, we only needed to talk. *To the women*: Now you've got it back, look after it. Most important, don't let any one of them out of Paris now.

Keep hold of them all. Press them to your breast, or to your breasts, they can't do any damage there.

A worker, Pierre Langevin, comes from the next street, where it has got quieter. He has children with him.

LANGEVIN: Salut, Papa! You managed, did you? And no bloodshed?

PHILIPPE *to his comrades*: How can we help it if they don't send us any horses? We can't shove the things through the women without.

PAPA: Everything OK. What about everywhere else?

LANGEVIN: The whole district's awake. No cannons gone so far.

CHILDREN: They tried to pinch our guns at the Moulin de la Galette as well. And they shot two of our people in the rue Lepic.

MME CABET *to the soldiers*: Messieurs, this is my brother-in-law, Pierre Langevin, from the Central Committee of the National Guard.

LANGEVIN: In the rue Granot General Lecomte gave the order to fire, but his men fraternised and he was arrested.

PAPA: Where is he? The swine. It was him who said the Guard should be given a bloodletting. Everyone in Paris knows it was.

LANGEVIN: He was taken to the lock-up.

PAPA: They'll let him escape. If he's not shot in five minutes he'll get away.

LANGEVIN: He'll be brought to justice, comrade.

PAPA: We're justice. *He hurries away.*

MME CABET: Will somebody help me down from this cannon?

LANGEVIN *to the government troops*: And what will you do? So long as you're still armed . . .

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS: Oh shit! Against our own people . . . *The soldiers reverse their rifles.*

GENEVIÈVE *to the children*: And you can tear down those silly posters.

They do so.

JEAN: Lift maman down, will you? And then to the Hôtel de Ville again. Arrest Thiers! He must tell us what he wanted the cannon for.

BABETTE: Three kisses for Thiers alive!

c

Eight in the morning. The baker is putting the iron bars back across her shop door. Philippe, standing nearby, is looking sourly at an enormous woman with a rifle over her shoulder pacing up and down in front of the cannon.

BAKER: There'll be disturbances, that's for sure. If they go ahead with the Commune everyone's talking about, there'll be looting. Everything shared out, then they drink their share and share out the rest again. You're a troublemaker yourself and I'm not having you back near my oven. And your brother a young priest! And he's a troublemaker too!

PHILIPPE: He's only in the seminary because there's nowhere else he could go and study.

BAKER: So he's stealing an education from the friars of Saint Joseph! Typical of you people – communards! *Exit angrily into the shop.*

Geneviève comes out of the house next door.

GENEVIÈVE: Good morning, Philippe. How are you feeling now the New Age has begun? *He growls.* Because it has begun. There's an end of violence. We've taken their cannon away.

PHILIPPE: And now you women have got them. A new age, my foot!

Dispirited, he goes into the house where the Cabets and his brother live. Geneviève, in good spirits, pulls on her gloves. Up the street, looking grim, comes Papa.

GENEVIÈVE: Good morning, monsieur. Didn't you go to the rue Granot last night, where they arrested General Thomas? What happened to him?

PAPA: He was shot, citizen.

GENEVIÈVE: Was that right? Who shot him?

PAPA: Who do you think shot him? The people.

GENEVIÈVE: Without a trial?

PAPA: Of course not. After a trial by the people.

GENEVIÈVE: And you were there?

PAPA: Everyone was there who was there. And don't be worrying about the enemies of the people. This is serious. *In an ill humour, he goes into the Cabets' house. Geneviève, the teacher, watches him go, confused.*

4

19 March 1871. Hôtel de Ville. Staircase to the assembly room of the Central Committee of the National Guard. Outside the door sits a National Guardsman, eating bread and cheese and checking people's passes. Papa, Coco and Mme Cabet are waiting. Delegates are arriving for the session.

DELEGATES: If we want to call new elections we must come to some understanding with the mayors of the twenty arrondissements. – On the contrary! We must send in a battalion and arrest them. They are hyenas, they wouldn't be mayors if they weren't. – The main thing is to get an overwhelming majority, all of Paris will turn out to vote if the mayors join us. We must receive them. – For God's sake, no violence! We shan't win Paris by terror. – Who is Paris? *Exit all but one of the delegates.*

PAPA *addressing him*: Citizen of the Central Committee, could you tell citizen Pierre Langevin in there that we have to speak to him? This is his sister-in-law. Why don't they let people in?

COMMITTEE MEMBER: The room is too small, citizen. And don't forget the enemy is listening.

PAPA: It's more important that the people listen. At least leave the door open.

The Committee member goes in and leaves the door open.

VOICE: Urgent motion from the 67th Battalion: 'That in consideration of the hardships suffered by the people of Paris and of their so generously shedding their blood in the defence of the motherland a distribution of a million francs be made in the twenty-two arrondissements, this being money saved by ceasing all payments to officials in the government that has betrayed us.'

CRIES: Carried!

MME CABET: They're getting on with it, aren't they?

PAPA: The most important thing is we march on Versailles.

MME CABET: There won't only *be* white bread, I'll actually have the money to buy it.

PAPA: But if we don't march on Versailles at once, there won't be white bread for very long, Madame Cabet.

VOICE: We continue our discussion of the question of elections. Delegate Varlin.

VARLIN'S VOICE: Citizen Guardsmen! About two o'clock this morning the Government, with the help of a few regular battalions, made an attempt to disarm the capital's National Guard and to seize the cannon whose handing over to the Prussians we had prevented.

CRY: Second attempt to emasculate Paris! The first was foisting a general on us.

Four gentlemen in top hats come up the staircase: the mayors.

VARLIN: Citizens, why was this attack undertaken? To deliver up our country, robbed of her last weapons, to Bismarck's most extreme demands and at the same time to make her solely and helplessly answerable to these demands. So that those who perpetrated the criminal war will get it paid for now by those who bled in it. So that from making good money out of the war they may move to making good money out of the peace. Citizen Guardsmen, the Commune will demand that the deputies, senators, generals, factory owners, estate owners and of course the church, who are to blame for the war, will now be the ones who pay the Prussians their five billion, and that to this end we sell their property.

Loud applause. The mayors have entered the room.

CHAIRMAN'S VOICE: The Central Committee welcomes the mayors of Paris.

ONE OF THE MAYORS: This is the Hôtel de Ville of Paris. You have occupied it by military force. Will you please tell us by what right?

CRY: In the name of the city's people, Monsieur le Maire. Consider yourselves their guests and you are welcome.

Cries of protest.

MAYORS: You know what this answer means? It will be said these people want revolution.

CRY: What do you mean 'want'? The revolution has happened. Look around you.

MAYORS: Citizens of the National Guard, we, the mayors of Paris, are willing to put it to the newly elected National Assembly in Versailles that you wish to elect a new Municipal Council under their authority.

CRIES: No, no, no! An independent Commune!

VARLIN'S VOICE: Not only the election of a Municipal Council but real municipal freedoms, the right of the National Guard to elect its own leaders, the exclusion of the standing army from the whole of Paris. In brief: a free Paris.

MAYORS: That is the red flag. Beware! If you unfurl that flag over the Hôtel de Ville your polling stations will be avoided like plague houses and Paris will spit on your elections.

CRY: The Committee will take that risk. We trust and believe that the people of Paris not only have hands to work with but also eyes to see.

Applause.

MAYORS: And they will see all sorts of things. I for one have no desire to stand for election alongside murderers. *Murmurings.* The Committee did not protest against the murders of General Thomas and General Lecomte.

CRIES: We had nothing to do with it. – I object to the word 'murder'. It was the just execution of murderers by the people of Paris. – Beware of censuring the people, or they will censure you. – No threats! The people joined hands with the bourgeoisie in the Republic of 4 September. – Indeed they did, and that alliance must continue. Everyone must take part in the elections, everyone! Until Paris has voted for us we acknowledge the Government in Versailles as the rightful power of the state. – And what if we do? The National Guard is the nation in arms against the power of the state.

The mayors appear in the doorway.

ONE OF THE MAYORS *calling back angrily into the room:* We note with satisfaction that you are divided even among yourselves.

CRIES *in the room, and murmurings*: We need the entrepreneurs to start up production again. Very well, turn your back on the people to humour the bourgeoisie. The people will withdraw from us and we shall discover that no revolution is possible with the bourgeoisie.

PAPA: That's the truth.

MAYORS: We leave you our sincere good wishes. May you succeed in your task, it is rather too large for us. *Exit.*

CRIES: The bourgeoisie are quitting the room. Good.

PAPA *shouting after the mayors*: Villains!

Langevin and Geneviève come out of the room.

PAPA: Pierre, you must bring a motion at once: people protecting the traitor generals must be eliminated. Shoot them like dogs, straight away, all of them, without trial, or you are lost.

LANGEVIN: What have you got to do with the shootings? Calm down.

PAPA: Me? Nothing. What do you mean? The Committee is dallying.

LANGEVIN: Wouldn't you do better to listen? *He opens the door again.*

RIGAUT'S VOICE: Citizens of the Guard, the right to decide the fate of the country can only rest in the hands of those who are defending it, namely the proletariat, the 200,000 combatants. Their ballot paper is the bullet.

Murmurings.

CRIES: Do you really want to throttle the elections? That means anarchy. Remember it means civil war. And with Prussian batteries from the Bois de Vincennes to the Bois de Boulogne. Unity! The elections are agreed.

GENEVIÈVE: We are divided, that is bad.

LANGEVIN *smiling*: No, it is good, it means movement. So long as it's movement in the right direction. But why have you come?

PAPA: In the 101st we've been talking about the gates not being closed. All night long they've been sending their police, their baggage and their artillery off to Versailles. And that's where Thiers is. We are to tell you that we'll

march on Versailles as soon as you give the signal, Langevin.

GENEVIÈVE *quickly*: That would be civil war as well.

COCO: There are 20,000 men with bread stuck on their bayonets camped outside the Hôtel de Ville alone, and fifty cannon have been brought up around the building. You only need shout through the window "To Versailles!" and everything will be settled once and for all.

LANGEVIN *slowly*: Perhaps. But we need the agreement of France, do we not?

PAPA: Good, then vote. Or don't vote, that's also good. But destroy the enemy while you can, now.

LANGEVIN *hesitantly*: It's hard enough getting the Commune on its feet. Once we're there, Thiers and his henchmen will be a handful of bankrupts in the eyes of France. But I know what you mean, Papa. It's good that you're breathing down our necks. Don't leave us in peace, you are always further on than we are. *He hurries back into the room.*

PAPA: COCO, let's leave it at that. They must know what they're doing after all.

They turn to go. Then they hear the closing speech.

VARLIN'S VOICE: Citizens of the National Guard! The proletariat of Paris, amid the defeats and treachery of the ruling classes, decimated on the battlefields of their own and the Prussian bourgeoisie, weakened by the hunger visited upon them by the Prussian generals and the Parisian black-marketeers, in the early hours of this morning rose up to defend what is left of their shattered *quartiers* and to take their destiny into their own hands. It is the destiny of France. The so-called Government of National Defence, formed by the bourgeoisie after military defeat, has been unmasked and shown to be a Government of National Treachery. Those same people who brought in the Emperor for their adventures and dropped him when he did not deliver the loot, they are now bringing in Herr von Bismarck to defend their wealth against the ones who created it, the proletariat. But the capital of France, declaring the revolt against this gang of adventurers to be

legitimate, arms herself now and strides calmly and determinedly to the election of her own free and sovereign Commune and calls on all free Communes of France to gather themselves around her.

Loud applause and cries of 'Long live the Commune!'

GENEVIÈVE: This is one of the greatest days in the history of France.

PAPA: And a part of its greatness will be that nobody can say the representatives of the people wanted civil war. It will be a New Age and there will not have been a bloodbath.

RESOLUTION

1

Whereas you knew how weak we were and made
Laws so we should ever more be slaves
These laws in future shall be set aside
Because we've had enough of being slaves.

Whereas you thereupon will threaten us
With rifles and with cannon we hereby
Resolve from now on we shall fear death less
Than we fear living wretchedly.

2

Whereas we're hungry and hungry we'll remain
If we put up with being robbed by you
We'll show there's only a pane of glass between
Us and all the good bread we are due.

Whereas you thereupon will threaten us
With rifles and with cannon we hereby
Resolve from now on we shall fear death less
Than we fear living wretchedly.

3

Whereas there are dwelling-places where you are
While you leave us without a home to go to
We have resolved that now we'll move in there
Because we're sick of slumming it down below.

Whereas you thereupon will threaten us
With rifles and with cannon we hereby
Resolve from now on we shall fear death less
Than we fear living wretchedly.

4

Whereas there's coal in surplus piled up high
 While we are freezing cold without the stuff
 We have resolved we'll be the ones that we supply
 Because if we do then we'll be warm enough.

Whereas you thereupon will threaten us
 With rifles and with cannon we hereby
 Resolve from now on we shall fear death less
 Than we fear living wretchedly.

5

Whereas it seems you'll never work out how
 To pay the ones who work a decent rate
 We'll have the factories in our own hands now
 Because there's plenty for us if we throw you out.

Whereas you thereupon will threaten us
 With rifles and with cannon we hereby
 Resolve from now on we shall fear death less
 Than we fear living wretchedly.

6

Whereas nobody's left who still believes
 The government whatever it promises
 We have resolved we'll build ourselves good lives
 By being the only ones who govern us.

Whereas you'll listen to what the cannon say -
 No other language will you listen to -
 Well then, we'll have to turn the cannon your way.
 Yes, that will be the best thing we can do!

5

19 March 1871. Gare du Nord. Posters everywhere urging people to vote for the Commune. Crush of bourgeois families, nuns, functionaries fleeing to Versailles.

NEWSPAPER SELLER: Declaration of the Press: Commune elections unconstitutional! Parisians, the following newspapers urge you not to vote: *Le Journal des débats*, *Le*

Constitutionnel, Le Moniteur universel, Le Figaro, Le Gaulois - and then during what follows - La Vérité, Paris-Journal, La Presse, La France, La Liberté, Le Pays, Le National, L'Univers, Le Temps, La Cloche, La Patrie, Le Bien public, L'Union, L'Avenir libéral, Journal des villes et des campagnes, Le Charivari, Le Monde, La France nouvelle, La Gazette de France, Le Petit Moniteur, Le Petit National, L'Electeur libre, La Petite Presse.

The tax-collector, among his family, buys the declaration.

TAX-COLLECTOR: What does that mean, 'the Committee is nothing'? It represents 215 battalions. Those people can do what they like. Alphonse, stand up straight. Where's Bourdet with the briefcase? Do I or don't I have a chief clerk in my hour of need?

HIS WIFE: Alphonse, don't slouch. If Bourdet doesn't come you'll have to stay behind, Christophe. Everything's very dear in Versailles, we'll be lost without money. Everywhere will be full.

TAX-COLLECTOR: 'You'll have to stay behind . . .' That's very typical. They can put me up against the wall so long as the money . . .

HIS WIFE: Don't start getting sentimental. You'll wait for Bourdet. Alphonse, stop shrugging your shoulders. *Exit without her husband. He waits.*

Enter Philippe and Jean just as some regular soldiers, led by a functionary, arrive dragging an iron chest.

FUNCTIONARY: Not in the goods wagon, if you please. Those are the registers and the cash boxes from the town hall.

PHILIPPE: It's your mother's fault that I have to go back to the army. How could she pawn François' microscope while he was fighting? It will take all my pay, which I haven't even got yet. And they might court-martial me because of that business with the cannon, and you're to blame for that as well.

JEAN absent-mindedly: We had to pay the rent, Philippe. If you bring us twenty francs we can get the things back again. But the most important is that François doesn't find out.

PHILIPPE: His studying gobbles up everything. And if he gets

involved in your Commune business the reverend brothers will expel him. A priest and in the Commune! And you can see how wrong your ideas are when you look at him. François wants his microscope, doesn't he? And why? Because it's his property. People want their property, and that's that.

JEAN: Philippe, your head's like a bakery, everything in a mess.

PHILIPPE: Everything's not in a mess in a bakery.

JEAN: Listen. The microscope is a tool of his trade, that's why he wants it. And the lathes in the locomotive works are the tools of our trade, that's why we want them. Got it?

PHILIPPE: Where are you going?

JEAN *thrusts the sack at him that he was carrying for him:*

Don't you see, they're taking the cash boxes away. Hey, you there! *To the soldiers dragging the boxes:* Nothing's to be taken away. It's the property of the people. *The soldiers continue, after one of them has given him a kick.* Scum! And no one here to stop them. *Hurries away.*

Exit Philippe, shaking his head. Enter an aristocratic woman with her niece and servants carrying hat-boxes and the like.

NIECE: Who would have thought, Aunt Marie, that the first trains allowed out of Paris would witness such a tragic spectacle! The whole of Paris in flight.

ARISTOCRATIC WOMAN: Not for long. Philine, mind the box doesn't get crushed. There's a Farnaud hat in it.

NIECE: We should have taken the carriage.

ARISTOCRATIC WOMAN: Don't talk nonsense. They'd have unhitched the horses and eaten them. Ah, de Plœuc, how very kind of you. At times like this one learns who one's friends are.

DE PLŒUC: I couldn't let you leave without shaking your hand, Madame la Duchesse.

NIECE: Must you really stay behind? Is it not dangerous?

DE PLŒUC: Perhaps. But the Bank of France is worth the risk, mademoiselle. *To the Duchess:* Might I ask you to hand over the note in this bouquet to Him? *He hands her a bouquet.*

ARISTOCRATIC WOMAN: It will be done. The whole pantomime won't last more than a week. Goodbye for a little while, Henri. *Exit with her niece.*

DE PLÆUC: For a little while, ladies.

The newspaper seller is now selling individual papers. Opposite him a street trader is selling his wares.

NEWSPAPER SELLER: 'Pronouncements of eminent persons' in the *Figaro!* – 'Murders of General Thomas and General Lecomte!' – 'Occupation of the Hôtel de Ville unlawful!' – 'Is the Central Committee in league with the Germans?' – 'Looting in the rue Gras!' – 'Rule of the Mob!'

STREET TRADER *interjecting*: Braces! – Combs from Lyons! – Buttons! – Soap and toiletries, cheap! – Mouth organs! – Belts from Tripolitania!

Soldiers bring in Jean, whose clothes are torn. They are halted by a sergeant of the National Guard and some of his men.

SERGEANT: One moment! What are you doing with him?

SOLDIERS: He was caught trying to climb on the locomotive.

A saboteur, sergeant.

JEAN: Listen will you. They're carrying off the cash boxes. You must stop them. You must arrest the whole lot of them.

SERGEANT: Easy, comrade, easy now. We've had no orders to stop the trains. Let him go.

DE PLÆUC: Friends, I am the Marquis de Plœuc of the Bank of France. You say yourselves that the Executive has issued no orders. We do not have a civil war yet, so far as I have heard. And if that is the case the man has committed a crime and must be arrested.

JEAN: Oh? And where was I being taken to? Answer me that. *Nobody speaks.*

SERGEANT: I see. You were dragging him off on the train? Let him go at once. *To his people*: Fetch reinforcements.

Exit some of his men. Jean is released. The soldiers creep away. Exit de Plœuc.

SOLDIERS: We were only doing our duty, comrade.

SERGEANT *to Jean*: You were lucky.

JEAN: And you let them go! Look at these posters. I'll tell you

something: I voted. But not for your Commune. Your Commune will go under. *He stumbles away.*

6

26 March. Outside the café in Montmartre. Mme Cabet and her little family – Jean, Babette, François, Geneviève – are making themselves at home in the little café, that had been closed. They take down the shutters, roll up the blinds, carry out chairs, hang up white paper lanterns. The waiter in the uniform of the National Guard and the wounded cuirassier in civilian clothes help them. Fast music can be heard from a square nearby. Geneviève comes out of the café with bottles of wine followed by one of the children in Sunday best.

FRANÇOIS *arriving with cane chairs*: This is the Commune, this is Science, the New Millennium! Paris has decided in favour of it!

WAITER: The *patron* decided against it so the waiter has become the *patron*. Make yourselves at home in his café.

GENEVIÈVE: So even the young men of the church salute the dawn. *She places bottles of wine in front of Mme Cabet.*

FRANÇOIS: And the teachers serve the widows with black-market wine. For now the Sermon on the Mount has been set down in paragraphs of the law which begin with the word 'Whereas' and finish in deeds. *He embraces the German soldier who, grinning all over his face, has opened a shutter.* I embrace you, cuirassier, my new brother, deserter from the predatory armies of the anachronistic Bismarck!

MME CABET *who from the start has been sitting on a chair in the middle of the street*: And they've let us off the rent! *Calls out*: Jean! Babette!

FRANÇOIS: Whereas the unjust war that has plagued our country was the work of a minority and whereas it is unjust, unjust, to shift the whole burden of it on to the majority, which is a vast majority of the very poor . . . I've learned it by heart, like my Lavoisier.

JEAN *looking out of the upper window of the café*: Be patient!

FRANÇOIS: And the pawnbrokers give the poor their pawned

belongings back for free, it being the case that life must be worth living.

MME CABET: François, you knew all about it? I'm a thief, everything's so dear. That's why I asked you for the rent, a bit tactlessly, but I wanted to get the things back, you need them of course. Jean! *To the child:* Sit down, Victor. Eat something before you taste the wine. Jean! *The child sits down stiffly. Jean looks out crossly.* I want to speak to Babette. Haven't you finished yet?

BABETTE *somewhat flushed, appears in the window next to Jean:* Maman?

MME CABET: See what wonderful wine we've got, Babette. *Babette laughs and disappears.* She needs looking after, he's very radical, that one.

Down the street come Papa and Langevin. Langevin looks very tired. Papa is carrying a white lantern on his bayonet.

PAPA: Madame, mademoiselle. I bring you your brother-in-law, Member of the Commune for Vaugirard. I dragged him away from work, they're at it like wage-slaves in the Hôtel de Ville.

MME CABET: Have a glass, Pierre.

WAITER: The wine is the *patron's*, the *patron* is in Versailles, help yourself, monsieur.

LANGEVIN: They've left six thousand sick behind, there's nobody for the street lighting, that's a lot of work.

Jean and Babette raise a red flag out of the window.

PAPA: Ah, raise a glass to Beauty! Loved and feared! Hounded and terrifying! Friendly Beauty, rides in on the storm wind!

MME CABET: Yes, she'll do it. Pierre, Papa, take some of these loaves. And where are the children? The baker opposite brought us bread out on the street when we carried our flag past. Yes, when we carried our flag past, of a certain colour, the baker, the sour-puss, forced these loaves upon us.

GENEVIEVE: Sit down. I'll sing you an old song.

Margot went to market early.

How loud the drums beat!

She bought meat and celery

And found the butcher grey,

Hair and face gone grey.

'That'll be twenty francs, the meat.'

Tarrabom, tarrabom, tarrabom.

'Pardon me?'

'Five, madame, okay.'

'Ahem.'

Margot went to her landlady.

The drums began to beat.

'Now what do I owe you? Say.'

The landlady went white,

White as death is white.

'It's twenty francs you owe.'

Tarrabom, tarrabom, tarrabom.

'Pardon me?'

'Ten, madame, will do.'

'Ahem.'

ALL *singing together*: Ahem, ahem, ahem.

Across the square come a troop of men and women wearing cockades.

ONE OF THE MEN: Mesdames, messieurs, come along all of you! Monsieur Courbet, the celebrated painter, will be speaking in the Place Vendôme. He will urge the necessity of flinging down Napoleon's Column, cast from the bronze of twelve hundred captured European cannon. A monument to war and an affirmation of militarism and barbarism.

PAPA: No, thank you. We approve of the project and we shall come to see it carried out.

A WOMAN: Then join us for the broth they're serving in the *quartier*.

A man whinnies.

MAN: In memory of five horses, ladies and gentlemen.

FRANÇOIS: Shall we go?

PAPA: I'm happy where I am.

FRANÇOIS: Broth.

MME CABET: Would you like to go? Where are Jean and Babette? Ah, there they are.

PAPA: Monsieur François, you seem to have the makings of a priest.

GENEVIÈVE: No, thank you, we'll sit here a while longer.

The men and women go on their way.

ONE OF THE MEN: Just as you please. The Commune invited you. You did not come. Oh là là!

PAPA: That's freedom.

Jean and Babette have appeared downstairs.

MME CABET: You've been up there too long. I'm cross with you.

JEAN: Maman, you're making Geneviève blush.

MME CABET: I told you, you have to act in accordance with your circumstances.

PAPA: But they are the best, madame, the very best. Paris has decided in favour of life lived how you please. And that's why Monsieur Fritz has decided to stay with us. No more class differences between citizens, no more barriers between peoples.

JEAN: Babette, answer maman, defend me.

BABETTE: Madame, your son will not be rushed. *She sings.*

Père Joseph, when it rains, gets wet
 His wife's backside is bare
 But she cooks something for him in the pot
 By the side of the road in a stolen pot
 And before he eats Père Joseph combs his hair.
 'Mother, do me something specially fine.
 For a poor devil nothing is too good.
 Mother, take your time, be the chef, be sublime!
 Do me something - wait, some chives in the salad!'

Père Joseph in the Salpêtrière
 He has no time at all for the priest
 And as though he had money to spare
 He sends out for a slap-up feast:
 'Warder, do me something specially fine.
 For a poor devil nothing is too good.
 Friends, take your time, be the best, be sublime!
 And don't forget the chives in the salad.'

PAPA: What are we here for, after all? According to my sister,

the curé of Sainte Héloïse answered that question so: to perfect the self. To do it, he needed quails for breakfast. *To the child:* We live for the extras, my son. We must have them, even if it takes cannon to get them. We do our stint. Then we needn't stint ourselves. Cheers! - Who is the young man?

MME CABET: Victor, bring me a fork will you? *The child goes into the café.* His father was killed with the 93rd, defending the cannon on 18 March. He has started a meat business, rabbits, keep quiet, Jean. I buy something off him now and then, because of his . . .

The child comes back with a fork.

PAPA gets to his feet, raises his glass: Good luck to you.

The child drinks to Papa. Music from close by. Jean begins to dance with Geneviève, Babette with François, the waiter with Mme Cabet.

PAPA: All going very well, don't you think?

LANGEVIN: Are you happy now?

PAPA after a pause: It's what this city wanted, and what it was built for, what it had forgotten under the lash and what it was reminded of by us. - Anything wrong?

LANGEVIN: Only one thing. I sometimes think we'd have done better to attack on 18 March. We put the question: elections or the march on Versailles? The answer was: both.

PAPA: And what of it?

LANGEVIN: Thiers sits in Versailles, gathering troops.

PAPA: Bah, I spit on them. Paris has decided everything. They're old men, half dead already, we'll settle them in no time. And the troops? We'll bring them round to our way of thinking, like we did on 18 March over the cannon.

LANGEVIN: I hope so. They are peasants.

PAPA: To Paris, monsieur.

The dancers come back.

BABETTE: To freedom, Jean Cabet. Total!

PAPA: To freedom.

LANGEVIN smiling: I drink to partial freedom.

BABETTE: In love!

GENEVIÈVE: Why to partial, Monsieur Langevin?

LANGEVIN: It leads to total freedom.

GENEVIÈVE: And total, immediate freedom, that's an illusion?

LANGEVIN: In politics.

BABETTE: François, you can dance. What do you dance as? A physicist or a priest, a little priest?

FRANÇOIS: I shan't be a priest. This is a New Age, Mademoiselle Guéricault. I shall study physics and Paris will pay.

BABETTE: Long live sharing! We've got everything, let's share!

GENEVIÈVE: Babette!

BABETTE: I'll teach you to dance cheek-to-cheek with Jean.

She hurls herself on Geneviève.

GENEVIÈVE: I shan't defend myself, Babette.

BABETTE: Then take that and that and that!

They roll on the ground. Geneviève begins to defend herself.

BABETTE: Oh, so you won't defend yourself? But you'll scratch my eyes out, you bitch?

Jean, laughing, has held back François. Papa and the waiter separate the combatants.

MME CABET: You behave as though you'd got wardrobes full of clothes. Oh là là! I was against you going upstairs to hang out the flag. She's a fighter, this one.

FRANÇOIS: A communarde doesn't get jealous.

BABETTE: Made of wood, is she?

GENEVIÈVE: No, she holds on to what she's got. I'm glad there wasn't a bayonet handy, Babette. Good day, Philippe.

Philippe has joined them.

PHILIPPE: Here I am again. I was curious whether I'd find you still alive. According to the Versailles newspapers you are all arrested and murdered. Anyone who doesn't say 'Long live the Commune!' before he goes to sleep is denounced by his own wife and tortured by the communards in the latrines until he confesses everything. That is well known. It is the Commune's Rule of Terror.

They all laugh.

PAPA: This is the first night in history, friends, that here in Paris there'll be no murder, no robbery, no fraud and no rape. For the first time the streets are safe, the city doesn't need any police. The bankers and the lesser thieves, the tax-collectors and the factory owners, the ministers, the tarts

and the clergy have emigrated to Versailles. The city is liveable in.

FRANÇOIS: Your good health, Papa.

PHILIPPE: I read about that in the papers too. The orgies! The orgies of the Commune! The tyrants in the Hôtel de Ville have seven mistresses each. It is decreed by law.

BABETTE: Oh Jean's only got two.

FRANÇOIS: And why did you run away?

PHILIPPE: I won't be at their beck and call for nothing. Monsieur Thiers is bankrupt, finished, over and done with. He's stopped paying the army. The soldiers in Versailles are selling their guns five francs apiece.

PAPA: I get my pay.

LANGEVIN: You're your own paymaster, that's the difference.

PHILIPPE: That's the Commune's bad management. They talk about that. I was in the country for a day, in Arles, at home. Mother and Father send their love to you, François. I didn't tell them you've become a communard, a devil that wants everything shared out.

PAPA: I dream of a side of pork. Or trotters.

LANGEVIN: But how did you get through the lines?

PHILIPPE: Nobody stopped me.

LANGEVIN: That's bad. That is the carelessness of the Commune.

PAPA: Pierre, you have too high an opinion of Monsieur Thiers and Herr von Bismarck. Those old men! Welcome, Philippe. So they're finished, are they? Give me a newspaper, Pierre. *Langevin hands him one, he makes a childish helmet out of it, which he puts on.* I'm Bismarck. Jean, you be Thiers, borrow François' glasses. We'll show Pierre what these old men talk about while we're enjoying our little festivities here in Paris.

Papa and Jean strike historical attitudes.

PAPA: My dear Thiers, I've just created an emperor, a dolt be it said in passing, would you like one as well?

JEAN: My dear Herr von Bismarck, I've had one already.

PAPA: I can understand you not wanting another one when you've had one already. That is all very well, but if you don't do as you're told you'll get your emperor back and

that's no idle threat. And by the way: would you like a king?

JEAN: Herr von Bismarck, only some of us want a king, a very few.

PAPA: You'll get one if you don't do as you're told. By the way, what is it *they* want, I mean the . . . What's it called, the thing that pays the taxes? That's it, the people . . . What is it the people want?

JEAN *looking around him nervously*: Me.

PAPA: But that's marvellous, I like you just as well as an emperor or a king. So they don't want one of them either? Funny. But you'll do as you're told, won't you? You'll hand the whole thing over even better than they would, the whole of, what's it called, where we are now, yes that's it: France.

JEAN: Herr von Bismarck, I have been entrusted with the task of handing over France.

PAPA: Who by, Monsieur Thiers?

JEAN: By France. I have just been elected.

PAPA *roaring with laughter*: So have we! The Emperor and I have just been elected too.

JEAN *likewise laughing, then*: Joking apart, Herr von Bismarck, I do feel a little insecure. In brief, I can't be sure I won't be arrested.

PAPA: I'll tell you what, I'll support you. I've got five thousand cannon.

JEAN: Then I have only one further wish, Herr von Bismarck. Will you allow me? May I kiss your boots? *Flinging himself on Papa's boots and kissing them*. Oh what boots! Oh how good they taste!

PAPA: Yes, but don't eat them up.

JEAN: And will you promise me, Otto, that with these, with these boots, you'll trample IT down as well?

PAPA: Oh yes, the Commune?

JEAN: Don't speak the word! Don't utter it! You know, for me it's a bit the way Liebknecht and Bebel are for you.

The cuirassier stands and raises his glass.

PAPA: In the name of God, don't utter those names!

JEAN: But why are you so frightened, Otto? How can you be

of any help to me when you are so frightened? Now I'm frightened too.

They remove the paper helmet and the glasses, and embrace.

BABETTE: Jean, that was good. Seems to me the flag's still not hanging right. Let's go up. *She embraces him.*

FRANÇOIS: I will read it to you after all. *He stands under a paper lantern and reads from the page of a newspaper.* 'Tonight she will drink the wine she owes to nobody. And tomorrow, like an old woman with work to do, Paris will rise and reach for the tools of her trade, that she loves.'

CUIRASSIER *raising his glass*: Bebel, Liebknecht!

WAITER: The Commune!

CUIRASSIER: The Commune!

WAITER: Bebel, Liebknecht!

FRANÇOIS: Teaching and learning!

GENEVIÈVE: The children!

7

a

Hôtel de Ville. Red flags. In the assembly room, while the session is in progress, boards are being hammered up bearing these inscriptions: 1 THE RIGHT TO LIFE. 2 FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL. 3 FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE. 4 RIGHT OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION. 5 FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OF THE PRESS AND OF THE PROMOTION OF ANY AND EVERY OPINION. 6 FREEDOM OF THE VOTE. 29 March 1871. Opening session of the Commune.

BESLAY: It is being said against us that we should have been content with the election of the Republic's National Assembly . . .

CRIES: Promoted by Monsieur Thiers! – Against Paris!

BESLAY: But the liberation of the community of Paris is the liberation of all the communities of the Republic. Our enemies assert that we have dealt the Republic a blow. We have indeed! But a blow such as drives a post more firmly

into the ground. *Applause.* The Republic of the Great Revolution of 1792 was a soldier. The Commune's Republic will be a worker. And what he needs most is freedom, to turn the Peace to good.

VARLIN: A Republic, fellow communards, that gives back the workers the tools of their trade just as the Republic of 1792 gave the peasants their land and so through social equality brought about political freedom. *Applause.* I shall proceed to a reading of our first legislative acts. Whereas all citizens equally shall hold themselves ready to serve in the defence of our national territory, the standing army is abolished.

CRY: Away with the generals! Away with the paid bloodhounds! Long live the people's army!

CRY: No more class distinctions among our citizens, no more barriers between peoples! We call on the workers in the German armies to shake hands with the workers in the French!

Applause.

BESLAY: Whereas the state is the people governing itself, all public offices shall be held for limited periods only, the holders being elected according to their abilities and always able to be dismissed.

CRY: Equal pay! A worker's pay!

BESLAY: Whereas no people stands higher than the lowest of its citizens, education shall be accessible to all and shall be free of charge and the responsibility of the state.

CRY: Feed the children in school! Education begins with feeding! They can't learn without learning to eat.

Mocking laughter and applause.

BESLAY: Whereas the purpose of life consists in the boundless development of our physical, intellectual and moral being, property must be nothing other than the right of every individual to share, proportionately to his contribution, in the collective result of the work of all. Work must be organised collectively in the factories and the workshops. *Applause.* Those, friends, are our first new laws. They are to be enacted at once. I hereby open this first working session of the Commune of Paris.

b

Ministry of the Interior. Led by a porter, Geneviève and Langevin enter an office. Rain.

GENEVIÈVE: You say not one official has been seen here? Not for a week?

PORTER: None. I should know, I'm the porter.

GENEVIÈVE: How many work here usually?

PORTER: 384 and the Minister.

GENEVIÈVE: Do you know where they all live?

PORTER: No.

GENEVIÈVE: How shall we find out even where the district schools are, where the teachers live, where the money comes from for their salaries? Even the keys have been taken away.

LANGEVIN: We'll have to fetch a locksmith.

GENEVIÈVE: And you will have to go and buy me some oil for the lamp. *She searches in her purse.*

PORTER: Will you be working nights as well?

LANGEVIN: This is the Commune's Delegate for Education.

PORTER: That's all very well but it's not my job to go running after oil.

GENEVIÈVE: Very well, but . . .

LANGEVIN: No it's not all very well. You will go and buy the oil. After you've shown the Delegate where the registers are and the maps with the district schools on.

PORTER: I can only show her where the offices are.

GENEVIÈVE: I shall have to ask the cleaning woman. She might have children who go to school.

LANGEVIN: She won't know anything.

GENEVIÈVE: Between us we'll find out.

LANGEVIN: It would be best to build new schools at once then we'd know where they are. Everything has to be done again, from A to Z, it was always done badly anyway. Clinics and street lighting, all of it. How much do your fellow-citizens pay you to carry out your duties, among which fetching oil is not included?

PORTER: Seven francs eighty a day, but it's not my fellow-citizens that pay, it's the state.

LANGEVIN: Yes, there's a big difference, isn't there? The Delegate will direct Education in the City of Paris for eleven francs a day, if that tells you anything.

PORTER: That's up to her.

LANGEVIN: You can go. If going happens to be one of your duties.

The porter shuffles away. Geneviève opens the window.

GENEVIÈVE: He's a poor devil too.

LANGEVIN: Not in his opinion. It was probably a mistake to let him know how low your salary is. Now he despises you. He's not going to kow-tow to a person only earning a few francs more than he does. And kow-towing is the only thing he can learn to do.

GENEVIÈVE: By himself, perhaps. What does he see? Those who had jobs around the Minister and in the ministerial council have all fled because of the low wages and all the civil servants, even the lowest, are abandoning Paris to darkness, filth and ignorance. And we can't do without them.

LANGEVIN: That's the worst thing. Their chief interest consists in making themselves irreplaceable. That's been the way of it for thousands of years. But we shall have to find people who do their work in such a fashion that it can always be done by someone else. The great workers of the future will be the simplifiers of work. Here comes Babette.

Babette arrives with Philippe.

BABETTE: Nobody sees you any more. It says in the *Officiel* that you've been made a minister or something of the sort.

GENEVIÈVE *in a conspiratorial way, showing fear*: Did he tell you where I was?

BABETTE: The porter? Philippe showed him the pistol.

LANGEVIN: I appoint you Assistant to the Delegate for Transport - that's me. The trains on the northern line do indeed depart, but they don't come back. All they do is carry off houseloads of furniture. I shall have to confiscate the assets of the railway company and court-martial their chief executives. That's what it's like in Paris now. Here nobody comes to work, there they go to work to commit acts of sabotage. But why have you come?

BABETTE: You must do something for the bakery workers at once.

GENEVIÈVE: But I'm the Delegate for Education.

PHILIPPE: Then look after us. It says in your newspapers workers must educate themselves. But how can they when they have to work nights? I never see daylight.

LANGEVIN: I believe the Commune issued a decree abolishing nightwork in bakeries.

PHILIPPE: But the master bakers refuse to abide by it. And we don't have the right to strike, we're a vital industry. But the baker can shut up shop when she likes. There's a loaf by the way. *He gives her a loaf of bread.*

GENEVIÈVE: That's bribery. *She bites into it.*

LANGEVIN: If she shuts up the shop we'll confiscate it and run it ourselves.

PHILIPPE: Does it taste good? You can let yourselves be bribed by us, but not by the masters. I'll say it at the guild meeting, or they'll smash the windows in the bakeries tonight. But what's to be done about Babette and Madame Cabet? Their boss Busson, the army tailor, has come back.

BABETTE: But for a pair of trousers he's only paying one franc now. He says the National Guard orders from the firms with the lowest prices.

GENEVIÈVE: Why are you looking at me like that, Pierre?

LANGEVIN: I am studying how you deal with the people, Citizen Delegate.

GENEVIÈVE: They are being economical with the people's resources.

BABETTE: But we are the people.

LANGEVIN *as Geneviève glances at him uncertainly*: Learn, teacher.

BABETTE: If the Commune pays less than the Empire, we don't need it. Jean is on the ramparts getting himself killed, and why? So we won't have to endure that exploitation, that's why.

PHILIPPE: If you won't pay a proper rate for his trousers you're doing the dirty on his own mother. And his girlfriend. You should . . .

LANGEVIN: We should? What's the matter with you?

PHILIPPE: OK, *we* should . . .

LANGEVIN: That's better.

PHILIPPE: So what should we do?

LANGEVIN: Of course, you're not in the union of tailors, are you? That's where prices should be decided. Not in Monsieur Busson's hat factory.

BABETTE: How should we know that?

GENEVIÈVE: I'm trying to organise schools in which the children will learn it.

BABETTE: Where will you get the money for it if you can't even pay a decent price for uniforms?

GENEVIÈVE: The Bank of France is a few blocks away. The difficulties are here. In this place even the cupboards are locked.

PHILIPPE: At least we can break them open, I should say.

LANGEVIN: What, you're a baker and yet you're ready to do a locksmith's work as well? Now I feel more cheerful about the Commune, boys and girls. Perhaps his next sideline will be government.

He has wound up a grandfather clock that had stopped and now gives the pendulum a tap so that it begins to swing again. All look at the clock and laugh.

LANGEVIN: Expect no more of the Commune than you do of yourselves.

8

The office of the Governor of the Bank of France. The Governor, the Marquis de Plœuc, is in conversation with a fat churchman, the Procurator of the Archbishop of Paris. Rain.

DE PLÆUC: Tell His Eminence that I thank him for conveying to me the wishes of Monsieur Thiers. The ten million francs will be transferred to Versailles in the usual way. But what will happen to the Bank of France in the course of the next few days, I cannot say. At any minute I expect a visit from the Delegate of the Commune, and with that my arrest. There are two billion, 180 million here, Monsignore. That is

our lifeline. If it is cut these people have won, whatever else happens.

SERVANT: Monsieur Beslay, Delegate of the Commune.

DE PLÆUC *white in the face*: France's hour of destiny, Monsignore.

FAT CHURCHMAN: But how do I get out?

DE PLÆUC: Don't lose your nerve.

Enter Beslay.

DE PLÆUC: Monsignore Beauchamp, Procurator of His Eminence the Archbishop.

FAT CHURCHMAN: May I take my leave?

DE PLÆUC: I assume you need this gentleman's permission.

BESLAY: Give the Captain this visiting card.

The two men bow and the fat churchman leaves.

BESLAY: Citizen, in the Ministry of Finance the safes are sealed. The paymasters of the National Guard battalions stand there unable to open them. But the men must be paid or the Bank will be plundered, whatever I say. These people have wives and children.

DE PLÆUC: Monsieur Beslay, in accordance with the statutes of your Central Committee the employees of the Bank of France formed a battalion. Let me assure you that for more than two weeks they haven't received a penny of their pay either, and they have wives and children too. Now, Monsieur Beslay, you have come through the courtyards and you have seen them there armed, sixty-year-olds among them, and I can assure you that they will fight if the Bank, which is in their care, should be attacked.

BESLAY: Such a fight would last two minutes.

DE PLÆUC: Perhaps only one. But what a minute in the history of France!

BESLAY *after a pause*: The Commune has issued a decree requiring the special battalions to be dissolved and merged with the others.

DE PLÆUC: I knew you would say that, monsieur. *He holds up a scroll.* May I show you a decree out of the archives of the Bank and issued by an older revolutionary body, the Convention, signed by Danton, according to which the

employees of large administrative institutions are to be stationed, as soldiers, in their own offices?

BESLAY: Monsieur le Marquis, I haven't come here to shed blood but to secure the means by which the defence of Paris and the reopening of its places of work may be effected and financed by the legally elected Commune.

DE PLÆUC: Monsieur Beslay, please do not think that I for one moment question the rights of the Commune. The Bank of France does not engage in politics.

BESLAY: Ah, now we are making progress.

DE PLÆUC: And what I hope with all my heart is that you of the Commune will recognise the rights of the Bank of France which stands above all parties.

BESLAY: Monsieur le Marquis, you are dealing with men of honour not highwaymen.

DE PLÆUC: Monsieur, I knew that the moment you came in. Monsieur Beslay, help me to save the Bank, which is to say the resources of your country, the resources of France.

BESLAY: Monsieur le Marquis, see us in a true light. We work like coolies, eighteen hours a day. We sleep in our clothes, on chairs. For fifteen francs a day every one of us does three or four jobs that to get done before now would have cost the people thirty times as much. There has certainly never been a cheaper government. But now we need ten million.

DE PLÆUC *pained*: Monsieur Beslay!

BESLAY: Monsieur le Marquis, we haven't collected the taxes on tobacco or on daily provisions but we must pay the soldiers and the workers, we can't hold on any longer unless we do. *De Plæuc maintains a meaningful silence.* Unless by early tomorrow we have six million . . .

DE PLÆUC: Six million. I wouldn't be within my rights to give you one. In your sessions you speak of corruption, you accuse Monsieur Thiers of circumventing procedures to come at money, and now here you are yourself, demanding money from me even though no competent financial body exists. *Despairingly.* Set me up a body responsible for finance, I shan't ask how you do it, but show me a piece of paper I can accept as legitimation.

BESLAY: But that will take two weeks. You are perhaps forgetting that we have the power.

DE PLŒUC: But not that I am in the right.

BESLAY: What funds do you have here?

DE PLŒUC: And you know I have a professional obligation to safeguard the confidentiality of the Bank! Do you, of all people, wish to assault such achievements as the confidentiality of our financial, legal and medical affairs? Monsieur Beslay, may I remind you that you too are dealing with a man of honour? Whatever sides we may seem to be on? Let us work together. Let us consider together how best we may satisfy the needs of our great and beloved city without criminally infringing the infinitely numerous but oh so necessary prescriptions of this venerable institution. I am wholly and utterly at your disposal.

BESLAY: Monsieur le Marquis, for peaceful negotiations I am at *your* disposal.

9

a

Hôtel de Ville. Session of the Commune. Beslay is withstanding vehement criticism. At the same time there is great fatigue.

CRIES: Treachery! – Worse: stupidity! – Shall our communards go hungry while we heed Monsieur the Governor of the Bank of France and his ‘necessary formalities’? – Enough negotiations, send in a battalion!

BESLAY: Citizens, if you are not satisfied with my work I shall be more than happy to step down. But remember that the resources of France are our resources too and they must be managed thriftily.

CRY: By you or by the Governor?

BESLAY: I flatter myself that I have won over that perhaps rather pedantic but nonetheless honourable man by touching him in his professional pride and by appealing to his expertise to find us a legal way out.

CRIES: We want no appeals to him, we demand his arrest. –

Why is it necessary to find a legal way out for the people to get their own money?

BESLAY: Do you want bankruptcy? Violate the statutes of the Bank and forty million banknotes are worthless. Currency depends on trust.

CRIES: Whose trust? – The bankers'? *Mocking laughter.* – These are delicate questions. Read Proudhon before you answer them. – We have taken possession of the state and now we must husband it.

VARLIN: For whom? This case illustrates that it is not enough to take possession of the apparatus of the state. It was not made for our purposes. Therefore we must smash it. That must be done by violence.

CRIES: No arrests! Let us not begin the new era with terror! Leave that to the old. – All you are doing is interrupting our peaceful work.

LANGEVIN: On the contrary, we are in the process of organising it.

CRIES: Arrest the Governor of the Bank and then read the newspapers! – The bourgeois newspapers? I read them and can't understand why they have not been proscribed.

BESLAY: Citizens, I move that the issue be discussed in camera.

LANGEVIN: I oppose that proposal. Let us make no claim to infallibility as former governments, without exception, have done. Let us make public all our speeches and our deeds. Let us make the people privy to our imperfections, for we have nothing to fear but ourselves. Accordingly, I shall proceed. I shan't speak of the fact that for 200,000 francs the Delegate for War could buy a thousand cavalry horses from the Germans – they are selling everything – but come back to the question of the soldiers' pay, and include another question in it.

CRY: Don't forget here that 200,000 men and their families live on that pay. The rifle is their trowel or spanner, it has to feed them.

RANVIER: I demand that the military situation be discussed.

LANGEVIN: Instead of paying the army a proper rate and

fetching the money to do so from where it is, namely in the Bank of France, on top of that we stint the piece-rates for the women in the artillery works. I move that we cancel all contracts with suppliers who are using competition to force wages down and that we deal only with workshops that are in the hands of workers' associations.

CRY: One thing at a time!

VARLIN: I support Langevin's motion. *To Beslay*: But I'm also in favour of the immediate occupation of the Bank. For the same reasons.

LANGEVIN: One thing on account of the other.

RANVIER: The military aspect must be discussed as well. Don't you see? Three things, all three of them. Because you have no time. Smash the enemy within today or you will be no match for the enemy outside your forts tomorrow.

CRIES: Where shall we find the strength for all that? Our strength will not suffice.

RIGAULT: We negotiate over the needs of the people. Why do we not listen to their proposals? They wish to participate, everywhere and at once. Why not put our trust in their strength? A strength which to many here is still mysterious and, indeed, suspect. The citizens who stormed the Bastille, declared the Revolution in Paris, protected its first steps, bled on the Champ de Mars, took the Tuileries, annihilated the Gironde, swept away priests and cults, were pushed back by Robespierre, rose up in Prairial, vanished for twenty years, surfaced again under the thunder of the Allies' cannon, sank again into darkness, rose again in the year 1830 and being at once confined, filled the first years of the rule of capital with their strugglings and burst the net of steel in 1848, took the bourgeois republic by the throat four months later and, flung down again, broke out rejuvenated in 1868 and rattled the Empire and toppled it and offered themselves again against a foreign invader and were again scorned and insulted till 18 March when they smashed the hand that sought to throttle them. What could we have against the personal intervention of the people? They demand the immediate taking over of the banks and factories into their control and they demand the fight on all

fronts but first and foremost the march on Versailles.

Uneasy murmurings.

CRIES: That means civil war! – Bloodshed! – We hear the word ‘violence’ too often in this place. Beware!

RIGAULT *holding up newspapers*: Then listen to what is being said on the streets of Paris. I quote *La Sociale*, one of the few newspapers that are for us: ‘Citizen Delegates, march on Versailles! You will have the 220 battalions of the National Guard behind you, all support you, what are you waiting for? You have been patient too long. March on Versailles! Put your trust in Paris as Paris puts her trust in you! March on Versailles!’ Citizens, let us increase this strength by availing ourselves of it.

Murmurings continue.

CRIES: You quote what you ordered! – They are irresponsible men! – Socialism marches without bayonets!

RIGAULT: But bayonets confront it, citizens. The red flag flies over Marseilles and Lyons, but Versailles is arming rural ignorance and prejudice against them. Let us carry the flame of revolt into the country, burst the iron girdle around Paris and strike terror into the big cities!

Continuing murmurings of unease.

CRIES: Military adventures! – Enough of this! – The Commune rejects civil war! – I move: the assembly resumes its peaceable work and will not be disturbed by the attempts of some all too impatient people to plunge Paris into an adventure. – Agreed, but I move that we suppress the hostile newspapers. I name the following: *Le Petit Moniteur*, *Le Petit National*, *Le Bon Sens*, *La Petite Presse*, *La France*, *Le Temps*. – Look around you and study the principles of this assembly!

Mocking laughter among those around Rigault and Varlin.

Meanwhile the Chairman has received a message.

CHAIRMAN: Citizen Delegates, I have received a message which will indeed turn the work of this assembly in a new direction.

b

A lobby in the Hôtel de Ville. Delegates and military personnel are entering or leaving the hall. A newspaper seller is selling the Officiel.

NEWSPAPER SELLER: *L'Officiel!* The Versailles traitors have attacked! Papal zouaves and imperial police have entered Neuilly! Women and children among the wounded! Mobilisation of all citizens between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five! The treacherous Versailles government has attacked!

AN OLD BEGGAR *approaching him*: Have you any bread on you?

NEWSPAPER SELLER: Don't you know begging's forbidden? 'Versailles begins the civil war!'

BEGGAR: Can I forbid my belly rumbling?

Two delegates leave the session.

ONE TO THE OTHER: This attack, undertaken with so few troops, is an act of the purest desperation. Elections in the country have gone badly for Monsieur Thiers.

BEGGAR *catching up with them below*: Messieurs, allow me to show you the balloon just leaving Paris. It is visible above the houses.

DELEGATE: Ah, the 'Sociale'? Has it lifted off?

BEGGAR: With proclamations and declarations, ten thousand of them for the country. The land will be given to the peasants. From the balloon! I'm from the country, I am. I know what's what, I'll show you the balloon.

The delegates look upwards through a window.

BEGGAR: Messieurs, the balloon!

DELEGATE: You're a peasant, old friend?

BEGGAR: From the Auvergne, Saint-Antoine.

DELEGATE: And why are you here?

BEGGAR: Take a look at me, can I still pull a plough? That's for the youngsters.

DELEGATE: So you've come to relatives in Paris, eh?

BEGGAR: They had no room.

DELEGATE: And what's your opinion of the Commune?

BEGGAR: Messieurs, at your service. You want what's best, even though you do want to share everything out. God be

with you. The balloon, messieurs, a look at it, that will be ten centimes.

DELEGATE: But why are you against the distribution of the land?

BEGGAR: Well, messieurs, they take it away.

DELEGATE: But not from you. You'll get some.

BEGGAR: Pardon me, messieurs, they take it away. Do I still have my own farm, for example? Ten centimes.

DELEGATE: But your children are on it, aren't they?

BEGGAR: You see?

DELEGATE: But that's because you don't have enough land between you.

BEGGAR: Do you mind if I ask you for the ten centimes for showing you the balloon? It will vanish any minute.

DELEGATE: Do you have a lord of the manor in Saint-Antoine?

BEGGAR: Of course we do. Monsieur de Bergeret.

DELEGATE: And are you fond of him?

BEGGAR: Well, monsieur, he does look after his own.

DELEGATE *shaking his head and paying the money*: An enemy. Owning nothing, he defends ownership, even that of the thief who has robbed him! We shall need years to persuade him. *Exit.*

BEGGAR *showing the coin to the newspaper seller*: Ten centimes, a very good balloon! What fools people are! They could have seen it for themselves.

NEWSPAPER SELLER: 'Women and children among the wounded!' Come here and give over swindling. Take a bundle, stand by the other staircase and shout after me. You'll get a centime a paper.

He gives him a bundle. The beggar repeats the newspaper seller's cries.

BOTH: *L'Officiel*. Mobilisation of all citizens between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five!

c

Night sitting of the Commune. Some delegates are working on papers, others are conferring together, one is giving advice to a woman and child.

CHAIRMAN: Given that it would be unwise for this assembly to intervene in military affairs and despite the uncertain state of the fighting in and around Malmaison, we shall continue with our deliberations. Citizen Langevin.

LANGEVIN: Whereas the first principle of the Republic is freedom; whereas freedom of conscience is the first of all freedoms; whereas the clergy have been complicit in the crimes of the monarchy against freedom, I move that the Commune decree the separation of church and state. — Further to that, I urge the Delegate for Education to require all teaching staff to remove from their classrooms all crucifixes, images of the Virgin and other symbolic objects and to hand over all such objects that are in metal to the Mint.

CHAIRMAN *counting the raised hands*: Carried.

CRIES: We hear complaints that wounded communards are being treated negligently by Catholic nurses. — And what about the plan to have reading rooms in the hospitals? For most workers their time in hospital is the only time they get to educate themselves.

CHAIRMAN *receiving a message*: Citizen Delegates, Battalion Leader André Farreaux, returned from the front, wishes, despite being severely wounded, to appear before you and to make a report.

An officer of the National Guard is carried in on a stretcher.

CHAIRMAN: Citizen Farreaux, I invite you to address us.

OFFICER: Citizen Delegates, Asnières is in our hands.

Excitement. Cries of 'Long live the Commune!' and 'Long live the National Guard!'

OFFICER: Citizens, having been wounded and obliged to leave the fighting, I should like now, with the permission of the Delegate for War, to offer for your consideration certain problems which are hampering your troops in their operations and making even the victories very costly. Our men are fighting like lions, but show precious little interest in being properly armed. Since every battery, drawn from a particular *quartier*, insists on its rights of ownership of its own cannons, we have out of a total of 1,740 cannons only 320 at our disposal for action.

CRIES: Remember the peculiar nature of our army, without precedent in the history of the world. These people cast their cannons themselves, Citizen Officer.

OFFICER: Not on their own account, Citizen Delegate. That may be why they can't deploy them on their own account. Our cannons are being used like muskets or not at all. And everybody wants to shoot but nobody wants to pull a baggage cart. And everyone chooses his own commander and where he wants to go and fight.

VARLIN: What are your origins, Citizen Officer?

OFFICER: Graduate of the School of Artillery at Vincennes, formerly Captain in the Regular Army.

VARLIN: Why are you fighting with the Commune?

ONE OF THE STRETCHER-BEARERS: He's for us.

VARLIN: You know that barely two days ago the Commune decreed the abolition of the rank of general? *The officer says nothing.* I suppose you wish to suggest we put trained officers in command?

OFFICER: War is a profession, Citizen Delegate.

VARLIN: You are doing this with the agreement of the Delegate for War, who has not appeared himself?

OFFICER: Who, contrary to all the rules of the art of war, is fighting in the very front line.

RANVIER: Citizen Delegates, I understand this man to be saying that to put an end to giving orders we must ourselves first learn to give them. Citizen Farreaux, we wish you a speedy recovery. Do not misunderstand the silence of this assembly. Silence does not always mean unwillingness to learn. Our difficulties are great, they have never been encountered before. But they will be overcome. The Commune approves your report.

The officer is carried out.

RANVIER: Citizen Delegates, you have a victory and you have a true report. Use both. You have the troops, the enemy has trained officers. He has no troops like yours. Overcome your well-founded mistrust of people whom until now you have only ever seen on the opposing side. They are not all against you. Add expert knowledge to the Commune's enthusiasm and your victory is certain.

Applause.

d

Session of the Commune.

CHAIRMAN: Citizen Delegates, I interrupt our discussion of the reports on the favourable progress of military operations around Neuilly to read out to you what August Bebel said yesterday in the German Reichstag: 'All the proletariat of Europe and all who have a feeling for freedom in their hearts, look towards Paris. The war-cry of the Parisian proletariat "Death to want and poverty! Death to idle luxury!" will become the war-cry of all the proletariat of Europe.' Citizens, I call on you to rise from your seats in honour of the workers of Germany.

All rise.

VARLIN *calmly*: Long live the Workers' International!
Workers of the world, unite!

10

Frankfurt. The opera, during a performance of Norma. The door of a box opens. Bismarck in the uniform of a cuirassier and Jules Favre in civilian dress emerge.

BISMARCK *lighting a cigar*: Another thing, Favre - I say, you've gone very grey, haven't you? - Here you are in Frankfurt now signing the peace, but what's happening in Paris, eh? Get that red flag off the town hall, will you? It's been there long enough. I've had a few sleepless nights already over their wretched carryings-on. Damned bad example for the rest of Europe, wants exterminating with fire and brimstone like Sodom and Gomorrah. *Hearkens to the music, audible because he has left the door of the box open.* Altmann is superb! As a woman too, good build. You know - *accompanied in servile fashion by Favre he continues his smoker's perambulation* - you're a funny crew. You coyly refuse our offer of military assistance, but

we're to let you have your prisoners, by the back door. I know, I know, it mustn't happen with the help of a foreign power. Like the old song, eh?: 'Oh Theodore keep your hands off me/ Except when no one's there to see.' *Again he hearkens to the music.* Now she's dying. Magnificent! But then that rabble of ours in the Reichstag want us to hand over Bonaparte. No chance. I'm keeping him up my sleeve, to keep you on a tight lead. Ho, ho! I'll hand over the common man and he can bleed the comrades in Paris for you. That will be a surprise. War or no war, we must have order. I'll give the arch enemy a hand, just where she wants it, eh Favre? But we'll have freed you 200,000 men before long . . . And by the way, have you got the pennies to pay for them?

FAVRE: I'm at liberty to tell you now, that was our greatest worry, but it has been settled. The Bank of France. To date we've been able to draw 257 million.

BISMARCK: Well, well. Not at all bad. Another thing: what guarantee have you got that the chums won't fraternise as they did on 18 March?

FAVRE: We've looked out units we can be sure of, people with a peasant background. And besides, the agitators couldn't get at the prisoners-of-war, could they?

BISMARCK: Fine, perhaps we're over the worst. But as I said, I want action. Understand? I've let you delay reparations till after the pacification of Paris. But now be so good as to get a move on. *Hearkening to the music.* Fabulous, the way she does it. And I don't want any accidents, Favre, the first cheque goes to Bleichröder, I trust him, he's my own banker, see he gets his commission, will you? Altmann is excellent.

II

a

Hôtel de Ville.

It is late at night, the hall is empty. Langevin, who has been

working till now, is fetched by Geneviève.

LANGEVIN: You complain that there's no money for school meals. Do you know how much Beslay triumphantly brought back from the Bank yesterday, for building barricades? 11,300 francs. What mistakes we are making, what mistakes we have made! Of course we should have marched on Versailles at once, on 18 March. Had we had the time. But the people only ever have one hour. Woe betide them if they are not ready when it strikes, fully armed and able to attack!

GENEVIÈVE: But what a people! I wanted to go to the concert for the ambulance units in the Tuileries this evening. They expected a few hundred, tens of thousands came. I got stuck in a crowd that seemed to have no end. And not a word of complaint!

LANGEVIN: They are patient with us. *Looks at the inscriptions on the wall.* 1. The Right to Life. That's it, but how did we attempt to push it through? Look at the other points. They all look good but what are they in reality? Number 2! Is that also the freedom to do business, to live off the people, to plot against the people and to serve the enemies of the people? Number 3! But what do their consciences prescribe to them? I'll tell you: what the rulers have prescribed to them, since infancy. Number 4! So is it permitted to the sharks on the stock exchange, the polyps in the venal press, the butcher generals and all the smaller bloodsuckers to congregate in Versailles and discharge against us all the 'opinions' guaranteed in Number 5? Is the freedom to lie a guaranteed freedom also? And in Number 6 do we permit the election of deceivers? By a people confused by their schools, their church, their press and their politicians? And where in all this is our right to occupy the Bank of France which holds the wealth that we heaped up with our bare hands? With that money we could have bribed all the generals and politicians, ours and Herr von Bismarck's as well. We should have put only one point on the statutes: *our* right to life!

GENEVIÈVE: Why didn't we?

LANGEVIN: For the sake of freedom, which we know nothing

about. We should have been prepared, as the members of a body fighting for its life, to forgo personal freedom until the freedom of all had been achieved.

GENEVÈVE: But weren't we anxious not to stain our hands with blood?

LANGEVIN: We were. But in this struggle the hands not bloodstained are the hands chopped off.

b

Session of the Commune. Coming and going of Guards with messages. Now and then delegates leave the session in haste. Every sign of immense fatigue. The busyness subsides as distant cannon fire becomes audible.

DELESCLUZE: Citizen Delegates, you hear the cannon of Versailles. The final struggle is beginning.

Pause.

RIGAULT: In the interests of security I have allowed a delegation of women from the eleventh arrondissement to appear before you to present you, at this juncture, with certain wishes of the people of Paris.

Agreement.

DELESCLUZE: Citizens, you have made me Delegate for War. The seemingly limitless task of making good the damage of war, of converting a national war into a social war, and in addition blows from outside such as Bismarck's handing over 150,000 prisoners-of-war to Versailles, these and other things have not left us time to develop the particular strengths of the proletariat in an area remote and new to them, namely the conduct of war. We have tried all sorts of generals. Those from below, from our own ranks, do not understand the new weapons; those from above who have taken our side do not understand the new men. Our fighters, having just shaken off the tyranny of the factory-owners, will not be commanded as though they were puppets. Their inventiveness and their reckless courage seem to the trained officers to be so much want of discipline. For the relief of Fort Issy our Supreme

Commander Rossel demanded 10,000 men by the next morning. Through personal appeals by various delegates 7,000 were got together. So Monsieur Rossel, wanting 3,000 for his round number, rode off, leaving Fort Issy to the Versailles forces who, herded up in their barracks, are always available. What's more, Monsieur Rossel issues a communiqué to the reactionary newspapers saying that all is lost.

RANVIER: The great surgeon, needed for the operation, who washes his hands in lysol, or, if there is no lysol, then in innocence.

DELESCLUZE: Now we have come to the point where all must be decided, and what will decide it is street fighting. Now we must man the barricades, which military specialists despise. Now the people themselves will fight in person for their streets and for their homes. Citizen Delegates, we shall go into the fight as into a job of work, and we shall do it well. Citizens, should our enemy succeed in turning Paris into a grave it will at least never be the grave of our ideas. *Loud applause, many rise to their feet. Three female workers are escorted in by members of the National Guard.*

DELESCLUZE: Citizen Delegates, the delegates of the eleventh arrondissement.

The meeting comes to order. A few delegates come down to meet the women.

ONE DELEGATE: Citizens, you fetch spring with you into the Hôtel de Ville.

WOMAN: Have no fear. *Laughter.* Citizen Delegates, I have a communication for you. It is brief.

CRY: It's twenty pages long.

WOMAN: Quiet, little man, those are only the signatures, 552 of them. *Laughter.* Citizen Delegates, yesterday afternoon notices were put up in our district urging us, the women of Paris, to be the mediators of a reconciliation with the so-called government in Versailles. We reply: there can be no reconciliation between freedom and despotism, between the people and the butchers of the people. Workers, men and women, belong on the barricades. It was said on 4 September: after our forts, our ramparts; after our ramparts,

our barricades; after our barricades, our bodies. *Applause.* We alter that. After our barricades, our houses; after our houses: mines and booby-traps. *Increasing applause.* But having said that, we appeal to you, Delegates of the Commune, not to make a spade out of an axe. Citizens, four days ago the cartridge factory in the avenue Rapp blew up; more than forty women working there were maimed, four houses collapsed. The perpetrators have not been arrested. And why is it only the ones who want to who go to work or into battle? Citizen Delegates, this is not a complaint against you, don't misunderstand us, but as citizens we have grounds to fear that the weakness of the members of the Commune – I beg your pardon, that has been changed – that the weakness of some – I beg your pardon, I can't read it, it has been crossed out – that the weakness of many . . . Citizen Delegates, we couldn't reach agreement on this point. *Scornful laughter.* Well then, that the weakness of some members of the Commune will bring to nothing our plans for the future. You promised to look after us and our children and I'd rather know mine dead than in the hands of Versailles, but we don't want to lose them through weakness. 552 from the eleventh arrondissement. Good day, citizens.

Exit the women.

VARLIN *leaping to his feet:* Citizen Delegates, the wives of the Versailles soldiers weep, so we hear, but our wives do not weep. Will you stand idle and deliver them up to an enemy who has never shrunk from violence? We were told in this place a few weeks ago that no military operations were necessary, that Thiers had no troops and in the eyes of the enemy it would be a declaration of civil war. But our bourgeoisie without a second thought allied itself with the enemy of France to wage a civil war against us and was given troops by him, the captured sons of peasants from the Vendée, rested men, inaccessible to our influence. There is no conflict between two bourgeoisies that could prevent them from at once joining forces against the proletariat of one or the other land. And then we were told in this place: no terror, what would become of the New Age? But

Versailles is practising terror and will butcher us all so that the New Age will never come to be. If we are flung down it will be because we were merciful, which is to say negligent, and because we were peaceable, which is to say ignorant. Citizens, we beg you, at this late stage let us learn from the enemy.

Applause and unease.

RIGAULT: Citizens, if you stopped raising your voices to spare your deadly enemy, you would hear his cannon. *Silence in the hall. The thunder of cannon again becomes audible.* Do not doubt it, he will be pitiless. Now as he makes ready for the copious spilling of this city's blood his spies and saboteurs and agents are among us everywhere. *He holds up a folder.* The names are here, I have been offering them to you for weeks. The Archbishop of Paris does more than say his prayers. The Governor of the Bank of France has a use for the people's money that he withholds from you. Fort Caen was sold to Versailles for 120,000 francs. In the Place Vendôme, in the rubble of the monument of militarism, the exact plans of our ramparts are openly on sale. Our enraged women fling the agents into the Seine. Shall we fish them out? But in Versailles 235 captured National Guards were shot like rabid dogs and they give our nursing sisters to the firing squads. When shall we begin our counter measures?

CRY: Citizens, we have discussed this. We decided that we do not wish to do what the enemies of humanity are doing. They are monsters, we are not.

Applause.

VARLIN: The question 'Inhumanity or humanity?' will be decided by the historical question 'Their state or our state?'

CRY: We don't want any state, since we don't want any oppression.

VARLIN: Their state or our state.

CRY: We cannot except ourselves from oppression if we go over to oppressing. But we are fighting for freedom.

VARLIN: If you want freedom you must first suppress the oppressors. And give up as much of your freedom as is

necessary for that end. You can have only one freedom: the freedom to fight the oppressors.

RIGAULT: Terror against terror, suppress or be suppressed, smash or be smashed!

Sounds of great unease.

CRIES: No, no! – That means dictatorship. – Tomorrow it will be us you smash! – You demand the execution of the Archbishop of Paris and you have us in your sights because we oppose it. – All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

VARLIN *very loud*: And they that don't take the sword?
Brief silence.

CRY: The Commune's generosity will bear fruit. Let it be said of the Commune: they burned the guillotine.

RIGAULT: And left the Bank alone! Generosity! Citizens, the Commune resolved to adopt even the orphans of the soldiers killed fighting for Thiers. It supplied with bread the wives of ninety-two who came to murder us. Widows belong to no party. The Republic has bread for all who are in misery and kisses for all who are orphaned. And that is right. But where is there action against murder, which I call the active side of generosity? Don't say to me 'Equal rights for those who fight in their camp or in ours.' The people do not fight as wrestlers or traders fight. Or as those nations which take account of the interests of such traders. The people fight as the judge fights evildoers or the doctor cancer. And still all I'm asking for is terror against terror, even though we alone have the right to terror.

CRY: That is blasphemy! Do you deny that the use of violence debases the man who uses it?

RIGAULT: No, I do not deny it.

CRIES: Silence him! Speeches like that discredit us. Look around you. We are not so many as we were in March. Delescluze, you speak to us! Delescluze! Delescluze!

DELESCLUZE: Citizens, you see me undecided, I confess. For so long now I too have solemnly spoken out against the use of violence. 'Disprove,' I said, 'the rooted opinion that justice has need of violence. For once, at long last, let justice prevail by the work of our bare hands. Lies have to be

written in blood, truth can be written in ink,' I said. 'In a few weeks the Commune of Paris has done more for the dignity of man than all other regimes in the course of eight centuries. Let us continue calmly bringing order into human dealings and putting an end to the exploitation of man by man,' I said. 'Let us dedicate ourselves to our working people who are useful to all who are not harmful pests. Then the two or three score exploiters in Versailles will see the host of slaves around them melt away like snow in the spring sun. The voice of reason, untainted by anger, will stop our murderers in their tracks, the simple sentence "you are workers like us" will bring them running into our welcoming arms.' That is what I said, and many of you said the same. May I and may you be forgiven if we were deceiving ourselves. I ask those delegates still opposed to reprisals to raise their hands.

Slowly most raise their hands.

DELESCLUZE: Citizen Delegates, you will be issued with arms.

National Guardsmen have entered laden with rifles. They distribute them among the delegates.

DELESCLUZE: Citizen Delegates, we shall continue with the business in hand. The next item is the organisation of a commission for the education of women.

NONE OR ALL

1

Who will deliver you, slave?
Comrade, those deepest below
They are the ones who will see you
They, when you cry out, will hear you
Slaves will deliver you, slave.
None or all, all or nothing it will be.
No one can set himself free.
Guns or chains it must be.
None or all, all or nothing it will be.

2

You who are hungry, who'll feed you?
Do you want bread for your hunger?

Come to us, we also suffer.
 Come to us, let us guide you
 We, the hungry, we'll feed you.
 None or all, all or nothing it will be.
 No one can set himself free.
 Guns or chains it must be.
 None or all, all or nothing it will be.

3
 For vengeance, where will you look?
 Comrade of ours, whom they beat
 Join with all they maltreat
 We are like you, we are weak.
 We are the avengers you seek.
 None or all, all or nothing it will be.
 No one can set himself free.
 Guns or chains it must be.
 None or all, all or nothing it will be.

4
 You who are lost, who will dare?
 Whoever's too wretched to bear
 More must join with those now
 Desperate: they're making sure
 Today is the day, not tomorrow.
 None or all, all or nothing it will be.
 No one can set himself free.
 Guns or chains it must be.
 None or all, all or nothing it will be.

12

Place Pigalle, Easter Sunday 1871. Jean Cabot, François Faure and two children are working at a barricade. Babette Cherron and Geneviève Guéricault are stitching sandbags. Distant thunder of cannon. Geneviève has been singing a song to the children who are mixing mortar in a wooden bath with shovels bigger than themselves.

CHILD: Would you sing it again, please, mademoiselle.

GENEVIÈVE: Yes, but that's the last time. *She sings.*

Eastertide. Fair on the Seine
 For Grandpa and everyone.
 All the blue rowing boats down there
 Are painted fresh again.
 Looking for Easter eggs you hear
 Among the trees, from far away
 The little children swear
 Getting towards mid-day.
 At table under the greenery
 We tell what fun it's been
 And we'll go fishing at Ivry
 At Eastertide next year.

CHILD *singing after her*: At Eastertide next year.

SECOND CHILD *to Jean*: Do you and Babette sleep together?

JEAN: Yes.

CHILD: She's going to have a baby, isn't she?

JEAN: Mm. Because she fell in love with me.

BABETTE: You fell in love with me.

JEAN: Whatever. But she started it, let me tell you.

BABETTE: How did I start it? I never said a word. It was you.

JEAN: Yes, I know. But your eyes.

BABETTE: And yours? *To François*: What are you sulking for?

FRANÇOIS: I don't like the way you said 'Philippe has run away'. You have to look at it scientifically, that is dispassionately. I assume the fight seemed to him hopeless, whereas it doesn't to us. Therefore he leaves Paris.

JEAN: Us you mean. Us fighting.

FRANÇOIS: Not us, only the hopeless fight.

JEAN: Unfortunately we can't leave Paris as easily as that.

Why? The leaves can't leave the tree. Woodlice can.
 Philippe's a louse.

FRANÇOIS: I shall have to knock your teeth out, Jean.

JEAN: But dispassionately, if you don't mind.

FRANÇOIS *helplessly*: Oh Jean, we don't know anything.

Pause. What you are thinking could perhaps be expressed so: Philippe is not an especially brave person because he hasn't learned to think.

JEAN: Good.

BABETTE: Geneviève, if I move in with Jean will you be able to pay the rent on your own?

Pause.

GENEVIÈVE: Yes, Babette.

JEAN: Oh damn it, must you women always be talking about the future?

GENEVIÈVE *softly*: She must, Jean.

FRANÇOIS: It's bad that we are cut off from the country. We can't speak to France.

GENEVIÈVE: They can think for themselves.

JEAN: Babette, that reminds me, we must fetch what we painted. One thing is certain: if they attack, Paris will be their grave, eh François?

They carry on working. Enter Mme Cabet.

MME CABET: Very sorry, I felt a real need to go to early morning mass and last night I stitched four extra bags. Now you shall have your Easter presents.

She hands François a parcel.

FRANÇOIS *opening it*: Lavoisier! Only yesterday I wanted to look up something particular in him.

MME CABET: Oh Jules and Victor, I'm sorry, you should have had yours first. *She gives each of them a bread roll.* Jean, this is a tie, I shortened the flag a bit, Papa was vexed but I did it anyway. I've got nothing for you, Geneviève, but I'll shake hands with you. *She shakes hands with Geneviève.* It's always so embarrassing when you haven't got a present to give, isn't it? And this is for you and really for somebody else, Babette, you know who I mean, don't you? *She gives Babette an Easter egg.* Next Easter he'll have one like that.

JEAN: *She will.*

They laugh.

MME CABET: And now I'd like you to come upstairs with me. There's a drop of wine left.

All follow her except Geneviève. Then when Geneviève also stands up she sees two nuns coming towards her.

FIRST NUN *softly*: Geneviève.

GENEVIÈVE *runs towards the nun and embraces her*: Guy!

GUY: *Softly*, my darling. Was it very bad?

GENEVIÈVE: But why are you dressed up like this? Seven months!

GUY: Can you take us to your room? Do you live on your own? And can you get me a razor? My blasted beard!

GENEVIÈVE: But why all the secrecy? You're here now and safe. Did you escape?

GUY: No, I'll explain everything, in your room.

GENEVIÈVE: But I don't live on my own any more. Babette's there, she might come in at any moment. I mean, if you don't want anybody to see. Guy, you're not in Paris against the Commune, are you? Not for Thiers?

GUY: Oh so you're still for the International, are you? Despite all the atrocities?

GENEVIÈVE: What atrocities?

GUY: Enough. The time for revolutionary and sloppy humanitarian speeches is over. Now it's serious. The whole of France is sick of your looting and violence.

GENEVIÈVE: So you've become a spy for the butcher Thiers?

GUY: Geneviève. We can't discuss that out on the street. I've been spotted, I didn't want to involve you, my damned beard forced me. After all, we are engaged, or we were, that might be more accurate. You can't let me perish and the sisters of Saint Joseph are involved as well. You're a Catholic, aren't you, or is that over and done with as well?

GENEVIÈVE: Yes, Guy, it is.

GUY: A nice way to treat me! And all out on the street!

GENEVIÈVE: The street is a good place. We are just getting ready to defend our homes on the street.

GUY: That is all utter madness. Versailles is ready to march in, three army corps. And if you hand me over . . . *He reaches under his nun's habit for a pistol.*

PAPA *who has arrived with Coco and has witnessed some of the foregoing*: One moment, monsieur. *He levels his rifle at him.* You have some interesting friends, mademoiselle.

GENEVIÈVE: Monsieur Guy Suitry, my fiancé, Papa.

The nun Guy arrived with suddenly runs away.

PAPA: Stop her, Coco. Or him. *To Geneviève*: Explain.

GENEVIÈVE *while Coco chases the nun*: Monsieur Suitry was a

prisoner-of-war in Germany. Now he's on business in Paris for Monsieur Thiers.

GUY: Geneviève!

PAPA: Oh. I'm sorry, Geneviève.

COCO *returning*: No breasts, but female. This one goes up against a wall. And then a little visit to the Convent Saint Joseph. *With his bayonet he prods Guy to the barricade.*
Turn round.

FRANÇOIS *arriving*: Geneviève, why didn't you come up? What's happening here?

PAPA: Geneviève's Guy has come back. Bismarck gave him back to Thiers so he could come and spy on us here. And the nuns of Saint Joseph mercifully took him in. *To Guy*: Turn round.

FRANÇOIS: You can't do that. You can arrest him.

PAPA: Then he goes off to the Petite Roquette and can eat cutlets with his Eminence the Archbishop. Unfortunately our people in the Commune are trying to be even more merciful than Saint Joseph, till we're all up against a wall. *To Guy*: No, you won't be telling anyone what you've seen in the rue Pigalle.

FRANÇOIS: Nothing rash, Papa.

PAPA: Oh so that's being rash, is it? General Gervaise sells one of our forts to Versailles but I'm being rash, am I? Of course, you people here think I'm in a bit deeper than you are and that explains why I'm not very gentle. *To Geneviève*: There was that certain morning when we met and I hadn't slept, remember?

GENEVIÈVE: Citizen Goule, I have learned in the meantime that the motto must be: 'All for one and one for all'. And even if it was only to defend you I would not leave this barricade.

PAPA *uncertainly*: I think I understand you.

FRANÇOIS: Madame Cabet won't allow it, Papa. Let Geneviève decide, don't do anything in haste. Geneviève, tell them you don't want that. You mustn't think we'll think it's because he's your fiancé. Speak to them, Geneviève.

Geneviève says nothing.

PAPA: Very well, Geneviève. Go indoors.

COCO: Turn round, you.

Enter Mme Cabet with the children.

MME CABET: Jean and Babette wanted to be on their own. Love, I ask you! Better than stitching sandbags. What are you doing?

COCO: Not a nun, Madame Cabet. Geneviève's fiancé, a spy.

MME CABET: Why's he standing up against the wall? He's not feeling well, you can see that, can't you? *Nobody speaks.* No! Don't do that, not on Easter Sunday. And in front of the children! Not in front of the children! Absolutely not! Hand him over to the police, that's bad enough for Geneviève. You come with me and have a glass of wine. You need it. Now don't do anything stupid here.

PAPA *vexed*: The devil take the lot of you. They'll stamp you out like vermin. Quick march, swine, say thank you to the children, they're the ones who decide in Paris.

He and Coco lead Guy away.

FRANÇOIS *to the children*: Let's get to work.

They begin their work again. Mme Cabet tries to lead Geneviève away but she shakes her head and sits down to stitch sandbags.

FRANÇOIS: There are bad people on our side too. The battalions are even enlisting criminals now.

MME CABET: Yes. Being with us is the only good thing they will ever do.

FRANÇOIS: At the top too. People working for their own advantage.

MME CABET: We get what we get.

FRANÇOIS: I'll have to chop the apple tree down.

MME CABET: Do we really have to? *Enter Jean and Babette.*

Jean and Babette, François wants to chop down the apple tree.

BABETTE: No.

JEAN: We'll never make a proper barricade with it in the way. But we'll leave it if you want. *Pats the barrel of the cannon.*

Ammunition or no ammunition it's good to have you, whatever the generals say, our own included. *He and Babette unroll a linen banner: 'You are workers like us'. There's my statement, François. They hang it over the*

barricade, the writing towards the attackers. We have to tell them.

MME CABET: I don't know, Jean, if it's those they had in the army before, from the provinces . . . farm labourers working sixteen hours a day and the sons of debt-ridden grocer women, even the cobblers think they're something better than workers.

JEAN: Perhaps they'll think again when they see the words along with our bullets, maman.

13

Place Pigalle, May, during Bloody Week. At the barricade, ready to fire, stand Geneviève Guéricault, Jean Cabet, François Faure and two civilians. The German cuirassier is dragging a crate of ammunition after Papa into the corner of the wall. A badly wounded woman, a stranger, is lying in a sheltered place. Heavy artillery fire. Rolling of drums, which signifies attacks in neighbouring streets. The apple tree is in full bloom.

FRANÇOIS *shouting loudly*: Langevin and Coco would have been here long ago if they were still alive. It's three days now.

PAPA: Coco's alive. And if Paris can send them home today with bloody noses the whole Versailles rabble will melt away, once and for all.

FRANÇOIS: They are heavily armed. With mitrailleuses. Have you noticed how the New Age always gives its weapons to the hyenas of the Old Age first?

PAPA: On 18 March we'd have cleared out the lot of them in two hours.

FRANÇOIS: What do you think, Jean?

JEAN: As I told you once before, we know nothing.

GENEVIÈVE: At least we're learning now, Jean.

JEAN: As we croak. Much good that will do us.

GENEVIÈVE: It will do some good, Jean. Here they come again.

JEAN: Not yet. What good is knowing to me and you, Geneviève, when we're dead?

GENEVIÈVE: I'm not talking about me and you. I said 'we'. 'We' are more than me and you.

JEAN: I only hope 'we' will be out in force alongside us and behind us now.

It has got rather quieter.

WOUNDED WOMAN *suddenly clear*: Friends, I live at 15 rue des Cygnes, write on the wall, will you, near the door, for my husband, what's happened to me, my name is Jardain.

FRANÇOIS: I will, 15 rue des Cygnes.

WOUNDED WOMAN: We wanted to go on fighting the Prussians because we were told they wouldn't give us back the prisoners straight away. Isn't that right? They had two of mine. Now they are coming back, like that. *She points over the barricade*. What things they must have told them about us! Now I feel bad again. *She sinks back and becomes delirious*.

FRANÇOIS: They have to do it. That's what makes them so raving mad.

JEAN: We ought to carry her indoors.

FRANÇOIS: Not if she doesn't want. She's frightened the house will burn.

JEAN: But she's in the way here.

FRANÇOIS: Not very much, Jean. And she was fighting, wasn't she?

JEAN: Yes, she can handle a gun.

Drums very near.

JEAN: That's in the rue Bac.

Enter Pierre Langevin followed by a child.

LANGEVIN *trying to shoo the child away*: Run along, that's an order, you're only in the way here. *The child moves back, but then halts, waiting for him*. They need reinforcements in the rue Bac.

JEAN *shrugging his shoulders*: Where's Coco?

LANGEVIN *shakes his head, glancing at Papa, then*: Can you spare the cuirassier?

PAPA: *Salut, Coco*. No, he only understands my language. What's happening in the Hôtel de Ville?

LANGEVIN: There's no one left there. They're on the barricades. Delescluze was killed in the Place du Château d'Eau. Vermorel is wounded, Varlin is fighting in the rue Lafayette. The slaughter at the Gare du Nord is such that women are rushing into the streets, boxing the officers' ears and putting themselves up against the wall.

Langevin goes on his way, the child following him.

JEAN: Things are bad, he didn't ask after Mother.

Mme Cabet and Babette bring soup.

MME CABET: Children, you must eat, but there's no chives in it. And why must you wear your kepis? When we've done all we can, they'll only give you away. You'll have to eat with the serving-spoon . . .

Handing Jean the serving-spoon, she collapses.

JEAN: Maman!

FRANÇOIS: From the roofs.

PAPA roaring: Take cover! It's only her arm.

He runs out and drags Mme Cabet away, into the house.

Babette, stunned, collects up the pan and the spoon.

Halfway to the house she also falls.

GENEVIÈVE restraining Jean: Jean, you mustn't go.

JEAN: But she isn't badly hit.

GENEVIÈVE: Yes, she is.

JEAN: She isn't.

FRANÇOIS: They're coming. Fire! *He fires.*

JEAN back at the barricade, he fires too: You swine! You swine! You swine!

One of the civilians runs away. Papa comes back. Regular soldiers advance from the street on the left, they kneel and fire. François falls. The salvo has torn down the banner. Jean points to it and falls. Geneviève takes the red flag from the barricade and withdraws with it into the corner where Papa and the cuirassier are firing. The cuirassier falls. Geneviève is hit.

GENEVIÈVE: Long live the . . . *She falls.*

Mme Cabet drags herself out of the house and sees those who have fallen. Papa and the remaining civilian carry on firing. From all the surrounding streets regular soldiers advance with fixed bayonets against the barricade.

From the walls of Versailles the bourgeoisie watch the end of the Commune through lorgnettes and opera glasses.

BOURGEOISE: My only concern is lest they escape towards Saint-Ouen.

GENTLEMAN: No fear of that, madame. We signed an agreement two days ago with the Crown Prince of Saxony. The Germans won't let anyone escape. Where is the picnic basket, Emilie?

ANOTHER GENTLEMAN: What a noble spectacle! The fires, the mathematical movements of the troops, the boulevards! Now we appreciate the genius of Haussmann in providing Paris with boulevards. There was some discussion as to whether they contribute to the beautifying of the capital. But there can be no doubt now that at the very least they have contributed to its pacification.

Huge explosion. The company applauds.

VOICES: That was the Mairie de Montmartre, an especially pernicious den.

DUCHESS: The glasses, Annette. *Looks through the opera glasses.* Splendid!

LADY NEXT TO HER: If only the poor Archbishop had lived to witness this! It was a little unkind of Him not to swap His Eminence for that Blanqui fellow.

DUCHESS: Nonsense, my dear. He explained it perfectly, with Latin clarity. That worshipper of violence Blanqui was worth a whole army corps to the rabble and the murder of the Archbishop, God have mercy on his soul, was worth two army corps to us. Oh, here He comes himself.

Enter Thiers accompanied by an adjutant, Guy Suinty. The company applauds him, he smiles and bows.

DUCHESS *softly*: Monsieur Thiers, this will make you immortal. You have given back Paris to her true mistress, to France.

THIERS: France, mesdames et messieurs . . . France is you.

Final chorus.