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TUG OF WAR

by **ALAN ROSSETT**

"Tug of War" was the first in the New Playwright Series of the Roundabout Theatre, New York. The cast included Jacqueline Bertrand, Ann Sachs, Carole Martin.
An extract of the author's own French translation "La Pastorale Sauvage" was presented at Le Bartok and the Théâtre du Rond-Point, Paris, then published by Les Editions de l'Amandier in « La Plus Grande Grande Pièce du monde - 143 playwrights combat political extremism ».

Cast

Liliane
Mopsy
Carol
Peter
Fred
Robert

The play takes place in and around a French country house.
A summer day in the early 1960's

ACT 1

Scene 1

(In the dark:)

CAROL'S VOICE

Once upon a time… Two little rabbits in the woods…

MOPSY'S VOICE

Peter Rabbit!

PETERS VOICE

Mopsy Rabbit! Where are you?

MOPSY'S VOICE

Three trees down! Hurry. Farmer Macgregor's on your tail.

(As morning light comes up on Mopsy and Peter discovering the façade of a French country house with a fairy tale touch about it. In front of the house, a swing.)

CAROL'S VOICE

A country day in peaceful clover!
In France, the Algerian War is finally over!
In Vietnam, the Yanks have not yet begun to play
Red Rover!

(Peter's eighteen. Mopsy, in her twenties, is dressed in military style outfit.
They are both American.)

MOPSY (into a walkie-talkie)
Who lives here?

PETER (into his walkie-talkie)
Three bears?

MOPSY
Hansy and Grety's witch? Let's nibble.

PETER (speaking to her directly)
It might belong to…

MOPSY (normally)
Big bad wolves? Everything does. I've been feeding you my lettuce all summer – Now I'm hungry. We're going to eat this house. Take possession.
(She jumps onto the swing.)
What beatitude. Know Barry Carbothnut?

PETER
At college – you broke his heart –

MOPSY
That word is so out of date, you mean his aorta. Then what happened?

PETER
He shot himself.

MOPSY
A sentimental suicide? You can do better than that!

PETER
He aimed too far to the right shooting off a pimple.

MOPSY
Bravo.

PETER
But you told me before…

MOPSY
I was lying before. First name in your head!

PETER
Uh – Ian.

MOPSY
Peter that's not very nice. He was my husband. (softly, smiling)
What makes you think I had a husband?

PETER

You told me!

MOPSY

You believed me?

PETER

Mopsy, all the things you've said about yourself –

MOPSY

A bunch of lies…maybe. That's what you get when you get involved with someone you didn't know before you got involved with them. You think you know them but you don't! I'm very unpredictable!

PETER

You were married – weren't you? The last time in bed with him –

MOPSY

Is none of your business. Swing a little harder, Peter. Harder, that's what soldiers are for.

PETER

Soldiers?

MOPSY

The time your Daddy sent you to a military school 'cause he didn't wish to look at you? I'll make you a man yet! A soldier! Harder! Go into my office, we'll have it out!
(jumps off, leaving Peter careening on the swing.)
When are you going to stop feeling?

PETER

Soon.

MOPSY

Now. It's anti-feeling hour. (shakes him off swing; points to the ground)
Bend over. Lower. Mopsy doesn't suffer crybabies. Lower. Maybe it's my fault. Maybe I'm not the right girl for you.

PETER

Mopsy, I wouldn't say that –

MOPSY

Darling we can still be very special friends without kidding ourselves.
Why, if I found the right girl, I'd see to it that you two got together. In fact it's probably being with me day in day out that's brought you to…this.

PETER

I suppose it might have had a slight –

MOPSY ("hurt")
You don't even like me? You're just after my money? Oh Peter there's so much under my surface you won't see! (slyly) It's even worse! You don't know me at all.

PETER
I know as much as you want me to. I wouldn't trespass into…before.

MOPSY
Before?

PETER
Have I ever asked where you really come from? What kind of a trauma you had before you learned to walk?

MOPSY
Ah, you want to go to Embryo-land. Be prepared, it's full of forget-me flowers under giant skies of night-fright stars. It's for the brave. Prove you're brave. Give me one of your first memories. Give me before.

(Pause.)

PETER
We went visiting…someone.

MOPSY
Who?

PETER
Her apartment – stank of antiseptics.

MOPSY
Death's clues.

PETER
She grabbed me. Her breasts, full of horrible medicine, grew. I got small, wandered off, nobody noticed.

MOPSY
We're all little angels. We all wander off.

PETER
To a garage. Lumber, newspapers tied like bales of hay, tools - in the corner a man. And a woman.

MOPSY (insinuating)
What were they doing, Peter?

PETER
Something with a hammer.

MOPSY

A hammer?!

PETER

The man grinned as if I'd been expected, gently led me into a little corner.
And continued.

MOPSY

What?

PETER

I don't know.

MOPSY

I do. They were making a coffin.

PETER (bewildered)

For…her?

MOPSY

For you.

PETER

How do you know?

MOPSY

I was there. I promised them to finish it. I've followed you secretly ever since.
(Disquieting silence. She laughs;)
The most flagrant gibberish and you still wet you pants – don't you?
Don't you?

(He pulls a knife and flicks it open.)

PETER

Get over there.

MOPSY

Peter! What are you going to do?

PETER

Tie you to a tree. Skin you flake by flake. Slowly cut your throat until your head falls off. Then I'll be able to look inside and see who you are!

(His knife touches her.)

MOPSY (nonchalantly)

Well what are you waiting for? I guess you do care for me too much to stick that into me. Hey, maybe you'd should stick it into someone else! Oh yes!
The next person we meet - no matter who it is - we're gonna do something to.
We includes you. (faces the house)
Who does live here anyway?

(suddenly she skips inside.

Demanding little signal ticks from his walkie-talkie.
He quickly enters.

The swing and the scrim of the house rise…

Peter stands in the front doorway of a room lending itself to a subtle game of hide-and-seek. Unmatching innovations started, abandoned. Dust, cobwebs, a yellowing touch about everything.
Three exits: a kitchen, a bedroom, a second room.

A fireplace with an upturned stool near it; on the floor a large children's book.
An old trunk.

Mopsy sits at a table set for three people's long abandoned meal: crusted plates, rotting fruit, an ashtray full of stubbed-out cigars.)

MOPSY

Three people live here…or lived here…? They never came back.
(She picks up a napkin with lipstick marks.)
A lady! (playing with the ashtray) A gentleman?

PETER

And the third?

MOPSY

No clues. Find me a clue.
(Peter looks around the room, almost stumbles over the stool, automatically sets it upright:)
Upside down? What's that near it?

PETER

A book.

MOPSY

…that one of them was reading. Read it.

PETER

"Once upon a time in an old country house…two troubadours took shelter…"
(Mopsy bows ceremoniously.)
"A great lady had lived in this house as a happy child."
(During the following, Mopsy improvises a mime to the story:)
"Now she lived far away with a loving family, a handsome knight and a faithful servant. She was unhappy. Ghosts had smoked through her window and into her mirror. They laughed and they were not there. They were there. The great lady decided to run away. With her handsome knight Frederick and her faithful servant she rode off at

dawn, never stopping till she came to her little old country house. Who did she find inside? Who?"

MOPSY

Two jolly troubadours?!

PETER

"'We will chase away your sadness!' said they.
Then I shall invite you to my feast!' said she.
The first troubadour wooed the lovely lady!
At sunset the feast began. Suddenly the second troubadour…"

(He stops.)

MOPSY

Well?

PETER

Someone tore out the last page.

MOPSY (examines the book.)

Don't just stand there. (She gets up –)
Find it.

(With the book, goes into the second room.
Peter waits uncertainly.)

PETER

Mopsy, we're going to get into trouble…

MOPSY

Oh Peter noo

(Her loud terrifying scream is heard. Her head appears – with two strangling hands clasped around the throat. Peter runs to the front door.)

MOPSY (cooly withdrawing her own hands)

You wouldn't lift a finger for me. C'mere, there's a lovely view…And the witch! The witch who has your train ticket back to Paris…

(He scrambles in.

A faint sound of a car. Liliane enters: middle-aged, wearing a "creation" that implies money and eccentricity. She's immediately followed by Frederick; in his late twenties, dressed with very overdone elegance, carrying a few overnight bags; and Carol, a young woman with a sense of latent tension, wearing a traditional maid's uniform.)

LILIANE (gaily, slight European accent)

Yes, Frederick darling, we're going to have a feast! Candlelight, song,

Carol will cook her most extravagant dinner…nobody goes hungry in my house! (to the table) But the place is filthy! We three surely didn't leave it like that.

CAROL (British accent)

We did.

LILIANE

You'll have to make it sparkle, Carol! Fred, put the bags in my bedroom -

FRED (British)

Where is it?

LILIANE

Surely you know –

FRED

I've never been here before, Liliane.

LILIANE (tilting ashtray, teasing)

Then who smoked these cigars? Me? Through that door is where we sleep…this is where we dine…the kitchen is over there…and (going toward second room)

…here…

CAROL

Yes, what's there?

LILIANE

Silly child, it's where I keep my secrets…and the banquet linen, silverware for our… (opens the door: Mopsy and Peter face her. Quickly starting away:)

GHOSTS!

MOPSY (following her, playing naivety)

But we didn't mean to frighten you, oh let me apologize! We were in the woods and saw this enchanting house, it seemed deserted, we took a peek, I'm really -

LILIANE (catching breath)

That's all right…

MOPSY

I feel just awful. When we heard voices we got scared ourselves.

LILIANE

You're a lovely child. I'm terribly sorry we frightened you.

MOPSY

That's all right!

LILIANE

You're American, aren't you?

MOPSY

I sure am! You're French?

LILIANE

I don't know what I am anymore. Who's that behind you?

MOPSY

My – husband. We're on our honeymoon voyage.! He's shyer than me! (cooing) He's Peter. I'm Mopsy.

LILIANE

I'm Liliane. Do come closer. Let me have a look at you.
(They approach her.)
You are lovely children. What do you do when you're not stumbling on enchanting houses?

MOPSY

Pete plays his recorder in front of movie houses. Show it to her, dear.
(He takes a recorder out of his back pocket.)
Play something. (He does.) And I sing along. We love to sing and dance!

LILIANE

Ooooh if only young people were like you…innocent lightning on the grass. I wish I had a daughter - just like you. But I'm really too young to have a daughter…your age. Your presence here couldn't be more perfect if you'd planned it. We're going to have a wonderful feast!

MOPSY

A feast?

LILIANE

That's why I always flee to my country estate.

MOPSY

Flee?

LILIANE

As a child, protected by my family, friends…battalions of people, this is where I get away, forget… (takes Mopsy's hand and turns her around in circles) We'll pass the cloudless day dancing on the green. Sylvie's under the trees, Harlequin's there! At night you're the guests of honor my –

MOPSY

<u>Feast</u>?

LILIANE

Yes! I've got funny costumes somewhere too, we can dress up as other people… (opens trunk, leafing through material)

We thought then the unhappy days were over…so we dressed up,
played games… (takes out a pair of men's hunting boots)
What are these doing in my trunk? Frederick, take them away at once –

FRED

They're not mine –

LILIANE

Then they're nobody's – get them out of my sight –
(As he quickly puts them behind one of the bags, Liliane brings out a very yellowing dress.)
Ah, this would be perfect on you.
(She turns it inside out to reveal a stunning evening gown in passable condition, holds it up, mentally fitting it over Mopsy but continues, drawn to Carol. Brooding:)
You're in costume already!

MOPSY (bringing out a motheaten children's dress)

Whose is this?
(Pause.)

LILIANE

It was mine – a few years ago. (grabs it from Mopsy, throws it a few feet in Carol's general direction, gets on her knees and starts covering it over with other clothes. Carol goes to Mopsy.)
Cover it over – like everything else.

CAROL (whispers to Mopsy)

Leave.

LILIANE

Carol! You claim I don't see you – now you must think I don't hear you!
How dare you give an order. They don't leave before we receive their gifts.

CAROL

But…what do they bring?

LILIANE

The only thing one can bring. Who they are. First they'll move in with us -

CAROL

There's no room - even for one night.

LILIANE

Of course there's room.

CAROL

Madame, you did promise.

LILIANE

What?

CAROL

Paul.

LILIANE (exasperated)

Oh Paul Paul Paul. She made a boy friend last spring – her first serious one, With her devotion for me she hasn't had time. His name is Paul, every time I look at her she forces me to think of it. Unfortunately I said the next time we were here, he could come back and stay. You'll both sleep in the kitchen.

CAROL

The kitchen?!

LILIANE

The cot is enormous.

CAROL

Bloody uncomfortable. I'm sure he won't come –

LILIANE

I try to do everything for my maid but guests do come first. You're going to lose him anyway. This is Frederick, my very dear friend.

(Fred nods stiffly)

He loves me madly but with a reserve that would freeze a drop of melted butler. The first time I saw him I thought he was rather like a cavalier but as time goes on –

FRED

I'm not like a cavalier. I enjoy fencing – and that is all. Liliane, I'm sure these people have other things to do.

LILIANE

Where am I going to put my guests…

MOPSY

Anywhere, from that room, the lovely view…

CAROL

She's chosen my room!

LILIANE

Yes, it's all there is. I'm terribly sorry – in the country – I can't offer you a more luxurious honeymoon suite. A honeymoon is all you'll ever have. It was all I ever had. My husband died shortly after. Of a toothache. That's how people die nowadays. I had to laugh. Ssshh if they hear you they'll notice you. I haven't said a word – all these years – I've smothered my tears. Still they follow – Wherever I go –

MOPSY

What?

LILIANE (backing away from the four)

Ghosts… (suddenly runs out of the house.)

CAROL (running after)
Please leave –

(Fred follows.)

PETER (going to the front door)
Yeh let's get outta this house –

MOPSY
No no!

PETER
This is a creepy house, that's a creepy woman, I wanta leave –

MOPSY
But Peter – the children's fairy tale has come to life!

PETER
What

MOPSY
A lady haunted by ghosts flees to her country house with knight and servant. And invites two troubadours to stay. Let's find out how the story ends.

PETER
Buy the book -

MOPSY
Oh no, it's more fun to play a game with it.

PETER
Game?

MOPSY (gleefully)
We're gonna fill in the missing page! You're a troubadour – you know you are – And you're gonna woo that lovely lady!

PETER
Woo?

MOPSY
Like in the book!

PETER
I don't even know her –

MOPSY
You'll get to know each other! Didn't I say we were going to do something to the next people we meet! Didn't I say I'd find the right girl for you! Well, Liliane's the right girl for you. And I'm going to generously bring you two together.

PETER
I couldn't carry on a conversation with that type let alone –

MOPSY
Different types are very attracted to each other! She'll teach you old world manners, you'll rub off some of yours – in bed.

PETER
I DON'T INTEND TO DIE OF A TOOTHACHE! THAT WOMAN IS NUTS!

MOPSY
"I know I'm stupid and bitchy but I can't help it, I'm nuts." She deserves to be demolished.

PETER
Mopsy, she's old.

MOPSY
She doesn't think so. "I'm too young to have a daughter."

PETER (stubbornly)
She's an old bag.

MOPSY
Makes no difference. This is my game. I paid for it. You're to kill her.

PETER (incredulously)
You don't really want me to kill her?

MOPSY
Skin her alive. Why do you think I gave you that knife? (chuckles) No, I mean I expect you to make her fall madly in love with you – just like in the book.

PETER
I can't, I can't –

MOPSY
Just 'cause she's old and nuts? Mopsy won't accept that.

PETER
It's not only that…

MOPSY
What?

PETER
Well…this may be a surprise but…you're the first girl I've ever had. So you can see why –

MOPSY
– you need more experience. You were a virgin, dear?

PETER

…not exactly.

MOPSY (sweetly)

‘fess up to Mopsy, we’re so close, nothing could come between.

PETER

You’re sure.

MOPSY (purring)

Give Mopsy your secrets. Make us closer.

PETER

Well Mopsy…

MOPSY

Yes, dear.

PETER

I, uh…

MOPSY

Say it, dear.

PETER

…am…uh…..queer.

MOPSY

Yes go on, dear.

PETER

That’s it, what I said.

MOPSY

I thought you were going to tell me something I didn’t already know, dear.

PETER

How did you find out –

MOPSY

It’s obvious, dear.

PETER

You can understand then - with someone like her - it makes the whole thing…

MOPSY

More amusing - dear!

PETER

How can you ask me…I’ve come to care for you so much I might –

MOPSY

Stop being queer? You were broke, you needed a bath, Mopsy came along – definition of Caring. I like you as you are, Pete.

PETER (ringing false)

But I love you, Mopsy.

MOPSY

I know. (gives him a long kiss.)
Open your eyes. At night, while I talk, you close your eyes and think about my husband…if I had one! That's how you manage to "love me". With Liliane your mind can turn back to…soldiers?...little boys…playing soldiers? Oh yes, I was there, on the landing outside my door, listening ….to what you and your "chums" were up to inside! Did sound like little boys to me…almost asleep in the barracks of…your military school? Till someone kicks you awake! (kicks him) Come on, soldier, time for battle, the trumpets blast, orders shriek over the loudspeaker, stab the enemy, stab the friend -

(She hits him hard; he hits her back; she starts close body wrestling, controlling him, easily the stronger:)

Think of him, Peter, your spear on his, sweat flesh wounds torture blood knives harder harder fight harder you love killing, love to be killed, kill when you love –

PETER

YES!

MOPSY

You'd better love killing Lil – or its dishonorable discharge and we say goodbye.

PETER

You don't think Fred's going to let me –

MOPSY

Pretty Boy'll love seeing Ol' Money Bags humiliated.

PETER

The maid –

(Fred and Carol can be seen, off, carrying Liliane, unconscious.)

MOPSY

Is given a rough time by that kind of Madame –

PETER

And a salary!

MOPSY

She's only serving her for money. We'll be Mopsy-turving her for fun!

(The three enter.)

CAROL
You're still here – we had to promise you'd stay –

FRED
Before she'd take the injection!

CAROL
If she wakes and finds you gone –

MOPSY (motioning Peter to help Fred with Liliane)
Our pleasure to provide entertainment. Right, Peter?

PETER (takes Carol's share of Liliane)
I'll do anything you say. (smiles ingratiatingly at Fred; they carry Liliane to her bedroom.
Carol lingers in the doorway looking in; turns to face Mopsy who as well is trying to peer inside. The two girls scrutinize each other.
Carol's body slowly bars the doorway.
The lights dim on their figures.)

Scene 2

(Early that evening. On the table, an elegant tablecloth, cigarettes, matches. Mopsy is placing the last candle in a candelabra. Liliane enters from her room; in a bathrobe, hair unkempt, her naturalness making her look slightly younger. She carries costumes.)

LILIANE
Where is everybody? (calling) Frederick!

MOPSY
Gone to get Peter a sweater.

LILIANE
And Peter?

MOPSY
Helping to prepare your feast –

LILIANE
I've prepared him a costume! This is Frederick's…

MOPSY
Cute, isn't he?

LILIANE

Fred's a darling!

MOPSY

I meant Peter!

LILIANE (stroking MOPSY in a motherly way)

Yes; he's the "cutest" because you're young! It's spring - summer rather –
You're in love! For the first time! Married! For the first time. Fill these years with sunshine, it's all you'll ever have; it's all I ever –

MOPSY

Peter's not my husband.

LILIANE (a bit shocked)

I see.

MOPSY (coyly)

Ah ah you don't! He's – my little brother!

LILIANE (suspicious)

Why did you lie to me?

MOPSY

I was scared!

LILIANE

Of me?

MOPSY

Of everybody! It's not easy being a girl traveling for the first time. In the old days, we used to dress up as page boys! I thought if I passed off my sweet kid brother as hubby –

LILIANE

But why, why, what are you talking about -

MOPSY

This way I escape men!

LILIANE

Escape?

MOPSY

And the terrible things they could do!

LILIANE

Oh my God you should want to keep them around – as many as you can!
You're adorable – I'm going to put you in this dress, rouge those pretty cheeks, whip up your little girl's hair – and you won't be able to escape anymore! That door will fly open – the room will be filled with cavaliers! Put it on.

MOPSY

Liliane, I could never wear that dress. I don't have the chic, the grace…the beauty! That dress is for you.

LILIANE

It was my dress.

MOPSY

Let's go into your bedroom and make it just right.

(Carol very quickly appears from the kitchen with a bottle of wine, followed by Peter with four sparkling goblets.)

CAROL

I need some help in the kitchen!

MOPSY

Peter. Hold it up – isn't Liliane beautiful?

PETER (nervously)

Oh. Very nice.

LILIANE

Come, we'll sew and chat –

CAROL

Couldn't Mopsy help me –

MOPSY (sweetly)

I bet you'd like a dress like this for Paul!

LILIANE (irritably)

I'm busy, Carol, don't bother me with Paul –

CAROL

No the dishes –

LILIANE

Don't bother my guests - (to Mopsy) Come –

CAROL (improvising)

If she goes into your room – it won't be a surprise!

LILIANE

…Do I have surprises?…

CAROL

Yes! And Mopsy mustn't look!

LILIANE

Aaah…Sssh?

CAROL

Sssh!

(Chuckling, Liliane quickly goes into her bedroom. As Peter gets away into the kitchen:)

MOPSY (naively)

Carol, what does Liliane have against your boy friend?

CAROL

From Liliane you surely don't expect reason? (darkly, glance inviting a chat:) Sometimes I could, I don't know what I could do to that woman

MOPSY

Golly, I didn't think you felt that strongly?

CAROL

I assure you, it's not easy passing month after month with someone who doesn't even see you. Oh well, I get what I can out of her. (slyly knowing) What are you trying to get out of her?

MOPSY

I beg your pardon.

CAROL

You are trying to get something out of her. What?...Perhaps I can be of help?

MOPSY

…I'm just having an innocent day in the country!

FRED (entering from front door with a sweater)

Peter!

CAROL (to Fred)

There's a terrible draft in this room. Could you make a fire, Mopsy'll help.

(He crouches by the fireplace as Carol takes the sweater into the kitchen. Mopsy creeps up behind Fred and slips the matches over his shoulder.)

MOPSY

Need matches.

FRED

Oh thank you.

MOPSY (her little finger toying with his shoulder)

That jacket is too gorgeous to get all sooty.

FRED (stolidly hinting)
Liliane gave it to me.

MOPSY ("sexily")
Mmmm I'll bet she did. I get your number. You're kinda cute. And you know it.

FRED (looks at her closely, definitively removes her finger)
You're not.

MOPSY (coyly)
All right for you then. (She skips into Liliane's bedroom. Peter peeks out from the kitchen, wearing the sweater.)

PETER
Thank you for the lovely sweater.

FRED (still at fireplace)
It's nothing

PETER
It's a fabulous sweater.

FRED
You don't find it a little extreme?

PETER
Oh no! (going to him) That's a lovely jacket you've got on too! But be careful! It's too marvelous to get all sooty!

FRED
I do not care! It's nothing I would choose for myself!

PETER
Liliane bought it?

FRED
Mmm yes.

PETER
She buys your clothes?

FRED
Sometimes.

PETER
Did she buy this sweater?

FRED
Yes.

(Pause.)

PETER

How did you and she…

(Fred snorts, then)

FRED

That's a long story.

PETER

I'm sorry. You must think I'm terribly rude.

FRED

No, it's understandable. I'm sure we seem a…

PETER

Very funny pair. You do. Frankly.

(They exchange quick, knowing smiles.)

PETER

I am being…rude.

FRED

Quite the contrary. It's a relief to hear someone bluntly stating something honest – for a change.

PETER

Oh…? Well then – she doesn't seem to be the type to attract…a man like…you.

FRED

She isn't.

(Pause.)

PETER

Mopsy's not my type either.

FRED

I'm sure that's not your fault.

PETER

You understand then?

FRED

Of course I do.

PETER

So we can stop fencing around.

FRED (blandly)

Fencing is a great sport.

PETER

Oh? (tosses Fred his recorder and grabs the poker)
En garde! (They playfully begin to “fence”. Their weapons clinking:)
You like that sort of thing too, uh?

FRED

Indeed I do.

PETER

Harder, Frederick!

FRED

Hey watch –

PETER (lunging closer)

To battle – soldier!

FRED

Soldier?

PETER

You love killing, huh – I got your number the second I saw you -
(pressing the poker against the recorder) Oh Fred Fred I love you so.

FRED

WHAT!!

PETER

You’re stuck. I’m stuck. We’ll run off together – let those three bitches devour each other.

FRED (icily)

I’m afraid you’ve made a mistake.
(Peter groans, looks away in an agony of humiliation. Nicer)
There’s no need to create a scene. I’m simply not like that. I’m sorry.

PETER

…all right…it’s not your fault…

FRED

You seem to be in an unusual situation.

PETER

I am.

FRED

Does your wife know?

PETER
We're not really married and she's most encouraging!

FRED
You two don't even care for each other?

PETER
She wouldn't allow it. Fred, she's a monster.

FRED
Why on earth do you stay with her?

PETER
Simple. Without Mops I'd be a little American speck floating around France stealing purses from old ladies.

FRED
Can't you get a job?

PETER
Playing the harmonica and the recorder badly? I said I was stuck.

FRED
If I were you I'd do something ordinary. Go back to your own country -

PETER
Go back…

FRED
It's obvious. You're stranded in a country that doesn't want you with too much time and too little money. So you get mixed up with Mopsy. Well you're still stranded and you're wasting your time with her. What on earth can you be doing in this house at this very moment –

PETER
Fred, I'm gonna tell you everything - (glances to bedroom, gets very close, whispers in Fred's ear) At this moment, I'm supposed to make mad mad love -

FRED (springing away, angrily)
Love! You don't even know me! Stop thinking about the next person to steal from and – for once in your life – think of someone to be responsible to. (Peter is very stung.) When you do…I'm sure it will be a girl!

PETER (quietly)
Oh? Really sure?

FRED
Of course! (uncomfortable) A, a damned sensitive chap like you…will make a…splendid husband…someday. You only have to meet the right…how old are you?

PETER

Eighteen.

FRED

That's very young – believe me!

PETER

It's old enough to have heard your line before. You've got a girl to be responsible to. Who buys your clothes? Your underwear? Why don't you go back to your own country – who needs you here?

FRED (furious)

I'm going to chop up some more wood!

PETER

Sure!

(Fred ducks into the kitchen.)

PETER

Rotten son of a bastard! I should find a girl!

(violently throws a plate across the room which crashes on Liliane's door. Liliane emerges, wearing the evening dress. It lends her a patrician beauty but accents the age and pallor of her face; Mopsy follows, dressed as a page: beret, two pillowcases sewn together as a chemise.)

MOPSY

Peter – here's your girl!

LILIANE

What are you doing? Why are you doing such a –

PETER

Liliane, I love you so.

LILIANE

You what?

PETER (angrily)

I love you!

LILIANE

You don't love me?

PETER

I do, I adore you, worship you – I'm sorry, Mopsy -

MOPSY

That's all right. Liliane knows <u>you're</u> <u>my</u> <u>brother</u>.

LILIANE (looking to Mopsy)
Is this a game?

PETER
Game – if you don't believe me (brandishing his knife)
I'll do something desperate!

(Carol quickly enters from the kitchen as Liliane runs to Peter:)

LILIANE
I believe you! Eyes that glitter with fury only come from intense caring!
(grabs his arm and pulls it down)
Don't let it go out of your eyes, don't, it's precious –

CAROL (trying to take the knife)
Give that to me –

LILIANE (confused)
What?

CAROL
I need a sharp knife in the kitchen.

(Mopsy manages to seize the knife…Fred sneaks out of the kitchen with an ax, moves around the edge of the room to avoid everybody on his way out:)

LILIANE
Carol, I'm having an intimate conversation with this young gentleman. Leave us.
(Sees Fred. Terrified) Frederick! What are you doing with that ax?

FRED
To chop wood.

LILIANE
Yes, go away. Chop.

(He quickly goes outside: Carol's disappeared into the kitchen.)

MOPSY
In view of the importance of the moment, I'll leave you two alone. I'm terribly moved.
(on her way into the second room, catches Peter's eye to make the traditional sexual hand in crook of arm gesture, disappears…)

LILIANE
Do you love me? Is it possible that I can still be loved?

PETER
Oh yes.

LILIANE

But we hardly know each other.

PETER

I feel I've known you - all my life!

LILIANE

But you haven't. How can you love without knowing…

PETER

I do.

LILIANE

…My name is Liliane. I have a charming Paris apartment and an exquisite one in London. I'm rich, you see you didn't know that.

PETER (ears perking)

Very rich?

LILIANE

A small fortune, that's not why you noticed me –

PETER

No…

LILIANE

But if I want to help you…

PETER

Do you?

LILIANE

There's so much misery in this world.

PETER

Yes…

LILIANE

I'm rather unhappy myself. You didn't know that either. If you want to care for another person, you must care about that side.

PETER

Well, I do. What is bothering you, Liliane?

LILIANE (wanders to the fireplace, searching for something, sits on stool)

I'm being pursued by ghosts. They seep into everything, cover us with dust. They deny what a wonderful complicated thing it is, a human being, Our different nuances glitter like lights on dark waves. We're old, young, stupid, clever – even cruel if we let them slip inside. Yes – strangely we wouldn't have become so complicated without them.

PETER

I'll vanquish them.

LILIANE

You're so confident, so vulnerable. You wouldn't be the first angelic boy they turned into a fiend.

PETER

I can take care of myself.

LILIANE

Then give your word even as a knight of old.

PETER (gravely holds his recorder in front of him as if it were a pledged sword)

I give my word.

LILIANE

You'll protect me – always? Love me – always? Stay with me – always?

(He hesitates. Unseen by Liliane, Mopsy – with the book – peeps out. She nod a smiling "yes".)

PETER

Liliane – I – (Mopsy stamps, disappears. Liliane swings around.)
I stamped – to show them my strength!

LILIANE

Yes – don't let them take shape. When I think of them they knit together – where the shadows fall, the sounds you can't quite make out. If they got hold of human form they'd drag me away.

PETER

Liliane, who are they? What are they?

LILIANE

Of all those who've cared, only you have cared to know. When I've
Insisted with the others, they've been embarrassed, even a little angry.
Nobody's listened – all these years.

PETER

They've been bothering you all that long? From your childhood…before?

LILIANE

Oh, no. There was a time when nothing was haunted. I lived in what now seems the happy simple land of a fairy tale. I was a young girl…like any young girl.
I had a mother, father, then a husband, sweet as - even you. (stops.)

PETER

What happened?

LILIANE
Something went wrong. Secretly a tiny germ got loose –

PETER
A germ –

LILIANE
An idea –

PETER
In your house?

LILIANE
No – everywhere. It gobbled human feelings, leaving hard outer shells only caring about their own outer shells. A person with a soul gleamed as under an X ray – then they didn't leave the shell. (sarcastically) "How could such a thing happen?" Oh how how and why. Nowadays the people who ask are those who find reasons and contradictory reasons and nod over their reasons as those monsters nodded over our misery. You know what I'm talking about?

PETER (uncomfortably)
I think, in a way. The war. (She nods yes.) You…had a bad time during the war? (She nods yes.) And you're still brooding about it?

LILIANE
Brooding? Listen – carefully. You'll need this information to protect you against them when they try to get at you –

PETER
I think it's unlikely that I could be touched -

LILIANE
Oh ho! I saw thousands of young people exactly like you, smiling, unpretentious, turned into millions of horrible soldiers pointing arrows at us dipped in poisoned lies. A child in trouble hits a toy. Down through the centuries they've been getting you into trouble…tricking you into hitting toys - breaking toys – others breaking you. Little by little, humanity turned into a set of toys. You don't agree?

PETER
I never really thought much about it.

LILIANE
How can anyone not think –

PETER (defensively)
It was over before I was born…if you weren't around then…It's very fuzzy.

LILIANE
You are too naive to understand its horrors.

PETER

I'm not so naïve I can't understand it wasn't very nice. But I don't see any point in still carrying on -

LILIANE (very angry, advances on him, unconsciously he backs away)

Excuse me for carrying on – they killed my husband – excuse me for that. They killed my father – excuse me. They put us in a yard. They killed my mother. Those like me who are still alive are only so because even they couldn't control the oh few accidental drops that fall from destiny's soiled hem. Where do you think you're going? You're like the rest of them, you're embarrassed; don't want to hear; you think you'll skip away. That's tooeasy! Stay here! The man who's to be my husband must go through the fireI went through – how dare you love me and not care about - (suddenly she grabs him; with the strength of madness holds him in an inflexible grip.)

We're in the yard, my love! Time has stopped! Go on, clutch yourself to swing down one of the hands and get to another second. It's stopped. Not only your body but your mind, heart, soul are in a wired yard.

(They're quite still. She loosens her grip. Simulating an American accent)

"Go away. Leave. The monsters are gone. Don't you believe in miracles?"

The soldiers, the other ones in different uniforms almost had to push us out. We were so certain they were waiting outside – furious with us for being outside.

(Taking Peter's hand, she leads him as if following invisible paths.)

All along the road we looked for them to spring out of the bushes with their torturous weapons. Long long road. When I finally reached the village I looked back – once - to be sure. My eyes were caught in the sun! It's there, right in the middle of the sun…their funeral pyre! All the monsters, all who torture, are leaping, jumping in. Fire! Blood! Even in the village the sky is red! (She covers her eyes. She looks up.)

When it died out the bones were gone.

PETER

It was <u>over</u>.

LILIANE

Such a child to believe in over. A pity you've got to know…to be on the lookout.

PETER (more forcibly)

Liliane, that war is over.

LILIANE

The war, a little game to teach us to use their weapons. Everything went according to the plan.

PETER

Plan?

LILIANE

But of course! Inside the pyre, they quickly burned the shapes we'd recognize – they put on others. I saw that. The red sky was no more real than fireworks. It took everybody's attention from the grey one that followed. I wasn't fooled! They had become the stinking smoke rising from their own corpses. When the smoke descended, the sky was blue again – but every conscience had been coated, every young leaf ruined. Now we live in a different world, changed our lives, we were born after – listen, my darling, there are brigades of ghosts riding right behind, their knives swiping at our souls. We're all fleeing, faster, always faster, we're so terrified we don't care who we trample on. We treat others as they did, even use their excuses – that person underfoot does have all sorts of things wrong with him. What's a human life worth nowadays? Nothing. Murders here and there…we couldn't care less. They've won. We have turned into them. Nobody will ever be the same. The young, the victims. Even me.

PETER (uneasily)

How…you?

(She seems bewildered. Then she grotesquely twirls around, showing off the dress.)

LILIANE

Look at me. Punishment for thinking I could flee to…before.

PETER

Before?

LILIANE

Before them. Far back…orchards, flowers, the innocent unconscious time no one can remember. The silent music in children's story books. No wonder, laughing, they fling in my face the dust of how hideous I am. They've slowly covered me with a transparent shroud: bitterness. I look in the mirror, see myself as they saw me. They were right, I think. I'm ludicrous. I'm not necessary. I don't deserve to be alive. I can't bear looking. Instead I find my own toys to hit.

PETER

No…I'm sure you don't.

LILIANE

Peter…who wants to love me as simply as my own husband loved me. We can't love like that anymore. Now I find it hard to believe that love could ever have been anything but a means of inflicting pain.

PETER (childishly nice)

You inflict pain?

LILIANE (with difficulty)

Yes, I've inflicted pain.

PETER

How?

(She moves away from him; looks around the room as if seeking something intangible.)

LILIANE

I once fought for, for. (looks toward kitchen) A carrot. I've stopped fighting for…the carrot… (breaking down) the carrot…

(He goes to her.)

Oh please I can't. I can't give you anymore.

PETER

I'm sorry for asking. I never knew such pain really existed. I'm terribly sorry. Will you believe me. You can't realize how…please don't…

(He puts a comforting arm around her. Suddenly she tightly grips his hand; ecstatically.)

LILIANE

You care! I've found the only person who still cares! You love me! You adore me! Pain is banished! I'm happy! You – so pure!

(quickly pulling him across the room.)

PETER

Liliane – you don't even know me!

LILIANE

I feel I've known you all my life! There's no time for politeness! Later – when the others are asleep – we'll take the car and drive off together! Forever!

PETER (frightened)

But, but –

LILIANE

So let's get this silly dinner out of the way quickly - (going toward her room.)

PETER

Think of the others –

LILIANE

Let them devour each other.

PETER

Frederick!

LILIANE

He doesn't love me. Not like you. He's playing a game.

PETER

But to leave them out here - stuck –

LILIANE

I'll write an enormous check. I wasn't lying, I have lots of money now -

PETER (uncertainly)

Have you?

LILIANE

Of course I - (frightened) You did mean it - you do love me. You've given your word. Take it away – ever – I couldn't go on – (disappears into her bedroom.)

PETER (calling)

I meant it!

.

MOPSY (peeping out from the second room**)**

Yoo hoo! (Peter quickly closes Liliane's door.)

Darling, your approach to that whole scene was real cool. The missing page is just ahead!

PETER (horrified)

Missing page?

MOPSY (grinning)

Of course. Don't tell me her little soap opera made you forget <u>our</u> <u>game</u>?

(Carol quietly enters with dishes and silverware.)

Now put on the costume like a bad little boy.

CAROL

Yes, put on the costume. (They turn to her. Nicely)

Dinner's almost ready. Mopsy – could you bring in a chair?

(Mopsy disappears.)

PETER

Carol –

CAROL

I cannot help. No one can help. – the game is on! Are you strong enough to come to grips with it?

(Mopsy enters with a chair.)

MOPSY (studying Carol)

Carol?

CAROL (smiling politely)

Mopsy?

End of Act 1

ACT 2

Scene 1

(The fire ablaze. At the table, each with a glass in hand, Liliane, Mopsy, Peter and Fred, in their improvised medieval costumes. Carol nearby.)

LILIANE

Light the candles, Carol.

MOPSY

I'll get the matches!

LILIANE

Turn out the lights – as we used to.

CAROL

As we used to.

(As Mopsy lights candles, Carol turns out the lamps and goes into the kitchen:)

LILIANE

I propose a toast. Tonight we're celebrating human feelings. We're keeping them alive! Whatever happens – later – remember, it was because of the most noble of all human feelings. Love!

MOPSY

To love.

PETER and FRED (uncomfortably)

Love.

LILIANE

Close the door. (Peter moves.) No. Frederick.
(To Peter as Frederick goes to front door:) Stay by me tonight. (to Fred) Lock it.

MOPSY

Of course. At night…the things that could get in.

(Carol re-enters with a platter; meat on one side, carrots on the other; places it in front of Liliane. They smile knowingly.)

LILIANE

Ah!

MOPSY (with the most subtle edge of disapproval)

Carrots?

CAROL

For dinner parties – I always make carrots.

(Liliane regards the platter for a long moment, takes a serving. Carol places the carrots in front of Mopsy.)

MOPSY

Oh no…not carrots…

FRED

They're Carol's specialty!

CAROL (taking them away)

That's all right, let her…

MOPSY (barely audible)

Starve?

LILIANE (sternly, to Carol)

Carol! When I think of how I – never mind –

MOPSY

What?

LILIANE (trying to control herself)

I once fought for – a carrot.

MOPSY ("dumbly')

Was it a nice carrot?

LILIANE (with difficulty)

No, it was a giant one. Its heart…grown out through the skin. Turned it completely yellow. Fetid.

MOPSY

How terrible! Why did you fight for it?

CAROL (covering up)

It's quite all right. There's plenty of other things to eat -

MOPSY (softly)

Now?

LILIANE (to Carol)

You do think you're above it. That carrot was all I had. Do you know how I pleaded for it, how I got on my knees and licked filthy boots for that, that. That is what I've done for that…that…

MOPSY

What happened?

LILIANE

He. Let me have the carrot. (She's visibly shaken. Mopsy takes her in her arms. Fred motions to Carol to go over.)

MOPSY (to Carol and Fred, angrily)
Do something. (Raises Liliane's head for her to see Carol tensely nod No to Fred.) They only have eyes for each other.

LILIANE
You two are lovers!

MOPSY
Of course they are.

FRED
Lili, that's absurd –

CAROL
We don't even like each other. You know I'm in love with –

LILIANE
Paul Paul, he's all you ever think of –

MOPSY
Not what she told me before.

LILIANE (urgently)
What did she tell you –

CAROL
Nothing! She's a liar!

LILIANE
Everybody's a liar except you.

MOPSY
She's got her eyes on Fred 'cause he has more money than Paul.

LILIANE (dementedly)
STOP RUBBING PAUL IN MY FACE! (pointedly leaves the table; Mopsy follows her with the candelabra.) You're fired. You can leave. Both of you – without a check. What are you waiting for?

CAROL
Madame, I've prepared a lovely dinner, only for you. Let me serve it.

MOPSY (taking Liliane toward the bedroom)
I wouldn't trust her lovely dinner.

LILIANE (as Carol approaches)
Don't come near me!

CAROL
Madame, don't you know who I am anymore?

LILIANE
Who are you really?

(By the candlelight their faces all glow like mysterious masks. Outside: a faint sound of a car. To Fred:)

Who are you?

CAROL (indicating MOPSY)
Who is she?

LILIANE (to MOPSY)
Yes you. (looks desperately to Peter; he goes to her.) Even you can't answer?

MOPSY
He's Peter – your troubadour. I'm your faithful servant. We're all you have.

FRED
Lili, you're being ludicrous –

LILIANE /(breaking down)
I'm not ludicrous, I'm not, I'm a human being, I -

MOPSY (to Carol and Fred, angrily)
Of course she isn't. Can't you see she's tired? Peter, help your lady.

(A knock on the front door.)

There's Paul!

(Carol and Fred rush to the door.)

It's them! In human shape! They'll drag you back!

(Suddenly opens the bedroom door.)

Hide!

(Liliane hysterically runs in, Mopsy shoves Peter in; stands in the doorway,The candlelight turns her face into an impassive smiling skull as Fred and Carol race to the bedroom.)

MOPSY
Mopsy's got the matches! (slams the door in their faces; immediate sound of a lock.

The scrim wall becomes transparent. Through it, Liliane half-reclines on her bed. Luxurious colors lit by Mopsy's candelabra. A window.)

FRED and CAROL (pounding on the door)
Liliane, Liliane –

(Pounding on the front door as well.)

LILIANE

What is that?

MOPSY

Them. But far away. We're here. Sink into the covers…

(pushes Peter over who, thoroughly frightened, barely kisses Liliane's fingertips. Carol has run to and opened the front door. Against a twilight sky, the silhouette of a man with a cigar, Robert.)

CAROL (as they run back to bedroom)

She's in danger – locked in -

(Robert pounds on the bedroom door.)

ROBERT (commandingly, French accent)

Liliane, come out of there.

(Liliane, startled, sits up.)

LILIANE

Whose voice is that?

ROBERT

It's Robert.

LILIANE

Robert…

ROBERT

Your husband.

LILIANE (bewildered)

My…husband…But you're dead…Did you suffer?

ROBERT

Yes, I have suffered.

MOPSY (low)

Is he a ghost?

LILIANE

Are you a ghost?

ROBERT

Of course I'm not a ghost.

LILIANE

I know that voice. (half-rises in bed) I know who you are. (directly)
One of their helpers! I don't come out for their helps – anymore.

ROBERT (forcibly)

I'm your husband.

LILIANE
Can you deny that you helped them – and they let you spend the war in this little house.

ROBERT
I was very young, frightened –

LILIANE
You frighten easily. Where other people supported nightmares you had a deserted house. You fled your country after the war, went to England looking for…what? You married me to buy my nightmares. Any victim would've done. Go away.

CAROL (low to him)
Tell her you love her.

ROBERT
I married you because I loved you. I love you still. Come out of that room.

LILIANE
You don't love me as Peter.

ROBERT (Pause.)
If I didn't love you would I have spent my entire life indulging you? Have I ever refused you anything?

MOPSY (low)
He would've if you were a real woman – not a victim he bought to excuse his crimes.

LILIANE
Yes. When I left that camp I was naked as a matchstick. My life might have gone in any direction. I started climbing a little.
(She stands, facing him directly through the transparent wall.)
Instead of stopping me, you encouraged me to climb, clothed me in disguise after finer disguise. When I'm troubled we don't speak to each other, we race off to find a dress. Twenty years and not one honest word.

ROBERT
Liliane…if it means anything, these months I've suffered as never before to watch my companion slip away from me. That is the truth. I need your open wounds. You're not a strong person. You need my evasions.

(Pause.)

LILIANE (uncertainly moving toward door)
Perhaps…

MOPSY
If he needed you so much why did he let you come here with Fred?

LILIANE (to Robert)
How did you know I was here?

ROBERT

Carol sent me a telegram.

LILIANE

It took you all day?

ROBERT

Darling, I was in the middle of a conference –

LILIANE (bitterly)

I see.

MOPSY

He doesn't even care about you. (leads Liliane back to bed) Peter.

PETER (as Mopsy pushes him on the bed as well)

No…Mopsy…

MOPSY

For those who love, there are no boundaries! And Peter pledged his word!…

ROBERT

Liliane?

MOPSY (produces Peter's knife)

On this. (She flicks open the knife…regards them stretched out, satisfied)
It's perfect. (chuckles) It's almost too perfect.

ROBERT

Liliane? Answer me.

MOPSY

If it weren't for him. (suddenly holding her arm out to Liliane)
Let's get away from him!

LILIANE

Away?

ROBERT

Are you all right – Liliane!

MOPSY

Say yes.

LILIANE

I'm all right – if you'd leave me alone!
(Mopsy has led her to the window.)

MOPSY

C'mon Peter.

LILIANE

Yes, Peter must come. (As Peter approaches, to Mopsy) Where are we going?

MOPSY

Why to…Peter Rabbit's secret place! But ssh! We've got to sneak out like little bunnies! (She slips out the window – holding Liliane's hand.)

PETER (as Liliane climbs out the window)

Liliane – don't follow her -

MOPSY

One-two-three – Private Rabbit!

(Mopsy's and Liliane's arms catch his hand and pull him out the window.

Blackout on the house.)

Scene 2

(A small area suggesting the inside of a wood shed. The ax. Mopsy, Liliane, Peter – completely still. Voices of Carol, Robert, Fred, calling "Liliane". The voices fade off.)

MOPSY

Look at him, Lil. He's afraid.

LILIANE

Don't be.

MOPSY

He frightens easily. Like a little girl. Put your arms around him.

(Liliane does.)

PETER

Liliane…please…

MOPSY

He does go a little weak in the dark…needs a strong man to protect him…

LILIANE

Your father?

MOPSY

He needs a sister too…someone to pay for a light in the dark. Perhaps he needs a mother…or a grandmother…doesn't matter, he'll close his eyes. No one knows Peter as well as Sis!

LILIANE (defensively)
I know him too!

MOPSY
What makes you think so?

LILIANE
We love each other!

MOPSY
Lil, you're adorable! You only met him today! Yet you love him so much that if he were lying –

PETER I'm not! (together) **LILIANE** Lying –

MOPSY
You couldn't go on –

LILIANE
I couldn't –

PETER
Mopsy said <u>if</u> -

MOPSY
If he didn't love you –

LILIANE
But he does, he, he –

MOPSY
Pledged his word. He's going to pledge it again. (suddenly takes the ax.) On this. To you – this will always be sacred. (hands Liliane the ax.) Kiss it. (Liliane kisses the ax.) A pity you've got to know – to be on the lookout!

LILIANE
Know? Know what?

MOPSY
If he loves you – if he doesn't - Quick! Pay him back! He's lying!

LILIANE and PETER
NO!

(Peter grabs the arm with the ax)

MOPSY
Don't hurt Peter! He's just a pawn.

LILIANE (frightened)
Whose? Yours?

MOPSY

No – Carol's!

LILIANE

Carole's?

MOPSY

Mm. You ought to start by killing Carol.

PETER

No!

MOPSY

You see: she's turned Peter against you. Before, it was Fred! As well as Paul.

LILIANE

That is true!

MOPSY

You ought to kill Carol.

LILIANE

….I have thought she'd be better off dead…but I protect her…!

MOPSY

Is she grateful? No! You've got the means to end that! (indicating ax) But are you strong enough?

LILIANE (optimistic!)

I once killed a chicken! And very quickly, that way it didn't suffer!

MOPSY

The chicken mustn't know you've come into the room. Then one good stroke - at the back of the neck!

LILIANE (lifts ax again -)

Yes?

MOPSY

Show me! (Liliane brings down the ax on the block. She brings it up again -)

Ooh you are strong! Go, my dear! You're ready…Go kill…Carol…

LILIANE

Go kill…Carol… (begins to move, Mopsy follows, with the ax.)

PETER (behind them, weakly)

No…

MOPSY

She's turned Peter against you…Before that, Paul…and Frederick.

LILIANE (troubled come to a halt)
…Frederick…?

MOPSY (encouraging)
She's even had your husband.

LILIANE
My husband?

MOPSY
Both of them!

LILIANE
Both…? (long pause.) That is not true.

MOPSY
Liliane, I've seen them…Both your husbands!…and Paul and Fred…with Carol…I've seen her making them all laugh at you!...Go…kill Carol…Have the last laugh…kill Carol…

LILIANE
Do you know who Carol is?

MOPSY
Of course.

LILIANE
You only met her today…Fred…me. You don't know any of us!
(She suddenly whips around - faces Mopsy as if seeing her for the first time.)
You've been playing some sort of horrible game!

MOPSY
Of course.

LILIANE
You little monster!

MOPSY
Of course!

LILIANE
Now you want me to put this through your throat - that would please you!

MOPSY
Of course!

LILIANE
A baby! And they're in your blood

MOPSY

They're in yours.

LILIANE

No!

MOPSY

You followed me! You want to know me! You can't ever! You're too stupid - you sniveling old bitch!

(Liliane puts down the ax.)

LILIANE

It's you who don't know any of us!. We've put something over on you. (beginning to chuckle) You have no idea of what it is! (to Peter) Look at her smile. She hopes that will gloss over her confusion. Behind the smile – nothing but bluff.

PETER (floundering)

…I've never been very close to…my sister.

LILIANE

Close enough! Come with me.

(She firmly takes his hand and leads him off.)

MOPSY

That's right. Get away. But not too far. (starts after them.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

(The main room. Liliane takes her drink and hands Peter his. Carol, flitting outside, sees them, comes in.)

LILIANE

Carol, turn on all the lights! (As Carol turns on the lights:) Tonight we're celebrating war. (Mopsy comes through the front door.) I drink to Mopsy.

MOPSY

Aw, does that mean you've stopped drinking to love?

(Fred comes in, followed by Robert)

Is the wedding off?

LILIANE

Wedding?

MOPSY

Pete's the groom, your husbands acting like your father – finally getting to give you away! Here comes the bride! Lil - are you going to go on being screwed by Fred?

(Ghastly freeze.)

FRED

I – I'd - uh -

ROBERT (overlapping**)**

Why you -

CAROL (to Fred, "hinting")

Get your things ready to go. It might take you a while.

(As he quickly darts into the second room:)

MOPSY

One knight down, tail between his legs. And now it's Peter's turn!

PETER (desperately)

Liliane, I meant everything I said, believe me,

MOPSY (ambiguously)

You really fell for her.

PETER

Yes.

LILIANE

I want to speak to my husband alone. (to Peter)
Wait in my bedroom.

MOPSY

I'll keep you company –

LILIANE (ferociously)

Not in that room – with him –

MOPSY (heading for the second room)

I'll wait in my -

CAROL

It's not <u>your</u> room. (has grabbed a carving knife from the table and, threatening, gestures to the kitchen)

Get in there. (backs her into the kitchen, closes door, stays unobtrusively in front of it. Peter goes into the bedroom, closes door.)

ROBERT

Who is that, that –

LILIANE

I don't know and I don't intend to continue the acquaintance. But I want your goodwill to invite her brother to live with us.

ROBERT

The brother of that!

LILIANE

He obviously needs to be taken out of her reach immediately.

ROBERT

Still -

LILIANE

I don't chose someone to love by their least attractive relative. Give him to me.

ROBERT

I can't give you anybody.

LILIANE

Accept him in our household.

ROBERT

No!

LILIANE

Yes!

ROBERT

Darling, must we fill our apartment with every stranger you find on the street?

LILIANE

They're not strangers. They're people without a real home. Like I was. Peter needs my help.

ROBERT

You cannot help the entire world.

LILIANE

Oh you! When I was young I did nothing – and you behaved despicably. Perhaps we couldn't conceive of the result. We no longer have that excuse. I know that if I close my door to that boy who told me he loved me, I deliver him to monsters like that girl. I won't let that happen. But you don't care…do you?

ROBERT

Of course I care…but…

LILIANE

But?

ROBERT

What about Fred?

LILIANE

Fred? Oh…that's over, I think, for both of us. We'll part as friends. I'm already forgetting Fred…

ROBERT

Good! Forget Fred. Forget his very name!

LILIANE

It's forgotten!

ROBERT

Then I'll go along with it. But only because I do love you, loved you from the start, gone on loving you –

LILIANE

Then I'm wreathed in love! (Carol steps directly to them.) We're leaving!

CAROL

Yes, go back to your nice apartment. I'll drive the other car later. (delicately) After I've closed the place up properly…this time.

LILIANE (impulsively)

You've been so good to me - all day - (embraces her)

CAROL

You've always been good to me. (nudging Liliane gently to bedroom) Peter's waiting.

LILIANE (calling)

Peter!

PETER (entering)

Yes?

LILIANE

If you want to share a little of our lives for a while, my husband and I extend an invitation.

(As Carol gestures at the bedroom to Robert.)

PETER

I accept the invitation. It's very kind of you.

ROBERT

Come, Liliane, let's get your things ready to go. (He takes her into the bedroom.)

CAROL

You'll drive back with them in the sports car. Fred and I will take Mopsy in the sedan.. You'd better say goodbye to her.

PETER

Can't we just sneak away – I don't care if I never see her again –

CAROL

But I care. Finish it with her. You're a grown-up man. Prove it.

(She quickly goes into the second room as Peter opens the kitchen door. Mopsy skips out.)

MOPSY

Lovely, darling, the way you keep the game spinning on and on! I lam into her, you lam into me, she loves you more!

PETER

Yeh, we're going to play it cool. I'm going to move in with Lil. Carol and Fred will drop you off someplace. Goodbye.

MOPSY

……Do I detect a note of irritation in my Peter's voice? (embracing him)
Darling I wasn't really going to let that old bag kill you…that was just the game!
Though I don't think the ending is acceptable. In fact we're not reincarnations from that stupid book! (trying to lead him to front door) So let's just tiptoe outta here like little -

PETER

I'm getting away from you. I'm going with Liliane. What you did – after what she went through –

MOPSY

You still believe her far-fetcheries? Everybody says they were there! You'd think it was a fancy hotel they were clambering to get into. As excuse for behavior, it's totally inacceptable.

PETER

We don't agree. I find it very acceptable. I now find you not.

MOPSY

Mmm. She must've offered you more money. I'll double it on the other side of that door.

(He hands her back his walkie-talkie.)

PETER

You lost me today.

MOPSY

But I love hide and seek! I'll seek Lil and tell her about the soldier boys! Think she'll play open-house to a vicious little sadist – or were you planning to give them up?

PETER

I didn't say that –

MOPSY

I think Fred oughta know!

PETER

He knows –

MOPSY

You hot little bunnies making out on my time? I'll tell Lil about you two of you! Why she still thinks you're my brother! I'll tell her everything.

PETER

I'll deny everything!

MOPSY

Doesn't matter. One more doubt – she won't trust you again! Or anyone else. Lovely! And you'll be on the sidewalk without a penny! (as Carol reappears)
Where's Lili, Peter

CAROL

Looking for Madame?

MOPSY

Yes –

CAROL

I saw her from the window…going to the shrine.

MOPSY

Where?

CAROL

Take the left path, then the turning to the right, then the second to the left,
You'll hit the shrine to her family.

MOPSY (racing out)

Ready-or-not-here-I-come!

(Peter springs after her but Carol grabs him.)

PETER (struggling)

You don't care, you're as bad as her -

CAROL

Madame's in <u>there</u>. (They stop fighting.) And she thinks she can count on you. Can she?

PETER

She can.

CAROL

Good. (races to the bedroom.)

FRED (peeking in from second room)

Carol –

CAROL

Quick! The sedan! Do as I say!

(He dashes out of the house. Looking into bedroom:)

Hurry up, Madame.

LILIANE'S VOICE

I haven't finished, now stop trying to rush –

CAROL

God damn it! Lil! Get off your bloody arse!

LILIANE (in doorway)

Carol! You know I don't like you talking like that!

CAROL (pulling Liliane toward front entrance)

Last one to the car's a rotten egg!

LILIANE (pulling away)

Let go –

ROBERT (blocking bedroom)

Surely you don't wish to be a rotten egg?

LILIANE

You're both a couple of children! All right all right – but we have to do it properly. Line up, everybody. Now! Let me warn you: this time I'm going to win! One. Two. Everybody is ready? Sure? Three. (takes a deep breath) Go!

(She dashes out of the house, followed by Peter and Robert. Carol runs into the second room.)

CAROL'S VOICE

You're going to be rotten eggs! Faster! Rotten eggs!

(Mopsy enters, suspicious.)

MOPSY

Rotten eggs?.....Liliane?

(Carole appears with the book.)

CAROL (to MOPSY, as if reading)

"Once upon a time there was a great lady who had everything she wanted. She had one thing she didn't want – her daughter, Carol. For Carol had been born in a place Liliane had every right to forget. Loved, ignored, loved again, Carol understood the mother who couldn't accept the one person she needed. Paul asked Carol to marry him. Liliane couldn't comprehend her daughter wishing to leave her voluntarily when the rest of her family had been dragged away. She refused to even discuss Paul. She sat by the fireplace reading a children's story over and over again. She always liked the child's world where good is good and bad indisputably bad. Aggravated, Carol grabbed the book, Liliane held it, a page tore. Liliane no longer even recognized Carol. When Carol brought Paul to her, hoping his presence would break the spell, Liliane insisted he was the handsome knight, Frederick, having stepped right out of the book to protect her against the ghosts – and Carol was her faithful servant. Along came Mopsy. She had no

idea of who these people were and yet she played a game with them. She ordered her slave, Peter, to destroy Liliane. Instead he offered her sanity and help. Poor Mopsy."

MOPSY

Along came Carol and ordered her slave, Paul, to destroy Liliane. Poor Carol.

CAROL

Someone Carol loves is on a tightrope of memory and feeling –

MOPSY

One wrong word from Carol and Liliane's gonna tumble off the rope.

CAROL

Carol won't say it.

MOPSY

Putting herself in the position to say it means one day she'll say it. Carol's playing the same game as mine – the only difference is that I'm enjoying the game. That's why I'm winning.

CAROL

Winning?

MOPSY

Everything's going according to the plan. I planned to get rid of Liliane and Peter.

CAROL

After the way tried to keep them here?

MOPSY

Aren't they gone? That's what Carol wanted too. Who invited Mopsy in the first place – who retained Mopsy with her little tale? Carol's intrigued by me because I always win and she's sick to death of losing. Long hours in a dreary costume insisting her evil toward Liliane was good…and I'm the one that's winning! That's all I care about. So I work harder and with more relish. If Liliane leaves, in a second I can knit into a new combination like dozens of flies re-settling on a heap of dung. (pinches Carol's arm. Pause.) Now what do you feel?

CAROL

Nothing.

MOPSY

But I'm still enjoying the memory of having done it.

CAROL

What did ten thousand feel?

MOPSY

They feel nothing now. But we're still enjoying the fun of having done it! You're on their side or ours. Change, Carol! Be anybody you want to be! As often as you like!

CAROL

Till I don't know who I am.

MOPSY

Do you know who you are? Stop caring about it. Stop caring. I'll have a lot to teach you. But you've got guts, brains - and cruelty! What you did to your mother does show promise! Now that Pete's gone over to her side, if you'd come over to mine, we could finish the story. Together we could fill in the missing page.

CAROL

Page?...Do you mean this one?

(She produces a page from her apron pocket, unfolds it.)

MOPSY (putting out her hand)

I accept it – as your initiation fee.

CAROL

You'd destroy everything that's ever breathed just to know what's on a little piece of paper?

(Mopsy nods yes.)

How easy it would be to let you slip inside and start the game on someone else. No. I'm sure I saved the page in order to burn it in front of you.

(Carol heads to the fireplace; Mopsy grabs at her. The page drops as they struggle – Carol manages to push Mopsy down and rains blows on her.)

MOPSY (cooing)

Punish me. You've been wanting to all day.

CAROL (fiercely)

I haven't! Already for you I feel nothing at all. Get out.

(She pushes Mopsy outside. Mopsy staggers, disappears. Carol throws the page in the fire – and the book. The fire violently flares up - its color exploding immediately over the entire room – Carol falls … Liliane, Peter, Robert… then Fred reappear)

FRED

Are you all right?...Carol…?

CAROL

Frederick...

LILIANE

No! (Liliane hesitates…)

Paul.

(She goes directly to Carol.)

The game is over. All the games.

(She holds Carol tightly as if her own life depended on it.)

End of play.

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