EMILE ZOLA: BLOOD, SEX & MONEY

**BLOOD**

**Episode 9: Trains**

**Dan Rebellato**

Adapted from:

**La Bête Humaine**

by Émile Zola

**Fourth Draft** (June 2015)

Night. A woman is having disturbed dreams. With a gasp she wakes up. She comes to, realises where she is. Stretches out. The other side of the bed is empty.

SEVERINE Martin?

Beat.

Husband?

ROUBAUD I’m here.

SEVERINE Martin, what are you doing out of bed?

ROUBAUD Shh.

SEVERINE What is it?

ROUBAUD Can’t you hear it?

SEVERINE Hear what - ?

ROUBAUD Shh. (Pause.) It’s the money.

SEVERINE The what? What money?

ROUBAUD Grandmorin’s money. I can hear it.

SEVERINE Come back to bed. You’re having a nightmare.

ROUBAUD No. Where I hid it, under the floor, after we -

SEVERINE Quiet!

ROUBAUD (hisses) After we did him in. I can hear it. I can hear the money.

SEVERINE Money doesn’t make / a sound –

ROUBAUD Listen. Just listen.

They listen. And slowly we can hear a heartbeat. Faint but unmistakeable.

It’s him. It’s the old devil. He’s here.

The heartbeat grows. It becomes more regular. It becomes the ticking of a pocket watch. These ticks become more rhythmic.

DIDI (VO) Listen. There’s something coming. Something returning, breaking through the ground, something thundering in the blood.

They are the rattling of steel rails. And then a train bursts towards us.

And we are in the driver’s cabin. Ferocious noise, steady roar of the engine, steam, wind passing, the engine thundering. The cabin is open so they have to shout to be heard.

JACQUES You shouldn’t be here.

SEVERINE Would you rather I was back in second class with my third-class husband?

JACQUES I’m not saying that, but this isn’t a place for a lady.

SEVERINE I’ll go back to my compartment at the next stop.

JACQUES Doesn’t he wonder where you are?

SEVERINE He doesn’t know and he doesn’t care.

DIDI (VO) A train is like a steel heart, running on steam rather than blood. When you hear the hammering of a train racing by, doesn’t your heart beat against your ribs? In this steel heart, weaker hearts are bursting: Severine whose desire for the train driver is only matched by the hatred she holds for her husband. Jacques - ah Jacques - a man born with murder in his heart, who believes himself cured by Severine’s love.

JACQUES Well. Just sit tight and hold on.

SEVERINE (sulkily) Alright then.

DIDI (VO) But a heart is not cured so easily, my boy. That is Macquart blood you have in you.

PECQUEUX First time in the driver’s cabin, Miss?

JACQUES Keep your mind on the job, Mr Pecqueux.

PECQUEUX Just making conversation!

JACQUES (tersely) I know what you were doing.

SEVERINE (pacifying) And what’s your job?

PECQUEUX I’m the fireman, Miss.

SEVERINE What does that mean?

PECQUEUX I’m the man in charge of the fire.

SEVERINE Is that important?

PECQUEUX Without no fire, you got no heat and without no heat you got no steam and without no steam you got no engine and without no engine you ain’t got no train.

SEVERINE (mock-outraged) Jacques! I thought it was you who made the train go.

JACQUES What? He’s a coal-shoveller, that’s all. It’s the driver that makes it go where we want.

PECQUEUX Where we want don’t come into it. See those lines in front of us? We’re on rails. Where we’re going’s already been decided.

Jacques operates the steam whistle.

DIDI (VO) This is how the future comes: a blast of whistle, a thundering of steam and steel.

SEVERINE How can you bear the noise?

BOTH MEN What noise?

SEVERINE That wind and roar and clanging.

JACQUES That’s not noise. That’s My Lady singing that is.

SEVERINE approaches JACQUES and clings to his waist.

SEVERINE (flirtily) I thought I was your lady.

JACQUES Not like this Lady. This Lady’s a proper thoroughbred. You got refinement, sure; but this one’s a beautiful beast.

SEVERINE You should try me...

PECQUEUX I’m still here, you know.

JACQUES Keep an eye on those dials; we got the incline coming up after Broken Cross.

SEVERINE We go past Broken Cross?

JACQUES We do. Why?

SEVERINE I hate that place.

JACQUES It’s coming up.

Pause.

PECQUEUX Think she’ll be there?

JACQUES Don’t doubt it.

SEVERINE Who?

JACQUES It’s no one.

SEVERINE Tell me, Jacques.

Train whistle.

JACQUES Damn it. Damn her.

PECQUEUX Is she there?

JACQUES She is.

SEVERINE Who? What are you talking about?

JACQUES Look. Over there, by the entrance to the tunnel.

SEVERINE Who is that?

JACQUES She’s called Flore.

Surge of train sound but now we’re outside, beside the tracks.

DIDI (VO) Oh yes, she’s there. Another wild heart. The servant-girl Flore with the waiting eyes. This girl who sees the dark blood in you. Can’t you understand that, Jacques? What it’s like to love a dangerous man? Makes you feel dangerous yourself. Like me, Jacques. Watching at the gate for my Macquart. His dangerous eyes flashing in my darkness. I know her, Jacques. I know how she thinks.

The train is thundering towards us. The sound slows, suspends, echoes unreally.

And as the train passes, your eyes make a connection for a second, for an instant. She thinks: I see you, Jacques Lantier. With your fancy woman. You can’t hide from me. Your Flore’s got everything that Paris woman got and more. A lot more. She thinks, I could break her like a stick. Crack her back with a punch. Come with me, Jacques Lantier. I’m waiting.

The sound unsuspends and the train roars past and away. And then it’s gone.

Back in the cabin.

SEVERINE Who was that?

JACQUES Just a girl.

SEVERINE What do you mean, just a girl?

JACQUES She works by Broken Cross. Her dad’s a signalman.

SEVERINE What does she want?

JACQUES Don’t know. She just stands there. Watching.

PECQUEUX She were here last week an’ all.

JACQUES She stands there every week. Watches the train.

PECQUEUX Aye, or maybe watches him.

JACQUES Leave it out.

SEVERINE I don’t like her. She’s dangerous.

JACQUES Don’t worry about her, she’s nothing.

Piercing musical note underscores.

DIDI (VO) But that’s not true, is it Jacques? She is dangerous and you know it. She’d do anything to have you, anything at all, and you know that too.

Note builds. It is building up in Jacques’s head. Then cut it.

JACQUES (after a beat) Okay, pressure dropping. You need to stoke her, man. Open the valve.

Roar of flame as the ventilator opens. Coal being shovelled. Steam floods, engine growls, metal straining.

That’s it. That’s it.

PECQUEUX (panting) Hope he’s not as demanding with you, Miss.

SEVERINE Oh he has his moments...

JACQUES Good girl. Come on girl. That’s it.

The engine is roaring as it starts to make the climb. Then cut to:

A room at the station. Four men at a table, studying their cards. They’re smoking. Brandies on the table.

ROUBAUD The evening train from Le Havre was late again.

CAUCHE We’re not here to talk shop, Mr Roubaud.

ROUBAUD No indeed, Mr Cauche, no indeed.

CAUCHE I’m in. 25 francs.

Coins pushed forward.

ROUBAUD But it does worry away at one. It’s the fourth time it’s been late this week.

CAUCHE Are you in or out, Mr Roubaud?

ROUBAUD I’m thinking...

Sighs of frustration.

You’ll have to forgive me gentlemen. I don’t have your constitutions. I have these headaches...

CAUCHE Too much wine, women, and song I’d say.

DIDI (VO) Since Martin Roubaud murdered Grandmorin, he had become numb inside. This man who once took pride in his job as assistant station manager, applauded for his efficiency and reliability, now he looked without seeing, gave orders but never checked they’d been carried out. He found his wife’s presence a reminder of their shared guilt and he sought out excuses to stay out late. He wasn’t even sure if he knew about his wife’s affair.

ROUBAUD I see your 25 francs and I raise you 50.

CAUCHE I’ll take that bet.

Coins.

ROUBAUD (Laying down his cards, smugly) Four tens.

Appreciative whistles.

CAUCHE Good work, Roubaud.

ROUBAUD Thank you.

He goes to collect his winnings.

CAUCHE Except.

ROUBAUD You have to be joking.

CAUCHE Straight flush. Jack, Queen, King, Ace. Bad luck, Roubaud.

Gathers in winnings.

ROUBAUD You have the luck of the devil.

DIDI (VO) But poor Mr Roubaud didn’t mind losing because poor Mr Roubaud wasn’t there to win. He would rather be there losing than at home. He would let himself in at three in the morning and slide carefully into bed trying not to wake his guilty wife.

Night. Bedroom.

DIDI (VO) For her part Severine would pretend to be asleep though in truth, whenever she closed her eyes, she saw a knife hacking across Grandmorin’s throat.

Distantly, we hear the sounds of the murder, the thrum of the train. Underneath, voiceless whispers: ‘beast, beast, beast’.

DIDI (VO) The frozen husband and faithless wife would lie side by side, both pretending to sleep, haunted by their memories and united in their mutual disgust.

DIDI (VO) Meanwhile, beside the House at Broken Cross, Flore watches the trains.

We hear a great train flashing past. We seem to hear the carriages, the windows, each flashing by. The effect becomes like a drum beat, as if somehow we are seeing the passenger at each window.

There are two worlds now, aren’t there? She thinks. A world of earth and a world of metal. There’s a world of the seasons and a world of speed. You think you’re better than the likes of me, Jacques Lantier, thinks Flore, but you’re wrong. Her eyes fill with darkness. Jacques Lantier, she thinks, I’m going to pull you back into the earth.

The ROUBAUDS’ kitchen. Morning. SEVERINE enters.

SEVERINE Haven’t you gone yet?

ROUBAUD I got time.

SEVERINE You should be there by now.

ROUBAUD Moulin can cover for me.

SEVERINE It’s like you want people to talk.

Pause. They ignore each other. SEVERINE cuts bread.

ROUBAUD I think my blood’s getting thicker.

SEVERINE You’re talking rubbish.

ROUBAUD Round my heart, I can feel it.

SEVERINE Listen, stop talking like that.

ROUBAUD Will you get my coat?

SEVERINE What? You get it.

ROUBAUD I’m asking you.

SEVERINE Why can’t you get it?

Pause.

ROUBAUD I can hear it again.

SEVERINE Not this again.

ROUBAUD His money. Grandmorin.

SEVERINE Don’t say his name.

ROUBAUD What if he’s not dead somehow?

SEVERINE You cut his throat. We threw him out of a train. He’s very dead. He’s about as dead as you can get.

ROUBAUD But I can hear him.

Heart beat/clock and the whispered words ‘Beast. Beast. Beast.’

SEVERINE I didn’t know I’d married such a coward.

ROUBAUD I don’t think we’re done with this.

She’s getting his coat.

SEVERINE We’re done with this if you keep your nerve.

She returns.

There. Happy now?

The noise subsides.

ROUBAUD Thank you.

SEVERINE I’m out today.

ROUBAUD What?

SEVERINE I’m seeing a doctor.

ROUBAUD What are you seeing a doctor for?

SEVERINE I have a bad knee. I told you about it.

ROUBAUD You didn’t tell me about it.

SEVERINE Yes I did, you just forgot.

ROUBAUD Which train are you getting?

SEVERINE 8.30.

ROUBAUD There’s isn’t an 8.30.

SEVERINE Whichever. I don’t know, Martin.

ROUBAUD The 8.40?

SEVERINE Yes, alright, maybe.

ROUBAUD That’s the Express. Jacques Lantier. He drives that one.

SEVERINE Does he? Well.

ROUBAUD Why’s he stopped coming here do you think?

SEVERINE Don’t know.

ROUBAUD I don’t mind, you know.

SEVERINE Don’t mind what?

ROUBAUD Nothing. Just...

SEVERINE Why can’t you say it?

ROUBAUD Say what?

SEVERINE No, you haven’t got the balls, have you?

ROUBAUD Don’t know what you’re talking about.

SEVERINE Give me strength.

ROUBAUD Severine...

SEVERINE Don’t talk to me. Don’t touch me.

ROUBAUD I’m not trying -

SEVERINE Just leave me alone.

Quick cut to: Train platform. Daytime. Distant chatter. Sounds of the train readying to go.

SEVERINE He disgusts me. I can’t bear to look at him. I can’t bear him touching me. In the night, if his leg touches mine, I want to scream.

JACQUES I know, love.

SEVERINE Sometimes I wish he’d just ask me outright.

JACQUES I don’t want that.

SEVERINE Sometimes I wish we could just go away. Just run away somewhere together. Sail away even.

JACQUES How can we do that?

SEVERINE I don’t know. But just think of it, Jacques. We could start again. Somewhere new. New names. A new life.

JACQUES Easy to say. Not so easy to do.

SEVERINE Once we sell the house at Broken Cross, I’ll have money.

JACQUES Severine, you know that won’t work. Legally, that money goes to your husband.

SEVERINE It was left to me!

JACQUES I’m not saying it wasn’t but the law –

SEVERINE You think I care about the law?

JACQUES Come on, Severine. Be reasonable.

SEVERINE I just sometimes wish he would just go.

JACQUES Go?

SEVERINE Just disappear. Swear to God, Jacques, sometimes I dream about waking up one day and finding out he’s dead.

JACQUES Don’t say that, love.

SEVERINE Just mean, it would be good for both of us if something happened to him.

JACQUES Severine.

SEVERINE Sooner rather than later.

JACQUES No!

Distantly we hear that shimmering spangly sound. JACQUES is breathless, panicked. Whispered voices: ‘beast, beast, beast’

SEVERINE I’m not saying –

JACQUES I know what you’re saying –

SEVERINE No, Jacques –

JACQUES Don’t ever ask me. Don’t ever ask me that.

SEVERINE I wasn’t, Jacques, please –

JACQUES Don’t say it. Don’t even think it.

SEVERINE Alright, Jacques, alright. I’ll shut up now. I was just thinking out loud. You know it’s just because I love you.

JACQUES Yes. I know.

SEVERINE The done thing, Jacques, when a girl says she loves you, is to say it back.

JACQUES Yes. I do.

SEVERINE Do what?

JACQUES I love you too.

SEVERINE We’ll forget about this conversation. I promise. It never happened, alright?

JACQUES Alright.

SEVERINE Good.

JACQUES Thank you.

DIDI (VO) But you know she doesn’t mean that, don’t you, Jacques? You know she’s just set a thought dancing in your head. Like she senses you have something in your blood, something dark and bad and ancient, and she wants it to come out.

Fade the shimmer. PECQUEUX appears.

PECQUEUX Jacques, Mrs Roubaud.

JACQUES Where have you been? You’re bloody late.

SEVERINE I’d better go back in my compartment.

JACQUES Yes. I’ll see you later.

SEVERINE Goodbye.

PECQUEUX Bye, Miss.

JACQUES Well?

PECQUEUX Philomene.

JACQUES What about her?

PECQUEUX She’s insatiable. I swear to you. She can’t get enough of me.

JACQUES I don’t care what woman you’ve found, don’t be late again.

They climb up into the cab, PECQUEUX first.

PECQUEUX There’s something to be said for an experienced woman.

JACQUES You’re a bloody animal.

Whistle, sounds of the engine rapidly building up steam.

DIDI (VO) An hour down the line, at Broken Cross, Flore is watching for the train.

The train is very distant. She watches it snake through the landscape.

Steam and smoke, she thinks. Come to me, Jacques Lantier, she thinks. Leave your woman behind, she thinks; come to Flore.

The train approaches.

I know you, Jacques Lantier, she thinks, you big strong beast. You don’t want a girl like her; you need a strong woman like Flore. That’s it. You take her, you pound her, you shake her, you –

The train is pounding on the rails, very loud now -

Come to Flore, she says. Come to me!

FLORE gasps as she is buffeted by the huge pulse of air displaced by the train and the sound that drums through her. The sound reverberates through her. Her gasps are perhaps almost gasps of arousal. The train passes and the sound recedes.

(softly) Jacques...

Night. A woman is having disturbed dreams. With a gasp she wakes up. She comes to, realises where she is. Stretches out. The other side of the bed is empty.

SEVERINE Martin?

Beat.

Roubaud?

She sits up. She listens. She can vaguely hear a sort of hammering.

What the - ?

She gets out of bed and pulls on a dressing gown. She goes to explore the source of the sound. We follow her. She opens the door to the front room and ROUBAUD is on the floor, pulling wood from the floor.

What the hell are you doing?

ROUBAUD What are you doing up?

SEVERINE You woke me.

ROUBAUD Go back to bed.

SEVERINE You tell me what you’re doing.

ROUBAUD It’s none of your business.

SEVERINE Is that his money?

ROUBAUD I’m moving it.

SEVERINE Moving it? Or spending it?

ROUBAUD No. What? No.

SEVERINE What are you going to do with it?

ROUBAUD I’ll find somewhere safe.

SEVERINE Safe where it is.

ROUBAUD Be safer out of the house.

SEVERINE What’s the matter? Lost too much at the poker table again?

ROUBAUD What do you care?

SEVERINE I care if you’re chucking away my money on your gambling debts.

ROUBAUD It’s not your money; it’s our money.

SEVERINE So that is what you’re doing with it.

ROUBAUD We can’t keep it here anyway. It’s not safe.

SEVERINE You’re pathetic. You’re a pathetic man.

ROUBAUD Oh is that what I am?

SEVERINE Why do you play cards? You’re not even any good at it.

ROUBAUD (losing his cool) WHAT DO YOU DAMN WELL CARE? I LET YOU HAVE YOUR FUN NOW YOU LET ME HAVE MINE.

Pause.

SEVERINE Put the money back and come to bed.

Train whistle.

Train in motion. Dining car.

JACQUES This doesn’t feel right.

SEVERINE What doesn’t?

JACQUES Fact it feels wrong.

SEVERINE Bit of luxury never hurt anyone.

JACQUES I’m a driver. I should be up front.

SEVERINE Sit back and enjoy it.

JACQUES Don’t feel right.

SEVERINE (Laughing) You’re not going to tell me you prefer your horrible little driver’s cabin.

JACQUES Well...

SEVERINE But it’s freezing, unless you’re by the furnace when it’s roasting; you can’t hear yourself think, the wind and the smoke make your eyes stream –

JACQUES But you can see where you’re going. You know what you’re doing.

SEVERINE Relax and enjoy it. Philippe is a good driver.

JACQUES Don’t feel right sitting in here. Like you’re in a box, someone’s dragging you through the countryside.

SEVERINE That’s the whole point, Jacques...

JACQUES There’s people as are drivers and there’s people as are passengers. I’m a driver.

SEVERINE And, what, I’m one of life’s passengers?

JACQUES Didn’t say nothing about life, just trains.

SEVERINE That’s silly, Jacques. It’s just a job.

JACQUES It’s more than that.

SEVERINE Oh here we go.

JACQUES The steel and the steam they get into your blood.

SEVERINE You could do a hundred jobs. A thousand.

JACQUES I wouldn’t though.

SEVERINE You only say that because you’ve never thought about it.

JACQUES Not so. I got a job offer last week. Turned it down flat.

SEVERINE What job?

JACQUES Bloke I know from the yard. He’s setting himself up in America, got a factory opening up, wanted me to manage it.

SEVERINE And you said no?

JACQUES Course I did. That’s what I’m saying.

SEVERINE I don’t believe you.

JACQUES What do you mean?

Steam whistle heard from outside the train.

JACQUES Ah.

SEVERINE What’s that mean?

JACQUES Warning the signalman at Broken Cross.

SEVERINE That place again.

JACQUES Take a look out that side.

SEVERINE Why?

JACQUES See if the girl’s there.

We’re in a signal box. We hear a male voice speaking low, too low for us to make out the words.

DIDI (VO) Yes, the girl Flore is there. Not trackside this time, she’s in the Signal Box with her father. Not trackside because her father is talking to her. He’s telling her mother, her poor mother, so long ill, so slow in letting go of this world, has finally lost her grip on life. He is awkward, his voice low and murmuring. And Flore, Flore hardly hears. She doesn’t look at him. Her eyes are looking down the line. She’s waiting for the Paris train to batter down her heart.

Train compartment.

SEVERINE I don’t see her.

JACQUES Good.

SEVERINE Anyway, why didn’t you tell me?

JACQUES Tell you what?

SEVERINE About America.

JACQUES What about it?

SEVERINE This is what we’ve been waiting for. We could start again.

JACQUES With what?

SEVERINE (drops her voice) What about Grandmorin’s money.

JACQUES You can’t use that.

SEVERINE Why not?

JACQUES I don’t know but you can’t.

SEVERINE We’d be free. We’d be together.

DIDI (VO) Flore hears her father tell her that her mother is gone. She doesn’t cry. She doesn’t speak. Her father asks her if she’s alright and Flore looks down the tracks and thinks: why can’t I cry? I can’t even bloody cry. You have crushed my heart, Jacques Lantier, thinks Flore. You and your Paris woman. Her father is telling her he needs to go back to the house but Flore doesn’t answer. She knows he’s speaking but she doesn’t hear him. She’s listening for the sound of steam and steel.

Train compartment.

SEVERINE I suppose you’re right. Even if we did go over the water, how would we know he wouldn’t come looking for us?

JACQUES Don’t be daft.

SEVERINE It’s not daft. Wherever we go, we’ll always be looking behind us.

JACQUES Oh come off it.

SEVERINE He would, you know he would. Unless...

Steam whistle.

JACQUES I told you I don’t like you talking like that.

SEVERINE I’m not saying anything. I’m just thinking.

DIDI (VO) Flore is thinking too. Sat in the signal box, hearing the first distant scream of a steam whistle.

We hear it.

Her heart pounds as she thinks of him, standing at the front of the train, driving it through her heart. She looks over at the levers. She’s seen her father do it so many times. Pull the levers, change the points, steel touching steel. Flore stares down the track at a siding where a ballast train stands, loaded up with stone. Flore doesn’t even know what she’s thinking. She looks into herself and does not see a thought to pull the lever, to divert the Paris train into that siding. Yet she pulls the lever.

We hear the lever engaged.

Train compartment.

WAITER Soup, madam? Sir?

SEVERINE What is it?

WAITER A beef consommé, madam.

SEVERINE Very good.

Soup ladled.

WAITER And you, sir?

JACQUES Yes, alright.

SEVERINE Thank you.

JACQUES I don’t like it.

SEVERINE It’s my treat. Stop being a misery.

JACQUES Not this. Her.

SEVERINE What?

JACQUES I don’t see her. She’s not there.

DIDI (VO) Flore stands hypnotised at the window of the signal box. She sees the great white eye of the train. She hears its roar. She looks up at the driver’s cabin. But he’s not there. Not him, not her love. The train is pounding the earth, the steel is beating in her heart, it’s almost upon her.

Build the tension.

Flore turns and with one movement she squeezes the handle and pushes the lever back –

The train bursts past the signal box. We hear Flore’s terrified breathing, hard, close. As the sound of the train recedes, all we have left is Flore’s panting breaths.

Train compartment.

SEVERINE She must have given up.

JACQUES I hope so.

SEVERINE Good thing too.

JACQUES Don’t be too hard on her.

SEVERINE Who’s being hard on her?

JACQUES Sometimes you get this tone.

SEVERINE I don’t think about her.

JACQUES You do though, Severine.

SEVERINE Who’s she, anyway?

JACQUES Exactly.

SEVERINE Just a girl.

JACQUES She means no harm.

DIDI (VO) But harm is all she means. Even her love is a sort of harm.

A station at night. We’re in the manager’s office. In the background we can hear night workers, trains cooling. These distant echoes enhance the silence. In the foreground ROUBAUD is doing paperwork and humming to himself. A door opens.

ROUBAUD Hello? Oh hello.

SEVERINE Martin.

ROUBAUD What are you doing up?

SEVERINE Couldn’t sleep.

ROUBAUD Well you can’t stop here.

SEVERINE I don’t want to stop here. I want to get through the side gate.

ROUBAUD Why do you want to get through the side gate.

SEVERINE I told you. I can’t sleep. Need some air.

ROUBAUD Walk on the platforms.

SEVERINE The platforms stink of coal and oil. I want fresh air.

ROUBAUD I am not at liberty to release keys to non-station personnel.

SEVERINE I’m not non-station personnel. I’m your wife.

ROUBAUD Oh really.

SEVERINE This them?

ROUBAUD Don’t touch them.

SEVERINE Too late.

She grabs a key from a rack of them.

ROUBAUD You are not an authorised keyholder.

SEVERINE God, you talk like a rulebook.

ROUBAUD I could lose my job.

SEVERINE Then don’t tell anyone.

ROUBAUD Well, don’t be long.

SEVERINE I’ll be as long as I like.

She goes.

The station yard. Night. Sound of SEVERINE’s footsteps in the deserted station. She hurries a little. On her way to a destination.

DIDI (VO) The glass roofs of the station soar above her head as she walks. The three steel fingers of the train lines stretch out behind her, though she doesn’t see them, her feet directed towards some other destination. The panes, blackened by soot, watch her blindly as she hurries along the goods path, through the unchained gates, out along the walkway -

We are now outside. We hear her stop.

DIDI (VO) Pausing beside a coal shed, she looks back at the station, which blankly returns her gaze. And alone in this deserted goods yard, she does this.

She knocks.

SEVERINE (whispers) Jacques?

A coal shed. The station yard. Night.

A knock at the door. JACQUES leaps to his feet, breathing nervously but trying not to be heard. The door opens. Pause.

SEVERINE (whispers) Are you there?

JACQUES Severine?

SEVERINE Jacques!

JACQUES I thought you weren’t coming.

SEVERINE I nearly didn’t.

JACQUES Well you’re here.

SEVERINE I am.

JACQUES So? What was so urgent?

SEVERINE Are you not pleased to see me?

JACQUES Course I am.

SEVERINE Well then.

JACQUES When I got your message I thought something had happened.

SEVERINE I wanted to see you.

JACQUES Severine...

SEVERINE I thought you’d be pleased.

JACQUES It’s so risky meeting here.

SEVERINE No it’s not.

JACQUES You don’t know. These goods yards. People are always breaking in. They’re dangerous.

SEVERINE I thought of that.

JACQUES What?

SEVERINE I brought a knife.

Do we hear the sound of a knife being produced? Very softly, whispered voice ‘knife, knife, knife’.

JACQUES What did you bring that for?

SEVERINE To defend myself.

JACQUES Don’t be daft.

SEVERINE Why?

JACQUES You couldn’t use it.

SEVERINE I bet I could.

JACQUES Put it away.

SEVERINE It’s the same one, you know.

JACQUES What?

SEVERINE The one we used on the old man.

JACQUES Grandmorin?

SEVERINE Shh!

JACQUES Really?

SEVERINE Yes.

JACQUES But still.

SEVERINE The knife that cut his throat.

Whispered voices: ‘cut, cut, cut’.

SEVERINE You take it.

JACQUES No.

SEVERINE You said it was dangerous.

JACQUES I don’t need it.

SEVERINE Take it anyway.

JACQUES No.

SEVERINE Don’t you want to defend me?

JACQUES I can’t take it.

SEVERINE Be quiet!

Pause.

JACQUES (whispers) What is it?

SEVERINE (whispers) Footsteps.

And indeed we can hear them. The footsteps approach but then recede. Maintain the tension. It’s not over.

They’ve gone the other way round.

JACQUES They’ll be back here in two minutes.

SEVERINE (whispers) Hold on.

JACQUES (whispers) What are you doing?

SEVERINE (whispers) Taking a look.

JACQUES (whispers) Don’t -

SEVERINE (whispers) Shh.

She opens the door a crack. She comes back.

It’s Martin. It’s my husband.

JACQUES What if he finds us in here?

SEVERINE What if he does?

JACQUES I’ll lose my job.

SEVERINE So, what are we going to do?

JACQUES Maybe he won’t come in.

SEVERINE You’ve got the knife.

Whispered voices: ‘knife, knife, knife’.

JACQUES No.

SEVERINE No one’s seen us.

JACQUES Severine, no.

SEVERINE Think of it, Jacques. We’d be free.

JACQUES Stop this.

SEVERINE With my money, we could start a new life. Even go to America.

The shimmering sound creeps in.

JACQUES Please, Severine.

SEVERINE This coal store is quiet. They won’t find him till morning. If then.

JACQUES We mustn’t.

Whispered voices: ‘beast, beast, beast’.

SEVERINE He’s making us miserable, Jacques.

JACQUES No, no...

SEVERINE It’s so easy. The knife

Whispered voices: ‘knife, knife’.

is very sharp. You just grab him, pull his head back when he comes in and draw it across.

JACQUES You don’t know what you’re doing ...

Whispered voices: ‘kill, kill, kill’. There’s a cacophony of voices crowding in his head.

SEVERINE I love you. I want you.

JACQUES I want – I want you –

SEVERINE Do this and you can have me.

JACQUES I – want – I so want –

SEVERINE Yes. Yes.

JACQUES I so want – to – kill –

SEVERINE Then do it. He’s coming. He’s coming. Kill him now.

The shimmer and the voices sweep to a climax and then fall silent. We hear ROUBAUD’s footsteps approach.

DIDI (VO) What are you going to do, my boy? Make your choice.

Silence. The footsteps approach the door.

JACQUES No.

SEVERINE What?

JACQUES I won’t do it.

He throws the knife down. It clatters on the floor. The footsteps stop ouside the door.

ROUBAUD (outside) Hello?

Pause.

Is there someone in there?

SEVERINE (whispers) What have you done?

A moment of indecision. We hear a hand on the door handle. SEVERINE and JACQUES hold their breath. It begins to open.

DABADIE (distant) Roubaud!

ROUBAUD (other side of the door) Sir?

DABADIE (approaching, muffled) Where have you been? The afternoon register is incomplete.

We hear a hand letting go of the door handle.

ROUBAUD (other side of the door, moving away) I was carrying out an inspection, sir –

DABADIE (muffled) No one asked you to do an inspection, Roubaud. Get back in the office.

ROUBAUD (muffled, going) Yes sir.

Footsteps, hurried, departing. Relief.

JACQUES I’m sorry.

SEVERINE It’s alright.

JACQUES I can’t do it.

SEVERINE I understand.

JACQUES You can’t ask me.

SEVERINE I’d better go. I’ll see you tomorrow maybe.

JACQUES Severine, please –

SEVERINE It’s alright, Jacques. I understand.

She kisses him and slips out of the shed.

DIDI (VO) Do you feel strong, my boy? Or weak?

JACQUES Quiet. Quiet. Quiet.

The twittering of voices rustles emptily behind her words.

Train station.

DIDI (VO) You didn’t see her for a week, did you Jacques? You rode those rails alone in the steam and sweat waiting for something, a letter or word, anything that would say she still wanted poor little Jacques.

JACQUES Stop it, stop it now.

DIDI (VO) So when a letter arrived - well, hardly a letter, a scrap of paper bearing the words on it ‘I will be at the station at 8.40 tomorrow morning’ - you pressed it to your lips with relief and swore you would do anything for that woman.

We hear JACQUES with the letter pressed to his lips, breathing hard with ecstatic relief.

You resolved right there, didn’t you, Jacques?, that if she ever asked again, even once, even suggested it, you would kill her unworthy husband.

We cross fade to the sounds of a station and a waiting train. The approaching noise should sound forbidding.

Train platform.

DIDI (VO) But you didn’t kill him, Jacques, and she never asked you.

JACQUES Shut up. Shut up.

DIDI (VO) What happened was so much worse...

And we are now fully on the train platform. They are speaking out loud aware that they are in public.

JACQUES Madam Roubaud.

SEVERINE Mr Lantier.

He is helping her up into a compartment.

JACQUES I hope you have a comfortable journey, Madam Roubaud.

SEVERINE I’m quite sure I shall, Mr Lantier.

JACQUES I shall try to make the journey as fast and smooth as possible, Madam.

SEVERINE Thank you.

JACQUES Do you have everything you need?

He closes the door behind her. Now they are much closer, speaking intimately through the window.

God I missed you.

SEVERINE I missed you too.

JACQUES Look, Severine, I’m sorry / about what –

SEVERINE Please, Jacques, it’s forgotten, / say no more

JACQUES No no, listen to me, I want to say this: Severine, I won’t fail again.

Beat.

SEVERINE Jacques. Do you mean that?

JACQUES I do.

SEVERINE Imagine it, Jacques. Free to be together.

JACQUES I know.

Whistle blows.

I need to get up front.

SEVERINE I’ll see you in Paris.

JACQUES Aye. Paris.

SEVERINE I brought something for you.

JACQUES What is it?

SEVERINE It’s a pocket watch.

JACQUES For me?

SEVERINE Keep it safe.

She pulls her window closed.

DIDI (VO) Severine did not herself know why she had given Grandmorin’s pocket watch to Jacques. A gift to her lover? A snub to her husband? Was she protecting the house? Or, in some obscure way, was she planting evidence? Severine looked into her heart but saw nothing. But when her husband returned from his night shift, he knew something had changed.

The Roubaud home. Key in the door. ROUBAUD enters.

ROUBAUD Severine?

Pause.

Are you home?

Silence. He puts down his bag and takes off his coat. He stops. He listens.

(to himself) I can’t hear him.

He listens.

The old man. The old man is gone.

The ticking of a watch starts, then rush into:

A driver’s cabin on a train. Train thundering, wind rushing.

PECQUEUX What’s that?

JACQUES Nothing.

PECQUEUX That a pocket watch?

JACQUES Mind your own business.

PECQUEUX Can I see it?

JACQUES Get on with your job. Look, the pressure’s down.

PECQUEUX Oh I get it.

JACQUES What?

PECQUEUX It’s Broken Cross. You want to get up speed so you don’t have to see your young admirer.

JACQUES Come off it.

PECQUEUX She’s not as bad as you make out.

JACQUES How would you know?

PECQUEUX Because, Mr Lantier, I spoke to her yesterday.

JACQUES You spoke to Flore?

PECQUEUX A ditch collapsed on the line. We stopped at Broken Cross while they cleared it. So I spoke to her.

JACQUES You want to be careful of that one.

PECQUEUX She’s got a crush on you, that’s all. Just wants to wave. That’s all she was asking.

JACQUES Asking?

PECQUEUX She wanted to be sure which train you’d be on. So I told her. She’ll be there. You’ll see.

DIDI (VO) Love re-shapes the brain like the tide shapes the beach. It is a chemical force that few are strong enough to resist and Flore was helpless in the flood. Her dark eyes watched her love and saw him choose another and each day saw them flash past her life. Love shook her eighteen-year-old body and the steel roar of the train punched the kindness from her heart.

Now she is standing by the rails, cursing her misfortune, hearing the first faint rumble of the Paris train.

Driver’s cabin on the train.

JACQUES You told her I’d be on this train?

PECQUEUX Course I did.

JACQUES Why did she want to know that?

PECQUEUX ’Cos she’s sweet on you! By God, Jacques, you are a miserable bugger.

JACQUES I don’t get it. She’s not cared before.

PECQUEUX Just wants to be sure she doesn’t miss you.

JACQUES No. It’s not that.

Trackside.

DIDI (VO) Here comes the quarryman, Cabuche, his cart piled high with enormous stone blocks. Five dray horses are needed to pull it. Can he cross the line?

Yes, says Flore. You can cross the line.

She opens the old gate to the crossingway. She glances up the tracks. She can’t see the train yet but she can hear it. She gives a whack to the first horse and the cart jerks forward, slowly, slowly.

Driver’s cabin.

PECQUEUX It’s not like she can do anything. Can she? I mean, what could she do?

JACQUES Shovel more coal, I want to get through Broken Cross as soon as we can.

PECQUEUX Right you are, boss.

He opens the furnace and shovels in more coal. JACQUES sounds the steam whistle.

Trackside. The horses are straining and whinnying. Sounds of encouragement from FLORE and CABUCHE.

DIDI (VO) To get onto the crossing point, the cart must travel up an incline that takes it to the level of the rails. The horses strain and Flore whacks at them for encouragement, but the cart with its load of stone is so hard to move. Flore motions to Cabuche and together they push their shoulders to the cart. And the wheels start to move.

Driver’s cabin.

PECQUEUX That’s enough, surely.

JACQUES I want another layer on there.

PECQUEUX I’m doing what I can.

JACQUES And break it up small. I don’t want to lose pressure.

Trackside. The horses straining, the cart is moving, very slowly.

DIDI (VO) Cabuche sees the train first. He grabs at the horses and tries to unharness them so the cart will roll back off the tracks. Flore keeps her shoulder to the cart, which stands with its stone burden at the centre of the crossing. Cabuche shouts in terror.

Driver’s cabin. Panic, shouting, overlapping.

JACQUES No!

PECQUEUX What is it?

JACQUES I don’t believe it!

PECQUEUX Oh God. Oh God.

JACQUES Release the pressure. I’ll brake.

A squeal of brake blocks pressing uselessly against the pounding wheels. He sounds the steam whistle. The train is still accelerating. The wind is rushing and the wheels hammering. Mix into it a thundering of hooves. Build louder and higher and then: cut to silence.

JACQUES (Almost internal) We’re going to crash.

Resume the sound. And we hear the impact. But as soon as the train strikes the cart, we go to a slow-motion, unreal sound picture.

Engine exploding.

Stones smashing.

Glass shattering.

Steel buckling.

And out from all that sound, underneath comes a huge metal groaning sound. Ferocious hot steel twisting slowly out of shape. It might sound like a huge beast in pain. A great low bellowing sound.

The train rears up and comes smashing to the ground.

DIDI (VO) The more beautiful the machine, the more terrible its end and this engine is very beautiful. The train rears up like a wild horse, seven carriages piling over one another, then smashing back to the ground, the wood and steel torn up like paper. The engine itself, Jacques’s beloved Lady, takes the full impact, shattering the stone blocks into shards and splinters, that embed themselves into the signal box, the embankment, the passengers, as the Lady groans, lists to one side and collapses, exhausted into the earth.

A scene of devastation. Fires have broken out in the ruins of the train. Screams of pain, men and women on fire, yells of panic, fear, sobbing.

PECQUEUX (very close) Miss. Miss? (slaps her face) Mrs Roubaud.

SEVERINE (dazed) Jacques... Jacques...

PECQUEUX It’s me, Mr Pecqueux.

DIDI (VO) Pecqueux, seeing the collision was inevitable, had jumped from the train before it hit, hitting and rolling over the soft embankment and missing the destruction of the train.

SEVERINE What – what’s happened?

PECQUEUX There’s been an accident, Miss.

SEVERINE Wh – what? Where’s Jacques?

She struggles to sit up.

PECQUEUX You shouldn’t move, Miss.

SEVERINE (starting to panic) Where’s Jacques?

PECQUEUX I don’t know, Miss. You really mustn’t move. You might have broken something.

DIDI (VO) In the last carriage, Severine heard the impact before she felt it. The shock whiplashed through the train and the same fluid movement flung open her compartment door and hurled Severine bodily through it. Knocked unconscious by the impact, she was awoken by the engineer.

SEVERINE (standing, walking towards the ruins; we follow her. She is slowly realising what has happened.) Jacques. Oh God. Jacques? You? Have you seen Jacques? The driver?

PASSENGER (in pain) No... no...

SEVERINE (running now) Jacques! JACQUES!

PECQUEUX (following her) Mrs Roo... Mrs Roo...

SEVERINE (asking everyone) Have you seen Jacques? Where’s Jacques? Oh God, is that the engine?

Sounds of screaming, people scrabbling through the wreckage. She starts to run.

MAN You better keep back, Miss.

SEVERINE I need to find Jacques.

PECQUEUX I’m the engineer. Has the driver been found?

MAN We’ve been too busy tending to the wounded.

PECQUEUX You two, come and help.

DIDI (VO) The engine was buried beneath the remains of three carriages. Pecqueux and two other survivors work quickly, pulling away wood and metal, digging down into the wreckage.

MAN It’s no use. There’s no one down here.

PECQUEUX He’s right, Miss.

SEVERINE I’m not giving up. He’s got to be down here.

PECQUEUX We’d be much more use helping these other people.

SEVERINE Well if you won’t do it, I will.

DIDI (VO) Severine starts pulling frantically at the debris, before the two men reluctantly join her. As she works, Severine feels another presence beside her. A young woman with a determined expression and strong arms toughened in the sun. Flore had watched the destruction of the train with a mixture of horror and elation. But now, surrounded by steel, fire and blood, she seems to have forgotten why she placed the stone cart in the path of the train and is determined to find Jacques.

SEVERINE Jacques!

PECQUEUX It’s him. (turns and shouts) We need some help over here!

SEVERINE Jacques, please. Jacques. It’s me. It’s Severine.

MAN I don’t think it’s any good, Miss.

Voices approaching.

SEVERINE Be quiet!

Silence. She puts her ear to JACQUES’s mouth. We are with her. We hear, very faintly, a breath. JACQUES is alive.

He’s alive!

PECQUEUX Get this stuff off him!

The survivors carefully free his body from the remaining wreckage.

SEVERINE Can you hear me, my love? It’s me.

JACQUES (barely audible) Sev... Sever...

SEVERINE Yes, my love, it’s me. Oh God, it’s me, your Severine.

JACQUES Severine...

SEVERINE My darling. You’re alive. We’re together. We’re alive.

DIDI (VO) Flore stands abruptly. Seeing them together, despite everything, she feels suddenly as if she were dead. If she has thoughts, racing through her mind, she does not know them. Her body feels numb, empty, moving not by volition but by reflex and spasm. She turns awkwardly and staggers away.

Old wooden bedroom. Big room. Sepulchral feel. In the background, two floors away, there is a slow and morbid piano tune being played amateurishly by a child. JACQUES wakes up.

DIDI (VO) For the next three days, Severine sat at Jacques’s bedside, in an upstairs bedroom at Broken Cross, in the house she had unwillingly inherited from President Grandmorin, a house of dark memories, a house she hated.

JACQUES (confused, slightly panicked breathing) Wh - where am I?

SEVERINE You’re at Broken Cross.

JACQUES What? What’s happened?

SEVERINE There was an accident. The doctor gave you something that helped you sleep.

JACQUES An accident?

SEVERINE On the line.

JACQUES Where is she?

SEVERINE Who?

JACQUES My Lady.

SEVERINE Don’t worry about that now.

JACQUES My Lady...

SEVERINE We can talk about that later.

JACQUES What about ... the girl...?

SEVERINE What girl?

JACQUES Fl ... Flo...

SEVERINE Flore? I sent her away. I said you didn’t want to see her.

JACQUES Away... away...

SEVERINE Sleep again, my love.

JACQUES Love.

A smaller room.

DIDI (VO) It took a week to clear the line. On the first day that trains passed through Broken Cross again, Flore wakes early. She dresses and brushes her thick hair. She thought she might have felt remorse but she can’t find any. She has a void where her love once was. Jacques had seen her pushing the cart and Jacques thinks she is a monster. That’s all she knows.

Outdoors. Early.

DIDI (VO) She leaves the house at five o’clock. She walks across the fields to Doinville and she enters the Malaunay tunnel.

Inside a railway tunnel. Echoey.

DIDI (VO) She walks into the tunnel along the rails. After two minutes the light from the entrance has diminished to nothing. She keeps walking; sometimes a foot brushes against a rail and she adjusts her direction. Is she walking to Paris? she wonders. She doesn’t know. She walks for twenty minutes into darkness.

Distant sound of a train.

After an hour. She sees a pinpoint of light. Is it the end of the tunnel? But then she hears the sound.

Train more distinct.

She stops walking; she draws herself up and standing there, she begins to sing.

We hear a peasant song, sung with abandon. The train is getting nearer.

The pinpoint becomes a light, the light becomes a beam, the beam resolves into the headlamp of a train.

Steam whistle.

The headlamp becomes an eye, bursting from the dark socket of the tunnel. Come to me, thinks Flore. I want you. I’ll have you, beast. I’ll have you any time. And she tears open the front of her dress, standing naked in the path of the train.

Steam whistle. Much nearer now.

I can smell your breath, beast, thinks Flore. I can feel the heat of you. Come and take me, you beast, you foul beast.

The train is upon her.

JACQ -

Impact. Sudden, entire. The train continues on its way.

Old wooden bedroom. Distant piano still. Same music

JACQUES What about your husband?

SEVERINE He knows I’m here.

JACQUES What have you told him?

SEVERINE I said I’m looking after the injured. Which is true.

JACQUES How many people are here?

SEVERINE Most are gone now.

JACQUES What’s that sound?

SEVERINE The Dauvergne girls are playing piano.

JACQUES They’re here?

SEVERINE The family were on the train. Henri was injured, badly. The girls just play piano, the same tune, round and round. I think it’s the only one they know.

JACQUES So this is your house.

SEVERINE I don’t want it.

JACQUES I know.

SEVERINE I hate it.

JACQUES I know.

Pause.

SEVERINE How are you?

JACQUES I feel better. The tear in my stomach is almost healed. My legs feel stronger again.

SEVERINE Good.

JACQUES I need to talk to the company.

SEVERINE Why?

JACQUES I have to get back to work.

SEVERINE Oh Jacques...

JACQUES What?

SEVERINE Back on the trains? You can’t mean it.

JACQUES Course I do. Why not?

SEVERINE After what happened?

JACQUES A man’s got to work, hasn’t he?

SEVERINE But what about us?

JACQUES What about us?

SEVERINE America.

JACQUES With what?

SEVERINE With my money.

JACQUES You don’t have any money.

SEVERINE I will.

JACQUES When.

SEVERINE You know.

JACQUES I know what?

SEVERINE When my husband’s out of the picture.

JACQUES This again?

SEVERINE You made me a promise, remember?

JACQUES I did?

SEVERINE Day we got that train.

JACQUES I don’t remember.

SEVERINE I saved your life, Jacques Lantier. Now you save mine.

JACQUES What are you suggesting?

SEVERINE We make a big show about you being recovered and leaving. We all wave you off. You go.

JACQUES Alright.

SEVERINE I write to Martin asking him to come and get me.

JACQUES Yes.

SEVERINE But you come back. And you wait over there, behind the door with the knife.

Faint whisper, so faint we maybe even can’t be sure we heard it: knife, knife, knife.

JACQUES What about you?

SEVERINE I’ll be downstairs with the Dauvergne girls. You go. I’ll find my husband dead. We say it was a vagrant, must have been a thief.

JACQUES When are we doing this?

SEVERINE I’ve already written to him.

JACQUES When?

SEVERINE He’s coming here tonight.

JACQUES But –

SEVERINE We have to do this.

JACQUES Do we?

SEVERINE And we’ll be free, my love.

JACQUES Free.

SEVERINE You know we will.

JACQUES You still have the knife?

Faint whisper, so faint we maybe even can’t be sure we heard it: knife, knife, knife.

SEVERINE Of course.

JACQUES What if something goes wrong?

SEVERINE What could go wrong?

JACQUES What if he struggles?

SEVERINE He’s a tired man. It’ll be a kindness.

JACQUES Severine -

SEVERINE It’s the only way. But then we’ll be together.

DIDI (VO) Is it the only way, my boy?

JACQUES I don’t know.

SEVERINE What?

JACQUES Nothing.

SEVERIN Promise me you’ll do this.

JACQUES I promise.

DIDI (VO) That afternoon, Jacques does his rounds, says his farewells, thanks Severine for her care, kisses the Dauvergne girls and gets on the next train North. The train comes to a halt at a junction and he slips out of his compartment, and starts to walk along the tracks back to the house. The sky is darkening. Jacques tries to turn his thoughts away from the promise he has made.

Whispered voices: beast, beast, beast.

By the time he returns to Broken Cross, it is past eight.

Old wooden bedroom.

SEVERINE I thought you weren’t coming.

JACQUES I said I’d be here.

SEVERINE Cold feet.

JACQUES I’m here, aren’t I?

SEVERINE No one saw you come in?

JACQUES Course not.

SEVERINE He said he’d be here at quarter to nine. We’ve got half an hour.

JACQUES Alright.

SEVERINE You know what you have to do?

JACQUES Yes.

SEVERINE You know it’s the right thing.

JACQUES Do I?

SEVERINE This is the knife.

Whispered voices: knife, knife, knife.

JACQUES Right, yes.

SEVERINE Still as sharp as the day I bought it.

Whispered voices: sharp, sharp, sharp

JACQUES You bought it?

SEVERINE A present for my husband.

JACQUES I see.

SEVERINE He steps into the room, you come behind him, cut his throat.

Whispered voices: cut, cut, cut

JACQUES When will I see you again?

SEVERINE We shouldn’t see each other for a week, maybe two. But I will come to you.

JACQUES You’ll come to me.

SEVERINE We’ll be together and I’ll come to you. You’ll have me then.

JACQUES What do you mean?

SEVERINE You know what I mean.

DIDI (VO) Do you know what she means, Jacques?

JACQUES Yes.

SEVERINE I want you so much, my lover.

JACQUES I want you too.

SEVERINE I want you so much it hurts.

Whispered voices: hurt, hurt, hurt

I’ll be yours, darling. Finally, all yours. If you can do this.

DIDI (VO) If you can do this.

JACQUES What?

SEVERINE I’ll be all yours, I said.

JACQUES I know.

DIDI (VO) Can you do this, Jacques?

JACQUES Yes, I can.

SEVERINE You can what?

DIDI (VO) You can take a life?

Whispered voice: life, life, life

JACQUES Who are you?

SEVERINE What do you mean, who am I?

JACQUES Not you.

SEVERINE Is something wrong, Jacques?

DIDI (VO) You know me, Jacques. I’m your blood, my boy.

Whispered voices: blood, blood, blood

SEVERINE What’s wrong?

DIDI (VO) Your mother’s mother’s mother.

JACQUES Get away from me!

SEVERINE Jacques?

JACQUES Get away.

DIDI (VO) Your poor weak Aunt Didi.

JACQUES Weak?

SEVERINE What are you talking about?

DIDI (VO) The family weakness, our broken blood. It breaks me sometimes, Jacques. The same blood that breaks me, breaks you. The blood in your eyes as you hold the knife.

Whispered voices: knife, knife, knife

JACQUES Stop this.

SEVERINE Who are you talking to?

JACQUES Not you. Not you.

DIDI (VO) But you can resist them, can’t you Jacques?

JACQUES Yes.

DIDI (VO) The voices telling you to kill.

Whispered voices: kill, kill, kill

SEVERINE Jacques, you’re scaring me.

JACQUES I’m not listening to you.

SEVERINE Jacques please.

DIDI (VO) I’m in your blood, my boy.

JACQUES No... no...

DIDI (VO) But what’s blood?

JACQUES Stop this.

DIDI (VO) Blood doesn’t force us.

JACQUES Stop –

DIDI (VO) We still have choice, don’t we?

SEVERINE I’m getting the doctor.

JACQUES Stay with me!

DIDI (VO) You can put that knife down, if you want.

JACQUES Yes, I can.

He drops the knife, which clatters to the floor.

DIDI (VO) You see, my boy?

JACQUES I don’t have to do this.

SEVERINE No, of course, if you don’t want to.

DIDI (VO) You don’t have to give in to your weakness.

JACQUES No...

DIDI (VO) Because it is a weakness, isn’t it?

JACQUES What?

SEVERINE You should lie down.

DIDI (VO) The flaw in the family line. Is it a weakness?

SEVERINE Lie down with me, Jacques.

JACQUES No. Yes.

SEVERINE I want to be your woman.

DIDI (VO) Or is it a strength?

JACQUES No.

SEVERINE Lie down with me, my love.

DIDI (VO) Why resist it?

SEVERINE My man.

DIDI (VO) Why turn your back on the greatest gift your family gave you?

SEVERINE My love.

DIDI (VO) It’s not a weakness is it Jacques? It’s your strength.

JACQUES No. No it isn’t.

DIDI (VO) Since you were a boy. When you liked a girl, you also wanted to hurt her too.

JACQUES No... no...

DIDI (VO) Don’t be ashamed. You were always the strong one.

JACQUES Me, strong?

SEVERINE My strong man.

DIDI (VO) Always the strong one in a family of weak men and cruel women.

JACQUES My family -

SEVERINE Hold me, Jacques.

DIDI (VO) Your family is a pack of wolves, my boy. France is overrun with them. It is their hunting ground.

JACQUES Wolves?

DIDI (VO) The Rougon line and the Macquart line. Two lines of steel stretching through this land.

JACQUES Steel lines.

DIDI (VO) This is a corrupt world, my boy, corrupted by them. By my unfortunate children.

SEVERINE Jacques, I don’t know what’s going on.

JACQUES Don’t leave me.

DIDI (VO) Their greed. Their lusts. They’ve built this country. They’ve made it hateful.

JACQUES I don’t understand.

DIDI (VO) You do understand. You cross this country every day. You’ve seen it. The Empire with its laughing rich and suffering poor; stopping its voices with food and drink. This is your family. This is your blood.

JACQUES I can’t listen to this.

DIDI (VO) You can end it.

JACQUES What?

DIDI (VO) Tear it down.

JACQUES No. Why?

DIDI (VO) Tear the whole thing down.

JACQUES Tear –

DIDI (VO) The Empire. The Emperor. The cruelty and greed. Tear it all down.

JACQUES No no no.

DIDI (VO) Tear down this system that the Rougons built. Greed, money, blood. Everything is sin. Tear it up, tear it down, strike a blow. You’re not weak; you’re strong. It’s not the past that haunts you; it’s today. There is no past for a strong man. This is the day of action. These are the days when worlds can change. These are the days, my boy. You don’t strike a blow for yourself but for the whole of the Macquart line.

JACQUES How can I –

DIDI (VO) Pick up the knife.

JACQUES No.

Whispered voices: knife, knife, knife

DIDI (VO) Feel its weight in your hand.

JACQUES No.

SEVERINE What are you doing, Jacques?

DIDI (VO) Its keen edge.

JACQUES Don’t ask me to do this.

DIDI (VO) You’ve always wanted to know what it feels like to kill.

Whispered voices: knife, knife, knife

JACQUES Please...

SEVERINE You’ll do it?

DIDI (VO) To push that knife into a person’s body. Feel it inside them.

JACQUES No.

SEVERINE Then what are you doing with the knife?

Whispered voices: knife, knife, knife

DIDI (VO) Prove you can do it.

JACQUES No! Please!

SEVERINE If you do it, Jacques, you can have me.

JACQUES My love.

SEVERINE My love.

JACQUES I want you.

SEVERINE I want you too.

JACQUES Must I do this?

DIDI (VO) Do it for me.

SEVERINE If we want to be free.

DIDI (VO) Do it for Didi.

JACQUES Severine.

SEVERINE Yes, my love?

JACQUES I’m sorry.

SEVERINE Sorry? Why?

Silence. SEVERINE chokes, exhales. Blood bubbles in her throat. JACQUES has stabbed her. We hear his breath rasping, uncontrolled.

JACQUES Oh God. Oh God oh God. The blood, the blood.

DIDI (VO) She died in seconds, her eyes uncomprehending. Do we ever know one another? Do we know ourselves? Jacques stood staring at the body of his lover, her blood running over the sheets, pooling on the floor.

ROUBAUD (downstairs) Severine? It’s me.

We hear Jacques hide. Running footsteps coming up the stairs. The door opens.

ROUBAUD Severine. Severine? Are you in here?

Silence.

(horror-struck) Oh.

Beat.

No. No. No.

DIDI (VO) Behind him, Jacques dashed from the room and ran down the stairs. He slipped out of the back door and ran across the fields.

ROUBAUD Oh God. Severine.

He kneels at her dead body. He is crying. He embraces her in tears.

Station Platform. There is a marching band, a festival atmosphere. Crowds are cheering soldiers onto a train.

SPEAKER Ladies and gentlemen, we welcome France’s finest fighting men, heroes of Crimea and Mexico: the 3rd Corps of the Army of the Rhine, off to join Marshal Bazaine!

DIDI (VO) It’s two months later; it is late July 1870 and France is going to war.

SPEAKER Let’s give a cheer for our brave boys as they go to muzzle the Prussian dog!

DIDI (VO) Most nations celebrate victory after the war is over. Not today. France’s confidence has been fuelled by greed the way a coward finds bravery in drink.

SPEAKER The Eastern Train Company is proud to carry our boys to the front. This special train, decked out in military colours, has been named after our founder, the much-missed President Grandmorin.

DIDI (VO) Nothing will stop the train of war, not even its driver, not even the finest train driver in the whole of France, Jacques Lantier.

Driver’s cabin.

JACQUES Mr Pecqueux.

PECQUEUX Mr Lantier.

JACQUES Best get a thin layer burning, once that’s caught we’ll want to build the pressure quick.

PECQUEUX I know my job, Mr Lantier.

Beat.

JACQUES I didn’t mean to –

PECQUEUX Just saying.

DIDI (VO) Something cold has hardened between these friends.

PECQUEUX I was sorry to hear about, you know.

JACQUES Severine.

PECQUEUX That bastard husband of hers.

JACQUES Yes.

PECQUEUX Hard labour? I’d have had him shot.

DIDI (VO) The household at Broken Cross had discovered Roubaud, holding his dead wife’s body, his shirt thick with her blood. He was arrested. The same day, police investigating the crash discovered Grandmorin’s pocket watch in the possession of Cabuche, the carter, who had found it in the wreckage and taken it home. At trial, the state sought to show that these had been accomplices in the death of the President, the lack of evidence only seeming to confirm the careful planning that lay behind their callous disregard for human life.

JACQUES He was a bad man.

Two blasts on the steam whistle.

SPEAKER (from the platform) Let us sing our brave lads off to war!

People cheering on the platform, singing a patriotic song. The soldiers on the train join in.

JACQUES Ease up the pressure now. Gently, gently.

The train eases off; the station falls away. The wind is buffeting. We can still hear the soldiers singing. We pick up speed.

Not sure how much use they’ll be, the amount they’ve drunk.

PECQUEUX What do you know?

JACQUES Some of them had to be helped onto the train, that’s all.

Silence. Train builds speed. PECQUEUX shovels coal.

Hey, easy does it.

PECQUEUX What?

JACQUES Don’t shovel so much. We’re losing pressure.

PECQUEUX Don’t tell me my job.

JACQUES Do your job properly then.

PECQUEUX Yes, ‘sir’.

JACQUES And I don’t like that attitude, you get me?

Mutinous silence. Stoking the fire. Train builds speed.

PECQUEUX Where’s your loyalty?

JACQUES Come again?

PECQUEUX You should be supporting them lads, not sneering at them. They’re good lads. Brave lads.

JACQUES I weren’t sneering. Just saying.

PECQUEUX Turning round and stabbing people in the back.

JACQUES What’s this about?

PECQUEUX Nothing.

JACQUES Have you been drinking an’ all?

PECQUEUX What if I have?

JACQUES It’s bloody stupid is what it is. Got to keep sharp.

PECQUEUX ‘Keep sharp’. It’s monkey work this and you know it is.

JACQUES I’m not telling you again –

PECQUEUX You think I don’t know about you and Philomene?

JACQUES What are you talking about?

PECQUEUX Everyone knows.

JACQUES There’s nothing to know.

PECQUEUX She’s my girl, you understand me? Keep your hands off.

JACQUES I wouldn’t touch your woman.

PECQUEUX Don’t talk about her like that.

JACQUES You take another step and I swear to God, I will smack you one.

PECQUEUX You try it.

JACQUES Get back.

PECQUEUX Dirty bastard. Dirty shagging bastard.

DIDI (VO) With a drunkard’s strength the engineer launched himself at the driver. The two men fell to the floor of the cabin, Pecqueux’s hands on Lantier’s throat.

We hear the sounds of the struggle. The train is accelerating.

JACQUES What are you doing, you lunatic?

PECQUEUX I’ll kill yer.

DIDI (VO) Jacques felt himself losing consciousness and in one desperate motion he wrenched his body sideways, unbalancing the engineer, who slumped forward his head and shoulders hanging from the side of the train. He grabbed out for something to stop himself falling. His hand met Lantier’s hand and, as the train lurched on a bend, the two men, locked in a kind of grim embrace, were flung from the cabin, falling and falling.

We hear their screams.

Their bodies were sucked beneath the train and cut to pieces by the wheels.

We hear that. Sudden and brutal.

And the train is racing, the steel is red with fury, it is cutting a metal scar through France.

The metal is straining, the pistons working beyond capacity. Faintly we can hear soldiers singing patriotic French songs.

All the telegraphs are ringing as the headless train tears through the stations.

We hear them ring.

Rouen, Sotteville, Oissel, Pont-de-l’Arche.

Stations roaring by.

Through the red lights, through the warning signals. The train screaming past the platforms, steam belching, coal roaring, wheels turning and turning, faster and faster, faster and faster.

Sounds of the engine roaring, the steam hissing, the smoke belching, the wheels hammering on the tracks. Soldiers singing patriotic songs.

Like a mad magnificent beast let loose on the field of battle. Who knows where it will end? What blood will be spilled before it is satisfied? It is not for us to know; it is only for us to watch and see. For this is the future and these are the days, my children, these are the very days.