EMILE ZOLA: BLOOD, SEX & MONEY

**BLOOD**

**Episode 1: Animals**

**Dan Rebellato**

Adapted from:

**The Fortune of the Rougons**

**His Excellency Eugene Rougon**

by Émile Zola

**Third Draft** (June 2015)

Characters

Narrator (Didi)

Pierre

Antoine

Ursule

Félicité

Gervaise Macquart

Solicitor

Sicardot

Carnavant

Vuillet

Roudier

Granoux

Eugène

Silvère

Miette

Louis-Napoleon

Phasie

Burgat

Rengade

Masson

Plassans Townsfolk

Workmen

Various French Kings

DIDI (VO) This is how it ends.

It is 1870. A steam train is approaching at extreme speed. The metal is straining, the pistons working beyond capacity. Faintly we can hear soldiers singing patriotic French songs. In great metallic anguish, the train leaves the tracks and ploughs into the earth. Screams, fear, calamity*.*

And this is how it begins.

A cold night. Breath on the air. A garden.

SILVÈRE (panicky) No, please.

MASSON Stand by the wall, boy.

SILVÈRE Please, you can’t!

MASSON Be quiet.

SILVÈRE I didn’t do anything!

MASSON Squad get ready.

SILVÈRE Didi. Didi. Didi.

MASSON Take aim.

We hear DIDI’s voice calling ‘My boy?’ from the other side of the wall.

SILVÈRE Didi! Help me!

MASSON Fire.

SILVÈRE Didi!

The word stops dead as the bullets slam into him. Silence.

DIDI (VO) This story begins in blood and ends in blood and of blood the story is made. It is a story of France and the story of the nineteenth century and the story of a family.

You heard the name that boy called out? ‘Didi’. Let me tell you about her. Didi was born Adelaide Fouque to a family of market gardeners in the town of Plassans, which sits in a valley in the Provencal hills in Southern France. Here it is, look.

Spring unfolds in Plassans.

About 10,000 people live here. Adelaide was born in the family home, which had been built fifty years earlier on the town cemetery.

Autumn unfolds in Plassans.

Every so often, bones would work their way out of the ground and pear trees grew, bearing great twisted branches and enormous misshapen fruit. Not many people ate that fruit.

Cruel vegetation growing*.*

As a young girl, Adelaide played in a garden whose soil was damp with sap and blood.

Oozing blood and sap.

The Fouque family supplied vegetables for the whole of Plassans. But by the time of the Revolution, she was the only one left.

Winter unfolds in Plassans.

Adelaide was a beautiful child. Sensitive and shy and pale, perhaps a little eccentric. Her father was committed to a madhouse and the people of Plassans thought it only a matter of time before she went the same way.

A distant male voice echoing down a maze of corridors, roaring in despair.

When her father died, she was consoled by the family gardener, Mr Rougon.

We hear ROUGON breathing and grunting hard as he digs her flowerbeds*.*

We all need a little consolation now and then.

Her co-gardening can be heard*.*

The whole of Plassans stayed away from their wedding.

A solitary bell rings in a lonely churchtower*.*

A year later, a baby followed. Say hello, Pierre!

A baby cries.

And shortly after that Rougon the gardener, while weeding a bed of carrots, died of a heart attack.

ROUGON has a heart attack and falls into the bed of carrots.

Bordering the family’s land separated by a high wall, sat the one-room hut owned by the smuggler, Macquart.

Music.

He would go away for months at a time and return at night. He had danger in his eyes. The town mistrusted him, feared him. But Adelaide saw something else in the smuggler Macquart and it was to him that she turned, after the death of her husband Rougon, for consolation.

Sounds of consolation.

Again, the good people of Plassans were appalled.

TOWNSFOLK She must be mad, like her father. To be seen with that pirate.

TOWNSFOLK That murderer!

TOWNSFOLK You know he kills children?

TOWNSFOLK Eats children, I heard.

TOWNSFOLK It’s a disgrace is what it is: to Plassans and to France.

DIDI (VO) And they were even more appalled when Adelaide gave birth to a girl. Say hello, Ursule!

A baby cries.

And then a second boy. Say hello, Antoine!

A second baby joins in the crying.

Plassans referred to these two new children as ‘the wolf cubs’ and they were tolerated as they rampaged through childhood.

A stone is thrown through a window.

TOWNSFOLK (distant) You little sh –

DIDI (VO) Shame did not come easily to Adelaide who tolerated, even enjoyed, her wolf cubs’ rampages. Her other child, Pierre, was less amenable and as he grew up he plotted ways of excluding Antoine and Ursule from the family inheritance. Though Aunt Didi, as all the children called her, was unmoved by his entreaties.

A stone cottage.

PIERRE I don’t know why you want to live alone in this big drafty house, mother.

DIDI I’m quite alright, Pierre.

PIERRE Why don’t we find you a nice little cottage somewhere?

DIDI Leave me alone, Pierre, please.

DIDI (VO) But Pierre was not put off. Adulthood had stirred something in his blood, a fierce, purposeless ambition, a desire to succeed in something, anything, beginning with becoming the sole beneficiary of his mother’s estate.

PIERRE You look cold, mother.

DIDI Oh, no –

PIERRE Here, take my jacket.

DIDI There’s really / no need –

PIERRE This big old drafty house. Freezes the blood, doesn’t it?

DIDI I’m not cold –

PIERRE What you need is something smaller.

DIDI I don’t –

PIERRE Toasty and warm, Lovely.

DIDI It’s not partic/ularly –

PIERRE I don’t suppose you can afford to light the fires here. Yes, I’m afraid this place is a real drain on you, mother.

DIDI Pierre! I do not want to hear another word about this, is that understood?

PIERRE But mother –

DIDI Is that understood?

DIDI (VO) However, Didi’s resolve was broken by two events. One night, in the early years of this century, the smuggler Macquart was challenged by a policeman at a border checkpoint. And in the ensuing struggle –

A shot rings out in the night.

- Macquart was shot. Didi got word late the following evening and,

We hear, underneath the following, a knock on the door, the door opening, murmured words and then howls of terrible grief.

her wide eyes staring up at the unforgiving stars, she walked across the field to Macquart’s cottage, where she lay in his bed and felt her heart shrivel inside her.

Distant tears.

The grief also opened up a weakness that lurked deep in the family’s blood. One afternoon, in her kitchen, it happened.

We hear DIDI humming at the stove, stirring something. She stops. The tune coagulates in her mouth, becomes a guttural. In slow motion, the metal spoon she is holding clatters to the ground. She is fitting. Sounds cracking in her throat, she collapses to the ground.

She experienced her first fit. It was a nervous attack, a kind of jolting paralysis of the mind, accompanied by terrible physical convulsions.

She’s on her back, the heel of her foot is thumping wildly on the wooden floor.

Every couple of months she would have a fit, though preceded by feelings of unearthly delight and joy.

A spangly heavenly shimmering sound.

The doctors could do nothing. They prescribed rare meat and quinine.

A spangly heavenly shimmering sound.

It was an imbalance, an unhappy mix of her father’s nerves and her mother’s heart. It was this dark blood that oozed down the branches of the family tree.

Oozing blood and sap.

Pierre took advantage of his mother’s weakness and persuaded her to sign over to him power of attorney. As soon as he had done so, he sold the family home and invested half of the proceeds in the family firm of Puesch & Lacamp, a manufacturer and distributor of olive oil, which had just been inherited by one Félicité Puesch, whom, coincidentally, Pierre had just married.

Wedding bells.

With the other half of the proceeds from the house sale, Pierre put down a deposit on a very nice house in the centre of Plassans. When Antoine heard about it, he was not happy.

ANTOINE I ain’t happy.

PIERRE I’m sorry to hear that, little brother.

ANTOINE What you done with the dosh?

PIERRE Dosh?

ANTOINE The moolah. What you done with it?

PIERRE The proceeds from the house sale have been securely tied up in sound investments.

ANTOINE But I want it.

PIERRE I explained, it is securely tied up in –

ANTOINE I don’t care about that. I want my bit.

PIERRE Well you can’t have it, Macquart.

ANTOINE Well I need it - Rougon.

PIERRE Why do you need it?

ANTOINE Stuff.

PIERRE Stuff?

ANTOINE Never you mind. Living expenses. Bits and bobs.

PIERRE Well I’m sorry; there’s nothing I can do for now.

DIDI (VO) Antoine still wasn’t happy.

ANTOINE I still ain’t happy.

DIDI (VO) And he was soon making trouble in the town.

ANTOINE (background; standing on a wooden crate in a town square in Plassans) The Rougons are thieves! Highwaymen! Pickpockets! They ain’t a family; they’re a bunch of criminals. Pierre Rougon stole my inheritance. Stole it I say! The house and its lands, worth 100,000 Francs, in which me and my dear sister was born and raised, the house was stolen from us. Is that justice?

CROWD No!

It’s a small, ragged crowd.

ANTOINE Is that right?

CROWD No!

DIDI (VO) So Pierre called a family meeting.

PIERRE My dear brother Antoine, my dear sister Ursule. I want you to know that your happiness has always been my prime concern.

ANTOINE Funny way of showing it.

PIERRE The inheritance is tied up in investments just now but I have not neglected you. In fact, I have worked hard to set you both up in a suitable occupation that will ensure your wellbeing and livelihood.

ANTOINE Occupation?

PIERRE Sister Ursule, dear beloved sister. It has always grieved me to think what will become of you.

URSULE Has it?

PIERRE Born into poverty, into the dirt. I speak not merely in metaphors, dear sister.

URSULE Right.

PIERRE Raised in muck. Nurtured in filth.

URSULE You’ve made that point, I think.

PIERRE Uneducated. No dowry to offer a potential husband. A face that only a mother could truly love.

URSULE This better be going somewhere.

PIERRE You know, I think, Mr Alfred Mouret.

URSULE The hatmaker?

PIERRE Well, he’s a milliner.

URSULE He makes hats: he’s a hatmaker.

ANTOINE How d’you become a millionaire making hats?

URSULE Milliner. What about him?

PIERRE He has taken a liking to you, sister.

URSULE And what does that mean in plain French?

PIERRE He has admired you, from afar. He speaks highly of your spirit, your pleasantness, your face, even.

URSULE Nice.

PIERRE And he has asked me if I would consent to your being married.

URSULE Alfred Mouret?

PIERRE You may know he is moving his workshop to Marseille. He would like very much for you to join him there as his wife.

URSULE This is a bit sudden.

PIERRE You can think it over, of course.

URSULE Can I?

PIERRE The coach to Marseille will afford you ample opportunities for reflection. It leaves in an hour.

URSULE Oh wow.

ANTOINE What about me, Rougon? You haven’t found an aristocrat’s daughter who wants to make me a rich man have you?

PIERRE No, ha ha.

ANTOINE Didn’t think so.

PIERRE Would that I had, little brother.

ANTOINE Go on then, spit it out, what have you got for me?

Produces papers.

PIERRE These.

ANTOINE What are they?

PIERRE Your passport to a better life.

ANTOINE Better life?

PIERRE A life of travel, of fellowship, of the Great Outdoors.

ANTOINE I’m not working on a farm.

PIERRE Of course not.

ANTOINE What is it, then?

PIERRE Your call-up papers.

ANTOINE Call-up?

PIERRE You’ve been conscripted, little brother.

ANTOINE I don’t want to join the army.

PIERRE That’s not the attitude, lad. Don’t you know there’s a war on?

ANTOINE You bastard.

PIERRE You’re going to be fighting for Emperor Napoleon, little brother.

DIDI (VO) Within a week, Ursule was packed off to Marseille with the hatmaker, Antoine went to war and Pierre and Félicité moved into their new house on the fashionable Rue de la Banne.

FÉLICITÉ You are brilliant, my love.

PIERRE We did it. Together.

FÉLICITÉ This house will become the very centre of Plassans. This room will be full of silk and conversation and laughter and champagne.

PIERRE Absolutely.

FÉLICITÉ And envy too. This salon will echo with envy. And intrigue. We will be famous for it.

DIDI (VO) In Félicité, Pierre had found a woman whose ambition even outstripped his own.

FÉLICITÉ But first I shall redecorate.

PIERRE Well why not?

FÉLICITÉ What about yellow silk for the curtains?

PIERRE Isn’t that a bit bright? Why yellow?

FÉLICITÉ To go with the yellow sateen wallpaper.

PIERRE Ah.

FÉLICITÉ It will contrast with the lemon upholstery and the amber cushions.

PIERRE Those are also yellow though -

FÉLICITÉ I see buttermilk table coverings with golden place settings, and the seats will be reupholstered in a xanthous fabric.

PIERRE Xanthous?

FÉLICITÉ It’s a colour. How to describe it?

PIERRE ...Yellow perhaps?

FÉLICITÉ It is a sort of yellow.

PIERRE So it will all be yellow.

FÉLICITÉ Exactly. The Yellow Drawing Room will become the most coveted invitation in Plassans.

PIERRE Of course it will.

DIDI (VO) Pierre and Félicité were like bandits gathering their forces and lying in wait for Plassans, eradicating drop by drop the traces of human feeling that watered down their blood.

PIERRE Darling...

FÉLICITÉ What is it?

PIERRE Oh nothing.

FÉLICITÉ Tell your Félicité.

PIERRE I suppose I do feel a little twinge.

FÉLICITÉ A twinge?

PIERRE A pang maybe.

FÉLICITÉ A pang of what?

PIERRE Guilt?

FÉLICITÉ Whatever for?

PIERRE For mummy.

FÉLICITÉ Mummy?

PIERRE In that horrible cottage, all on her own.

FÉLICITÉ Oh you mean Didi?

PIERRE Nothing to worry about, just a pang.

FÉLICITÉ You know? I’d forgotten all about her. (harder) And I suggest you do the same.

DIDI (VO) Does anyone remember poor Adelaide?

Back in the cottage.

For a while after the death of the smuggler Macquart, few people saw her. She ate little. She drank only water. Her skin was pale, her hair grew white. Her eyes became milky. On her rare visits to town, the children would hide behind their mother’s skirts. Aunt Didi, it seems, was waiting to die.

A knock at a wooden door.

Her daughter Ursule’s story was an unhappy one. She lived in Marseille for many years with Mouret the hatmaker and had three children. Say hello, children!

Three babies cry.

But Ursule was not strong and one summer in 1840, she succumbed to consumption. The two older children, François and Hélène, were found apprenticeships but Silvère was too young and, after being turned away at Pierre’s door, Adelaide took him in.

DIDI Well boy? Aren’t you going to say hello to your grandma?

SILVÈRE quietly snivelling.

Don’t be scared, Silvère.

SILVÈRE quietly snivelling.

I’ve got a small larder in the back of the kitchen. I’ve emptied that out and you can sleep in there. Alright?

SILVÈRE quietly snivelling.

You going to say thank you to your grandma?

SILVÈRE quietly snivelling.

That’s alright, boy. You don’t have to talk. I know what it’s like. I’ve got no one and you’ve got no one. So now we’ll have no one together.

DIDI (VO) For the first month Silvère barely spoke at all. Sometimes he would cry. But Didi was patient. She fed him. She didn’t force him to speak. And sometimes she would come back from town with a treat: a pigeon, perhaps, or a book.

A front door opens.

DIDI Hello Silvère. Have you even moved from that chair since I left? What’s this? You’ve nearly finished that book.

SILVÈRE (quietly) I washed the plates.

DIDI What was that, love?

SILVÈRE I washed the plates.

DIDI You washed the plates?

SILVÈRE Yeah.

DIDI What a good boy you are.

SILVÈRE And I broke one.

DIDI You broke one?

SILVÈRE I’m sorry.

DIDI There’s always plates. Just take more care next time.

SILVÈRE I will, Didi.

DIDI (VO) After six weeks, the twelve-year-old Silvère and the eighty-year-old Adelaide had formed a strange friendship. Silvere’s shyness disappeared and to Adelaide’s face returned a colour and life that hadn’t been there since the night a border guard ended her happiness.

Gun shot.

Silvère was a voracious reader. He read books faster than Didi could bring them into the house: stories, history books, romances, natural science. But what stirred his young mind particularly were books about heroic deeds, people fighting for liberty, battles against tyranny.

Underneath:

SILVÈRE (reading, in his head) ‘Man is born free but everywhere is in chains. See a man who thinks himself the master of others; he is more a slave than they. How did this change take place? I cannot say. What can make it legitimate? That I can explain.’

DIDI (VO) Silvère’s calming presence even seemed to steady her damaged nerves. Her attacks were milder and less frequent and she was able to hide them from the boy. Until one day:

DIDI What do you want for tea, Silvère?

SILVÈRE Soup!

DIDI And you shall have soup.

SILVÈRE And bread.

DIDI And you shall have bread.

SILVÈRE Soup and bread! Soup and bread!

A spangly heavenly shimmering sound.

Didi? Are you alright?

DIDI I – yes –

SILVÈRE Didi? What’s the matter –

DIDI Now you must not be scared. Promise me you will not be scared.

SILVÈRE What’s happening, grandma?

DIDI Sometimes my mind it – gets too much for me – and – go: go now, leave me alone.

SILVÈRE I don’t want to go, grandma.

DIDI You mustn’t see s ss stss

Her voice becomes guttural. She collapses. Her body is twitching.

SILVÈRE (panicking) Grandma? What’s wrong?

Her feet thumping the floor, words churning in her throat.

Grandma. Grandma. I’m here. Grandma. I’m still here.

DIDI (VO) And Silvère got a cushion and placed it beneath his grandmother’s head and he stayed with her until her legs stopped shaking. When she came to an hour later, she found Silvère sitting beside her, holding her hand, reading a book.

SILVÈRE I’m still here, Grandma.

DIDI (VO) He was a good boy. Such a good boy. (Moved.) Excuse me. (Pulls herself together.) Aged 13, Silvere was apprenticed to Vian the wheelwright. He learned quickly and soon was able to bring food and books into the old hut himself. At night he would read his books and in the morning he would go out and fill the bucket at the well.

Outdoors.

The well was set into a high wall at the far end of the garden, half of it on one side of the wall, half on the other.

MIETTE Hello.

SILVÈRE lets out a yelp and lets go of the handle. The bucket winch spins and the bucket on its rope splashes back down into the water.

SILVÈRE Who’s that?

MIETTE My name is Marie. But everyone calls me Miette.

The voices are strange, echoey. The well with its deep pool and stone dome creates the sound like the inside of a cave, or a grotto. Droplets of water, shimmering voices. It sounds unworldly.

SILVÈRE You gave me a fright.

MIETTE I only said hello.

SILVÈRE I was surprised.

MIETTE What a girl!

SILVÈRE I’m not.

MIETTE I’m not that scary am I?

SILVÈRE I can’t see you.

MIETTE Look in the water.

SILVÈRE What do you mean?

MIETTE Wait for it to clear.

DIDI (VO) The opening in the wall was only large enough to take the bucket in and out. But as the water stilled Silvère could make out the reflection of a girl with raven-black hair and a mocking expression.

SILVÈRE I’m Silvère.

MIETTE Hello, Silvère.

Pause.

Um, have you finished with the bucket?

SILVÈRE Oh!

MIETTE Hurry up!

SILVÈRE Alright -

He hauls the bucket up with the winch.

Do you live near here?

MIETTE No, I walk fifty miles to get here.

SILVÈRE Really?

MIETTE No, silly!

SILVÈRE I’m not silly!

MIETTE Who walks fifty miles for a well? Course I live near here.

SILVÈRE With your mum and dad?

MIETTE No, I live with my aunt. My mum is dead and my dad is, he’s gone away.

SILVÈRE I live with my grandma. So we’re both orphans.

MIETTE Sort of.

SILVÈRE pours the water from the bucket into his pail.

SILVÈRE That’s me done.

MIETTE Thanks.

SILVÈRE See you around.

He makes to go.

MIETTE Oi, silly!

SILVÈRE (crossly) What?

MIETTE You come here every morning?

SILVÈRE Yeah.

MIETTE Right.

SILVÈRE See you tomorrow maybe.

He makes to go.

MIETTE Oi, silly.

SILVÈRE (crossly) What now?

MIETTE Pass the bucket through.

SILVÈRE Oh.

DIDI (VO) That day, at work, Silvère asked at the carriageworks if anyone knew a girl who had just moved in nearby. They did.

WORKMAN Yeah that’s the Chantegreil girl.

SILVÈRE Shunterwhat?

WORKMAN Chantegreil. The murderer’s girl.

SILVÈRE Murderer?

2nd WORKMAN He was a poacher. A policeman challenged him and he shot him, dead, right there.

SILVÈRE What happened to him?

WORKMAN Sentenced to the galleys. No one knows where he is now. The girl was taken in by the aunt. They don’t let her out, too ashamed. And quite right.

SILVÈRE Why?

WORKMAN Bad blood that lot. Bad blood. She’s just the same. They’re all the same.

DIDI (VO) The next morning, at the well, Silvère talked to Miette.

SILVÈRE I want to be your friend.

MIETTE I don’t need a friend.

SILVÈRE No but, if you do, I’m here.

MIETTE Listen to this. (She changes her voice and makes it echo in the well.) I’M A TROLL AND I’M GOING TO EAT YOU.

SILVÈRE You don’t look like a troll.

MIETTE No? What about now?

She throws a stone into the water.

I WILL SUCK THE FLESH FROM YOUR BONES AND CRUNCH THEM IN MY TEETH.

She laughs. The laughter subsides.

SILVÈRE I asked about you where I work.

MIETTE Oh did you?

SILVÈRE Yes. They told me about your dad.

MIETTE People love to blab. Blah blah blah.

SILVÈRE I want to protect you.

MIETTE I don’t need your protection, silly.

SILVÈRE I’m not silly.

MIETTE Well I don’t need it anyway.

SILVÈRE But it’s not fair. The things people say.

MIETTE So? Nothing’s fair. Why should things be fair?

SILVÈRE I believe in justice.

MIETTE You what?

SILVÈRE I believe in justice and liberty. And equality as well.

MIETTE You’re silly.

SILVÈRE I am not silly.

MIETTE You can’t believe in justice. What does that even mean?

SILVÈRE It means doing what’s right.

MIETTE Those people aren’t going to change. Let them believe what they want to believe. Why make a fuss?

SILVÈRE Because sometimes you have to stand your ground. Sometimes you have to do what’s right.

MIETTE You’re a weird kid.

SILVÈRE I’m not a kid.

MIETTE You so are a kid.

SILVÈRE See you here tomorrow?

MIETTE Maybe kiddo.

DIDI (VO) Every morning, Silvère would get to the well at precisely the same time. And every morning Miette would be there too, one way or another.

SILVÈRE I thought you weren’t coming.

MIETTE So?

SILVÈRE Just you’re late.

MIETTE Aww, did you miss me?

SILVÈRE No, just...

MIETTE Oh, poor Silvère missed his little Miette!

SILVÈRE No! I just thought, that’s all.

MIETTE Admit it. You missed me!

SILVÈRE Well what about you?

MIETTE What do you mean?

SILVÈRE You’re out of breath.

MIETTE No I’m not.

She is.

SILVÈRE You ran to get here.

MIETTE No I didn’t.

SILVÈRE Yes you did.

MIETTE No I didn’t, so.

SILVÈRE Doesn’t matter if you did.

MIETTE I know.

Change of mood.

SILVÈRE I want to talk to you.

MIETTE You are talking to me.

SILVÈRE No but properly.

MIETTE This is properly.

SILVÈRE Not through the well.

MIETTE My aunt doesn’t let me out.

SILVÈRE This wall is too high.

MIETTE So it’s the well or nothing.

DIDI (VO) In the evenings, Silvère would sit and talk to his grandma and one night their conversation turned to Macquart.

DIDI He was not what you’d call a good man. He was a bad man. He did some wicked things, I think. I didn’t ask him about them.

SILVÈRE Why not?

DIDI Because I loved him.

SILVÈRE Even though he did those bad things?

DIDI (after a pause) Maybe, a bit, because of that.

SILVÈRE I don’t understand.

DIDI It was exciting. Knowing that the town were so angry. Those evenings when I would slip out of my house, walk down the path. Once I was past the wall and I was in here, I felt I was living the life of an outlaw.

SILVÈRE You were standing up for what was right.

DIDI I don’t know if I thought it was right, Silvère. But I don’t think I cared very much about that.

Pause.

SILVÈRE What did you mean, ‘past the wall’?

DIDI This wall. The one at the end of the garden. Once I was past that wall, it was as if I had left Plassans and I was somewhere else entirely.

SILVÈRE Um, how – I mean – how did you get past the wall. You didn’t climb over it, did you?

DIDI Of course not. There’s a door.

SILVÈRE There’s a door?

DIDI Yes.

SILVÈRE I’ve never seen a door.

DIDI No.

SILVÈRE I don’t understand.

DIDI That night a policeman came to the door and told me that my Macquart had been shot and killed I locked the door and put the key away and I never opened it again.

SILVÈRE You’ve not seen the other side of the wall?

DIDI Not in 25 years, Silvère. Promise me you won’t ever try. There’s nothing for you over there.

Sounds of upheaval.

DIDI (VO) That evening, Silvère promised and the next morning he broke his promise. Finding the key in the back of a kitchen drawer...

Outside.

... he took a trowel and an oilcan and the key and he explored the wall, inch by inch.

He taps the handle of the trowel on the wall, through the ivy that covers it. We hear a series of taps. Stone. Stone. Stone. Stone. Stone. Wood.

Pulling away the vines, eventually the door stood exposed before him. He pushed the key in the lock.

A very stiff, rusty lock slowly unlocks.

And he pushed.

With a resonating squeal, the door rustily pushes ajar.

Pause.

MIETTE Hello Silvère.

SILVÈRE Hello Miette.

MIETTE Your voice sounds different in the open.

SILVÈRE Bad different?

MIETTE Just different.

SILVÈRE You look different from in the water.

MIETTE Bad different?

SILVÈRE Good different. Definitely good different.

MIETTE Well then?

SILVÈRE What?

MIETTE You wanted to talk.

SILVÈRE Yes I did.

MIETTE So talk, silly!

A creak of the door.

DIDI Silvère!

SILVÈRE Didi! I’m sorry I -

DIDI (VO) But she stopped, confused by the gap between her memories of the old house and the sight now before her. As she turned her eyes towards Silvere and Miette, she felt her nerves jangling, her blood pulsing –

A spangly heavenly shimmering sound.

SILVÈRE Didi? Grandma?

DIDI You cacnacc caccc csc c

She slumps to her knees, then to the earth.

MIETTE What’s happening? What’s wrong with her.

SILVÈRE It’s nothing, she’ll be alright, we just need to help her.

He runs over.

Well come on!

MIETTE joins him.

I’m going to put her on her back, you hold her head.

We go into DIDI’s mind. The heavenly shimmering sound is all-consuming, ennervating.

SILVÈRE (beneath the following, as if from underwater) You take her legs, I’ll put her on her side.

DIDI (VO) Adelaide’s vision blurred. It seemed to her suddenly that the two faces crowded anxiously above her were spattered in blood. She saw the skies darken. It was as though she saw a flag streaked with blood floating in the air.

In the kitchen, that evening.

SILVÈRE I’m sorry, Grandma.

DIDI I understand, Silvère.

SILVÈRE I am though.

DIDI Take care. Love can kill people, my boy.

SILVÈRE Love? I don’t love her, grandma.

DIDI Take care, that’s all.

DIDI (VO) From that day on, each morning Silvère and Miette would meet at the well and each evening at ten they would meet by the door. They would speak about the town and their days and their rooms and their hearts and books and ideas and the future.

MIETTE Do you think France will ever be free?

SILVÈRE I do, but we’ll have to fight for it.

MIETTE Would you ever fight? Really?

SILVÈRE For freedom, course I would!

MIETTE Not being funny, but do you know how to fight?

SILVÈRE I bet I could learn.

DIDI (VO) And on the colder nights she would wrap her dark brown cloak around their shoulders and they would carry on talking, their breath misting in the air between them.

MIETTE When the day comes and I have to stand up for what I believe, I hope I will be strong enough.

SILVÈRE You’ll be strong enough. You’re amazing.

MIETTE Imagine it, fighting for liberty. Doing what’s right!

SILVÈRE Obeying no one’s rules but the dictates of our own conscience!

DIDI (distant) Silvère! Bedtime!

SILVÈRE Coming, grandma!

DIDI (VO) Félicité and Pierre, meanwhile, laid siege to Plassans. Félicité began her assault by assembling an army of children. Five in eight years. Eugène! Pascal! Aristide! Sidonie! Martha!

Each name answered by cannonfire.

She launched her olive oil business at every housewife in Plassans, while picking off the rest with a series of strategic invitations to the Yellow Drawing Room at the Rue de la Banne.

A cocktail party.

But the Rougons’ conquest of Plassans was not wholly successful. The oil business remained stubbornly unlucrative.

TOWNSFOLK No thank you.

Door slams.

DIDI (VO) And the smart set of Plassans were underwhelmed by their new neigbours.

Cocktail party.

RICH WOMAN (acidly) Oh you’re tradespeople. How very fascinating that must be for you.

DIDI (VO) And old antagonisms resurfaced.

ANTOINE (heard in the square outside, continuing underneath:) Criminals! Highwaymen! Brigands! Thieves! (sings the Chant du Départ) Victory in song, opens the gates to us! Liberty guides our steps! And from the North and from the South the trumpets of war celebrate the hour of fight! Tremble enemies of France, kings drunk on blood and pride! The sovereign people are coming! Tyrants go to your graves! The Republic is calling!

FÉLICITÉ What ever is that noise?

PIERRE (Goes to the window) Oh no.

FÉLICITÉ What is it, my darling?

PIERRE Antoine’s back.

DIDI (VO) Antoine had returned from the war, more resentful of his half-brother than ever before.

ANTOINE (distant) Thieves!

DIDI (VO) At first, Pierre tried to ignore him. But when Antoine started once again making speeches in the town square...

ANTOINE (public speech) What do we want?

CROWD Rougons out!

ANTOINE When do we want it?

CROWD Now!

DIDI (VO) ...Pierre was obliged to change course.

A wood-panelled office.

ANTOINE What’s this?

PIERRE It’s a very generous settlement.

ANTOINE Generous? You got a nerve.

SOLICITOR You understand, sir, that my client makes this offer in a spirit of goodwill...

ANTOINE Hah!

SOLICITOR ... and does not intend by it any concession to the slanderous claims made by you against his person.

ANTOINE It’s no slander Mr Dubois. Ask your client. He knows.

PIERRE Pipe down, Antoine.

ANTOINE Don’t you tell me to pipe down, you thief! You highwayman!

SOLICITOR I must ask you, however, Mr Macquart, to sign an undertaking that you will never again repeat these allegations.

ANTOINE Yes, that’s how you work, isn’t it? Contracts. Signature. Yes yes.

PIERRE Antoine, please. Calm down. Take the money. Buy yourself a suit of clothes. Get some rooms. A job, perhaps.

ANTOINE A job! You’d like that wouldn’t you? Trample on the working man, you would. Yes you’d like that.

PIERRE So you don’t want the money?

ANTOINE Tell me to calm down. Bloody nerve of it.

SOLICITOR I would remind you that my client is at liberty to withdraw this offer at any time.

PIERRE Just sign it, Macquart.

Pause.

SOLICITOR Just here, sir.

ANTOINE signs.

ANTOINE There. And I hope you’re happy, you pair of bandits.

DIDI (VO) Antoine did buy a suit. He even bought his own drinks for a while. And before the money ran out, he was lucky enough to meet Josephine, a basket-maker and a hard worker. While he sat at home, seething at his injustice, Josephine would work to bring home money. And in time she also gave him three children. Lisa, Gervaise and Jean. Say hello!

Three babies, crying.

ANTOINE Keep the bloody noise down! I’m trying to read the paper!

DIDI (VO) In the evenings, Josephine would feed the kids and then she and Antoine would drink until their foreheads touched the table.

Foreheads hitting a wooden table.

And there they would sleep until the morning. This was the happiest time of Antoine’s life. He had money. He had a wife. He had plenty to drink. But he still had not forgotten how he had been cheated.

ANTOINE (drunkenly, sleepily) Thieves...

DIDI (VO) But outside Plassans, things were happening. France was changing. For fifty years, the country had been in two minds about the King. Sometimes for him:

Snatch of pompous courtly music.

And sometimes against:

Guillotine. Head drops into a basket.

After the revolution, France had become a Republic and then under Napoleon it became an Empire and after the Emperor was deposed a King was restored to the throne.

LOUIS-PHILIPPE Bonjour!

DIDI (VO) But then the King tried to restrict the right to free assembly and he was forced to flee the country.

LOUIS-PHILIPPE Au revoir!

Rides off on a horse.

DIDI (VO) In 1848, the Monarchy is ended for the second time. The Second Republic is declared. In towns across the country, Liberty Trees were planted to celebrate the new democratic state. This did not always go down well.

PIERRE It’s a complete disgrace.

FÉLICITÉ A tree, of all things. It’s disfiguring. It’s unsightly.

PIERRE I’m going to do something.

DIDI (VO) What Pierre and Félicité did was to form a Salon for the conservative faction of Plassans.

A hubbub of voices and glassware.

They included the almond-dealer Mr Granoux.

GRANOUX Evening.

DIDI (VO) Mr Roudier, the contractor.

ROUDIER At your service.

DIDI (VO) The clerical publisher, Mr Vuillet.

VUILLET Bless you.

DIDI (VO) Commander Sicardot, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars.

SICARDOT Bah!

DIDI (VO) And the Marquis de Carnavant, a dispossessed aristocrat, who gave the Salon style and took whatever he could.

CARNAVANT Enchanté, Madame.

Kisses her hand.

DIDI (VO) Under the influence of their distinguished guests, Pierre and Félicité Rougon became devotees of authority, opponents of democracy, more royalist than the King.

SICARDOT The King is a keystone of order, keeps the whole thing solid. Without a King, everything falls apart.

Hear hears.

GRANOUX Thieves. Scoundrels. Scroungers. Spongers. Slackers. Yobbos. Freeloaders. Parasites. Am I right?

Hear hears.

DIDI (VO) Their son Eugène grew up and studied law, establishing a small practice in Plassans. He represented farmers and he prosecuted poachers. He drew up wills and he wriggled clients out of contracts. But life in a small provincial town like Plassans never suited him. And as 1848 broke, he announced to his parents:

EUGÈNE I’m going to Paris.

PIERRE What are you talking about, Eugène?

EUGÈNE Things are happening in Paris, sir.

PIERRE What things? What do you mean, my son?

EUGÈNE There are changes afoot in the world of politics. Constitutional changes in how we are governed.

PIERRE But you have your law practice here.

EUGÈNE I propose to sell it and with the proceeds establish myself in Paris. I want to be part of the future of France, sir.

PIERRE I’m sorry. I forbid it.

FÉLICITÉ You most certainly do not forbid it.

PIERRE I – what?

FÉLICITÉ Go to Paris, my child. Do great things. Do the Rougon name proud.

PIERRE I intend to, mother.

DIDI (VO) And so, at the end of January 1848, Eugène travelled to the capital, with one suitcase and 500 Francs in his pocket.

Gare Montparnasse. Steam trains relaxing.

Stepping out from the station, Eugène set eyes for the first time on Paris.

Voices. Footsteps. Horses. Fruitsellers. Shouts. Crowds.

The immensity of Paris struck him immediately and entirely. All around him, the houses and shops and theatres and carriages and posters and people and people and people he felt himself not shrink but grow. He felt his soul expanding to fill the city. It was as though his eyes saw through the bricks and buildings to take in the whole of Paris, in its grandeur, its wealth, its terrible brilliance.

EUGÈNE I shall be your mirror.

DIDI (VO) Eugène understood.

EUGÈNE I will become you.

DIDI (VO) Eugène saw everything.

EUGÈNE You shall see yourself in me.

DIDI (VO) He saw that a great city needed a great man. Not a parliament but an Emperor, not a Republic but an Empire.

EUGÈNE I have come to save you.

DIDI (VO) Eugène would restore to France its Emperor.

EUGÈNE But first I need a bite to eat.

DIDI (VO) After a month or two, Eugène’s hatred of France’s Republican government consumed his every thought. Each minute of each day was spent working for the return of the Emperor. But when his speeches went unheard and his pamphlets unread, he had to change to subtler methods. In the guise of an investment advisor, he started to insinuate himself into some of the most important houses in Paris.

EUGÈNE Ah, I am glad to find myself in a house such as this.

POSH FRENCHMAN Indeed so, I am delighted you say so.

EUGÈNE To be among true supporters of the Republic.

POSH FRENCHMAN Why – y – yes, indeed. Long live the Republic, so say I.

EUGÈNE So say we all, sir. Or nearly all.

POSH FRENCHMAN Nearly all?

EUGÈNE (Confidentially) I cannot name the man, but in the last house I visited, not half an hour ago, I formed a grave impression, a most grave impression.

POSH FRENCHMAN Oh really?

EUGÈNE Yes. Things are happening, sir. Things are happening.

DIDI (VO) And after some weeks repeating this nonsense in every house he visited, he began to spread the impression that the whole of Paris was dissatisfied with the Republic. He became known as a source of information. He was trusted as a man with the ear of Paris. And soon he was invited to meet a rather special man.

A grand room. Doors open.

BUTLER Mr Eugène Rougon, Excellency.

EUGÈNE My deepest respects, Excellency, I place myself entirely at your disposal.

LOUIS-NAPOLEON (very diffident) Oh really?

EUGÈNE Indeed sir. You may be aware, I have been working in your interests these last months.

LOUIS-NAPOLEON Well. Fancy.

EUGÈNE France needs you. You carry within you the good name of Napoleon. Truly, sir, you are the man of the hour.

DIDI (VO) Louis-Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, heir to the Napoleon dynasty, and a man with his eyes on the throne of France.

LOUIS-NAPOLEON Well. Strain every sinew, etc.

EUGÈNE I assure you, I am doing so, Excellency.

LOUIS-NAPOLEON I’m thinking of standing for the Presidency. What do you think?

EUGÈNE It is not my place to advise you sir.

LOUIS-NAPOLEON Humour me.

EUGÈNE I think you should stand. But I think, too, that the Presidency should be only the first of two steps.

LOUIS-NAPOLEON What ever do you mean?

EUGÈNE France does not need a President. It needs an Emperor.

LOUIS-NAPOLEON A Second Empire. Well well well. That would be fun, I suppose.

EUGÈNE Am I to continue to act in your interest, sir?

LOUIS-NAPOLEON Do as you please, Rougon. You won’t find me ungrateful.

EUGÈNE Sir.

DIDI (VO) That evening, Eugène wrote the first of many letters to his father, explaining that the Republic’s days were numbered and to prepare for a new French Empire.

The Yellow Drawing Room.

PIERRE Gentlemen, I am not at liberty to discuss any details, but I have recently received information that forces sympathetic to our interests are, as we speak, working to bring an end to this foolish atheistical experiment.

ROUDIER Are we to be protected from this Republic?

PIERRE No need, Gentlemen. Within a year, I say to you now, the Republic will be no more.

Hear hears. Clinking of glasses, thumping on tables.

DIDI (VO) Pierre was not right. Louis-Napoleon was elected President in 1848 but the Republic remained intact through 1849 and 1850, to the dismay of some:

GRANOUX Radicals. Anarchists. Reds. Communists. Fanatics. Extremists. Liberals. Am I right?

DIDI (VO) And the delight of others:

SILVÈRE The Orleanists are still agitating for a restoration of the monarchy.

MIETTE Idiots. France will never have a King back.

SILVÈRE I don’t think so either.

MIETTE I like being a citizen. I don’t want to be a subject.

SILVÈRE A citizen, standing tall.

MIETTE Standing on our own two feet.

SILVÈRE Fighting for dignity, justice.

MIETTE Standing our ground. Standing up for what we believe in.

SILVÈRE Breathing freedom like we breathe air. Imagine it, Miette.

MIETTE I am. I’m imagining it.

DIDI (VO) By 1851, Eugene and his friends had been dripping poison in Parisian ears for so long that all Paris, even those sympathetic to the Republic, believed its days were numbered. Eugene had stood Paris on its edge and it needed only the slightest touch to make it fall.

EUGÈNE Excellency, the parliament becomes more unpopular by the day. I believe that before the year is out, we will be in a position to dissolve the Parliament in the name of the people and have you declared absolute ruler of France.

LOUIS-NAPOLEON If you say so, Rougon. You just give me the nod and I’ll do the rest.

DIDI (VO) And so the signal went up.

A shot is fired.

DIDI (VO) The first shots were fired.

Underneath: Horses cantering through Parisian streets. More shots. Screams.

DIDI (VO) Louis-Napoleon put the army on the streets. Parliament was dissolved. And the news did not take long to reach Plassans.

Yellow Drawing Room.

PIERRE I am delighted to announce that His Excellency Louis-Napoleon has suspended the Parliament and brought down the Republican Government.

Hear hears. Glasses tapped, tables thumped.

SICARDOT Not before time. Smack of strong leadership. Needed, you follow me?

PIERRE I would like to propose that the Yellow Drawing Room of Plassans gratefully accepts Louis-Napoleon’s generous assumption of power and furthermore that I propose that he be crowned Emperor of France.

ROUDIER Seconded.

PIERRE Anyone against? Carried!

Cheers. Out in the garden.

SILVÈRE Have you heard?

MIETTE Heard what?

SILVÈRE The President’s dissolved the National Assembly.

MIETTE He can’t do that!

SILVÈRE He has though.

MIETTE Someone’s got to stop him.

SILVÈRE They are.

MIETTE What do you mean?

SILVÈRE Guys told me in the yard. Rebel groups are springing up all over France. There’s one gathering a few miles outside town. I’m going to join them.

MIETTE Well I’m coming with you, then.

SILVÈRE No you’re not.

MIETTE Oh am I not, Silvère?

SILVÈRE But you’re a girl.

MIETTE Well spotted, Mr Equality.

SILVÈRE I don’t mean that. I just mean, I don’t know what’s going to happen. It could be dangerous.

MIETTE Then I’m definitely coming.

SILVÈRE What? Why?

MIETTE Someone’s got to look after you.

SILVÈRE Come on then, if you’re coming.

They run off.

A bedroom in Plassans. A stone is thrown at a window. There is singing outside.

PIERRE What the devil?

FÉLICITÉ What’s going on?

A heavier stone is thrown, it breaks the window.

Pierre! What’s happening?

PIERRE Oh it’s that damn fool brother of mine.

ANTOINE (from outside, singing drunkenly)

Rise up you children of our country!

The day of glory has arrived

We will fight and defeat all the tyrants!

And we’ll raise up our flag, red as blood!

Yes we’ll raise up our flag, red as blood!

You haven’t won yet, Rougon. The rebels are coming!

/ To arms, citizens!

Form battalions!

We march, we march! (He wanders off)

FÉLICITÉ What’s he saying?

PIERRE He says the rebels are coming.

FÉLICITÉ (panicked) The rebels are coming?

PIERRE He’s just drunk. Ignore him. We’ll discuss it all in the morning. Get some sleep.

DIDI (VO) Out beyond the Rue de la Banne, out beyond the town’s walls, two hours down the Nice road, Silvère and Miette are looking for a group of brave men and women that they have never met and of whose existence they have heard only wild rumours.

They are walking.

MIETTE Are you sure?

SILVÈRE Dubruel told me they’d be here.

MIETTE Who’s Dubruel?

SILVÈRE He’s a butcher.

MIETTE A butcher?

SILVÈRE It doesn’t matter. He said they’d be here.

MIETTE It’s bloody cold.

SILVÈRE It is bloody cold.

MIETTE I don’t mind turning back. It doesn’t mean we’re giving up.

SILVÈRE I want to find them.

MIETTE (laughs)

SILVÈRE What’s the joke?

MIETTE You’ve got your serious face on.

SILVÈRE No I haven’t.

MIETTE Yes you have, when your mouth goes all little and you frown like this. (Does the face.)

SILVÈRE I do not look like that.

MIETTE You do an’ all.

SILVÈRE I’m just concentrating.

MIETTE Not saying it’s bad in fact I think it looks quite cute.

SILVÈRE I’m not trying to look cute, I’m trying to join a revolution –

MIETTE Wait.

SILVÈRE What?

MIETTE Shh.

Pause*.*

You hear that?

Very faintly, we can hear voices, a campfire, people eating from tin plates.

SILVÈRE That’s them.

MIETTE Careful.

SILVÈRE Why?

MIETTE It could be, you know.

SILVÈRE What?

MIETTE The other lot.

SILVÈRE Right well let’s keep quiet. (whispers) Follow me.

MIETTE (whispers) No, you follow me.

SILVÈRE (whispers) This was my idea!

MIETTE (whispers) But I heard them!

SILVÈRE (whispers) You are so annoying.

MIETTE (whispers) You’re doing the face again.

SILVÈRE (whispers) I am not doing a face!

BURGAT And who do we have here then?

SILVÈRE and MIETTE scream in shock.

Well?

SILVÈRE My name’s Silvère. I’m from Plassans. I’ve come to join you.

BURGAT Join us eh?

SILVÈRE I want to join the rebellion.

BURGAT No rebellion round here, lad. Just me.

SILVÈRE That’s not true.

BURGAT Oh, and how do you make that out?

SILVÈRE Cos you said ‘us’.

BURGAT (After a beat.) So I did.

SILVÈRE I want to fight for freedom and justice, sir.

BURGAT (amused) Well – if you’re going to fight for something – I suppose there are worse things to choose.

SILVÈRE And who do I have the honour of addressing, sir?

BURGAT My name’s Burgat. I’m a blacksmith. From Castel-le-Vieux. Who’s your friend?

SILVÈRE A comrade!

BURGAT A comrade eh? Well, you and your comrade follow me.

They walk.

SILVÈRE (whispers) Oh my gosh, this is so amazing?

MIETTE (whispers) I know, right?

SILVÈRE (whispers) We’re like totally joining a revolution?

MIETTE (whispers) So awesome?

Guys are sitting around a campfire eating.

DIDI (VO) 150 men stood or sat in a clearing in the woods. Woodcutters from the forests of the Seille with their axes freshly-sharpened; hunters from La Palud with rifles; peasants from the Midi with pitchforks and scythes. Short jackets, smocks, some with red sashes, others in the uniforms of armies they had deserted. Everyone eating, thinking, talking, drinking.

They fall silent.

BURGAT Gentlemen, we have two new recruits. This is Silvére.

SILVÈRE Hello.

Murmurs of greeting.

BURGAT And this lad in the hood is – sorry, didn’t catch your name.

She takes down the hood.

MIETTE I am Marie Chantegreil. People call me Miette.

Good-natured but appreciative cheers and whistles.

BURGAT You didn’t say your comrade was a girl.

MIETTE I’m a comrade. And I’m as good as he is.

BURGAT Is she?

SILVÈRE She really is, actually.

BURGAT Alright then.

SILVÈRE It’s really annoying sometimes.

BURGAT Marie, Miette. I like that. We set off tomorrow morning. Want to hold the flag, Marie Chantegreil?

MIETTE I’d rather have a gun.

BURGAT Have you ever fired a gun?

MIETTE No.

BURGAT Then take the flag.

SILVÈRE Where are we going?

BURGAT Orchères.

SILVÈRE That’s the other side of Plassans.

BURGAT Yeah. Thought we might pass through. They won’t give us too much trouble, will they?

SILVÈRE No - I. No.

BURGAT You get some sleep, you two. Tomorrow’s going to be a long day.

DIDI (VO) The next morning, the rebels met with battalions from Estournel and Sainte-Anne and then began to march towards Plassans, at their head Miette, proudly carrying aloft the red flag of the republican cause.

The rebels are marching, Miette at the head, drumming and singing The Marseilleise. They have to shout to be heard over the noise.

SILVÈRE You look – amazing!

MIETTE How cool is this?

DIDI (VO) At the same time, in the Yellow Drawing Room, plans were being laid to defend Plassans against the barbarians.

PIERRE Gentlemen, fires have been sighted in the hills to the west. It is clear that rebels are massing, fanatics for democracy, friends of anarchy, enemies of the Empire. But will Plassans fall? No, Plassans will not fall. For we shall defend it.

Cheers.

PIERRE Now first of all / we need to

ROUDIER How?

PIERRE establish a – what?

ROUDIER How will we defend it?

PIERRE Well we – we shall – obviously - Commander Sicardot, how will we defend Plassans?

SICARDOT (matter-of-factly) We will fight like lions.

PIERRE There, you see?

ROUDIER We’ll be massacred. My butcher says there’s supposed to be 2000 of them.

SICARDOT First whiff of grapeshot, they’ll scatter. No backbone, you see. Show of strength. The old spirit.

ROUDIER Do we even have any weapons?

PIERRE Indeed we do. Commander Sicardot has placed a supply of muskets and ammunition in the old cart-shed by the ramparts.

ROUDIER I’ve never shot a musket in my life.

SICARDOT Hammer to half cock, charge, ball, wadding on top, ramrod, tamp tamp tamp, gunpowder, full cock, point and fire, child’s play.

GRANOUX Hear hear.

PIERRE This is our moment, gentlemen. The moment of which we have talked for so long. I refuse to believe that any man in this room would not take up arms to defend the glory of the French Empire.

SICARDOT Hear hear.

PIERRE I offer myself as your Captain.

GRANOUX Permission to speak, Captain.

PIERRE Of course, Mr Granoux.

GRANOUX I would like to volunteer as your sergeant.

PIERRE Very good, Sergeant.

ROUDIER Oh, I wanted to be Sergeant.

PIERRE You can be Corporal. Vuillet you’ll be my lieutenant and Carnavant, you, um, wait over there. Now look, men, I’m proud of you. What a fine body of true-born Frenchmen you are. The rebels are not expected until this evening. We are all to be ready, in the town square, prepared to fight to the death.

FÉLICITÉ Oh darling, you will be careful, won’t you?

PIERRE My love, please don’t concern yourself with such matters.

FÉLICITÉ I couldn’t bear to see you taken prisoner.

SICARDOT Fear not, Madam, that will not happen.

FÉLICITÉ Oh good.

PIERRE There, you see?

SICARDOT Probably just shoot you.

PIERRE Exactly. What?

SICARDOT Can’t waste rations on prisoners. No, up against the wall, bang bang, blood on the cobbles, dead before you know it.

PIERRE You didn’t mention that before.

SICARDOT Thought it might spoil the mood.

PIERRE (gritted teeth) Yes it would have done.

SICARDOT Nothing wrong with a bit of blood. Blood makes things happen. Blood is a good fertilizer.

FÉLICITÉ Commander Sicardot, might I suggest that my husband lead a second company, a sort of back-up company, if you will. If the first defence is unsuccessful, he can rally the troops for a counter-attack.

SICARDOT Would you be prepared to lead such a company, Captain Rougon?

PIERRE If need be.

SICARDOT Then it is decided: I myself shall gather volunteers to defend the Mayoralty against the hordes. You, Granoux, Vuillet and the Marquis, you ... stay in your homes.

ALL Well, if you insist / I suppose if that’s best / Good tactical thinking.

DIDI (VO) As the next day dawned, Captain Pierre Rougon stood bravely at his post, peeking through the shutters.

FÉLICITÉ enters.

FÉLICITÉ Your brother’s here to see you.

PIERRE What? No! Don’t let him in.

ANTOINE (entering) Too late, you rascal!

PIERRE What do you want, Antoine?

ANTOINE Just came to give you some friendly advice. Brother to brother.

PIERRE I don’t need your advice, Macquart.

ANTOINE When the rebels arrive, give yourselves up without fuss and we won’t harm you.

PIERRE ‘We’? What have you got to do with it?

ANTOINE I’m the man on the spot ain’t I? The old rabble-rouser. Oh yes, I think I will be very useful to our friends.

PIERRE Now look here, lad –

ANTOINE Oh no no no. There’s won’t be any more of that talk. No no. No more talking down to the working man.

PIERRE When did you last do a stroke of work, you little -

ANTOINE I’m just saying, dear brother of mine, is we can avoid all unnecessary bloodshed if you’ll just give yourself up.

PIERRE Get out of this house. You’re a monster.

ANTOINE Oh don’t you worry. I know when I’m not wanted. Hold on -

PIERRE What?

ANTOINE Listen. I think that’s them. Yes, I think my comrades are here.

We can indeed here drums and singing and a mass of people entering the town.

Well, better be off. Join my brethren. Good day, brother. Good day, dear lady.

He leaves.

FÉLICITÉ Dirty little man.

PIERRE He’s right. They’re here.

He opens the window a crack. Noise slightly up.

FÉLICITÉ How many are there?

PIERRE Good grief. There must be 500 of them.

FÉLICITÉ Can I see?

PIERRE No no. Keep back. In fact, go and lock the door. Barricade it if you can. Let’s see what these creatures do.

We swoop into the square. Drums, marching, singing.

BURGAT Stop!

The march comes to a slow halt. SICARDOT is on the balcony of the Town Hall, armed with a musket.

SICARDOT (distant) I am Commander Georges Sicardot, veteran of the great wars of Emperor Napoleon.

Some laughter and jeers.

I command you to leave this town immediately.

More laughter and jeers.

I am armed and I am prepared to defend this town.

BURGAT We have no quarrel with the town of Plassans, Commander Sicardot.

SICARDOT (distant) Then leave, sir, and take your rabble with you.

Jeers.

BURGAT These men are tired and they are hungry. We will not disturb your town for more than one night. We ask only for some food and that we might sleep here. We will leave at daybreak and I assure you no one will be harmed.

SICARDOT (distant) I’m giving a count of three to begin your retreat.

BURGAT We come in peace, Commander.

SICARDOT (distant) One. Two. Three.

A shot is fired. Pause.

BURGAT What happened there?

SICARDOT (distant) I fired upwards.

BURGAT Why?

SICARDOT (distant) It was a warning shot.

BURGAT Are you sure you didn’t miss?

SICARDOT (distant) Of course I didn’t miss. I fired in the air. It’s what you do.

BURGAT Next time you’ll shoot at us?

SICARDOT (distant) Yes I will.

BURGAT Will you give us a count for that as well?

SICARDOT (distant) Yes. Probably. I haven’t decided yet.

BURGAT Well go on then.

SICARDOT (distant) As you wish. Just give me a chance to reload my musket.

BURGAT (To the rebels around him) Oh, just go and get the silly old sod.

The rebels surge forward.

DIDI (VO) The Rebels streamed into the Town Hall. The few soldiers on guard were easily disarmed. The town’s leaders, The Mayor, the Receiver of Taxes, and the Postmaster were taken prisoner before Sicardot had finished reloading.

BURGAT You. Lad. Silvère wasn’t it?

SILVÈRE Yes, sir.

BURGAT Take this gun. Keep an eye on the soldiers.

SILVÈRE Me?

BURGAT Don’t worry, son. Just for an hour. I’ll send someone over to relieve you.

SILVÈRE Yes, sir.

SILVÈRE takes the rifle. It’s much too big for him.

BURGAT (to others) You, go see if the butcher’s around. You find some bread. We’ll need to find places to sleep too.

DIDI (VO) (this overlaps with previous speech) In the Town Hall, Silvere stood, guarding the six soldiers in a mixture of excitement and terror, counting down the hour.

RENGADE Oi, you, kid, what’s your name?

SILVÈRE ignores him.

Oi, I’m talking to you.

SILVÈRE ignores him.

Does yer mum know you’re out this late?

The SOLDIERS laugh.

SILVÈRE My mum’s dead.

RENGADE (to another soldier) Can you believe this? A little kid.

SILVÈRE I’m 18. I’m not a kid.

RENGADE You know, you are going to get into a lot of trouble, sunshine. I mean it. A lot of trouble.

SILVÈRE I’m fighting for justice.

The SOLDIERS laugh.

RENGADE Course you are, boy. Don’t you think the time for play acting is over?

SILVÈRE I’m not play-acting.

RENGADE gets to his feet.

RENGADE Why don’t you give me that gun, eh?

He approaches, slowly, carefully.

SILVÈRE Sit down.

RENGADE You going to make me?

SILVÈRE Keep back or I will shoot.

RENGADE (still moving) You ever shot a gun, boy?

Moving closer.

Didn’t think so. Why don’t you hand it over?

He’s very close now.

DIDI (VO) The Soldier reached out his hands and grabbed the gun. Silvère held onto it firmly.

We hear sounds of a struggle.

The two men, young and old, struggled for possession but:

We hear the crack of bone and RENGADE’s cry of pain. He falls to the floor in agony. The other soldiers go to him and SILVÈRE snatches up the gun.

SILVÈRE Stay back!

SOLDIER He’s hurt. What did you do?

SILVÈRE I did nothing! It was an accident.

SOLDIER He’s bleeding.

SILVÈRE He went for the gun. You saw him.

RENGADE I can’t see. I can’t see.

SOLDIER You’ve blinded him.

SILVÈRE I didn’t do anything.

RENGADE I’ll get you, you little shit.

BURGAT enters.

BURGAT What’s going on here?

SILVÈRE He tried to get the gun off me and he got hurt.

BURGAT Let that be a lesson to you, sir. I left young Mister Silvère in charge and that means you sit there and behave. (To SILVÈRE) Go and get the Doctor; we should get his eye checked out.

SILVÈRE Yes, sir. (He goes)

ANTOINE (entering) Silvère. Ah, Mr Burgat.

BURGAT What do you want?

ANTOINE Now that you’ve conquered Plassans, I humbly offer my services as Mayor.

BURGAT We haven’t conquered Plassans. We’re leaving in the morning.

ANTOINE No, what? No. No you can’t do that. This is a hotbed. A hotbed of counter-revolutionary-Imperialist running dogs. No no, you don’t want to leave this lot unsupervised.

BURGAT They seem harmless to me. We have that idiot Sicardot locked up.

ANTOINE No, I assure you, this place is dangerous. You need someone to keep an eye on the locals.

BURGAT Well, really I don’t know.

ANTOINE Just give me twenty of your men and I’ll take charge after you lot have gone.

BURGAT (thinks and:) You can have ten. But no trouble, understood?

ANTOINE Understood, comrade.

BURGAT Good.

ANTOINE Long live the Republic!

BURGAT Yep thank you.

DIDI (VO) The following morning, as promised, the rebels left at daybreak, leaving a handful of their men and Antoine Macquart occupying the big chair in the big office in the Town Hall.

ANTOINE I could get used to this.

DIDI Antoine put his boots up on the big desk and gazed at his reflection in the big mirror.

ANTOINE Oi! You! Thingy!

CLERK (appearing) Yes, sir.

ANTOINE Got any vino in these cellars?

CLERK Vino, sir?

ANTOINE Got a wine cellar down there by any chance? Nice little drop of brandy down there, have you?

CLERK Do I understand that sir would like some refreshment?

ANTOINE Yeah, that’s right. And make it snappy! I’m in charge now!

DIDI (VO) Around the corner on the Rue de la Banne, Pierre had woken at dawn and watched the rebels depart.

There is a knocking at the door. PIERRE approaches nervously.

PIERRE (whispers) Who’s there?

ROUDIER (outside) It’s us, Roudier and Granoux.

PIERRE Ah, come in, come in.

A lot of bolts being undone. The door opens.

ROUDIER You see them go?

PIERRE Yes.

GRANOUX Vagabonds. Thieves. Scoundrels.

ROUDIER And you know who they’ve left in charge? Your brother.

PIERRE The little worm. I might have known he’d take advantage.

ROUDIER So, what do we do?

PIERRE We round up a few of our most loyal friends. We get guns from Sicardot’s store. And we make a reccy of the Town Hall.

ROUDIER Good idea.

PIERRE Good idea, Captain.

ROUDIER Yes, Captain.

PIERRE Come on.

DIDI (VO) Armed with muskets and jumping at their own shadows, twelve stout champions of Empire made their cautious way through the deserted streets of Plassans.

PIERRE Right now, men. This is the Town Hall and it’s most likely that the Rebel forces will have made this their base.

GRANOUX Fanatics. Vandals. Delinquents –

PIERRE Yes, thank you, Sergeant.

GRANOUX Yes Captain.

PIERRE Corporal!

ROUDIER Sir!

PIERRE You go in the front door, take a look inside, see if there’s anyone guarding it.

ROUDIER Why me?

PIERRE Don’t be insubordinate, Corporal.

ROUDIER (sighs heavily) Oh well if I must.

PIERRE We’ll wait here. If you come under attack, give us a shout and we’ll come and rescue you.

ROUDIER goes off muttering.

ROUDIER Rescue me, that’s a laugh. I’ll be dead before you’ve picked your gun up.

PIERRE Quiet everybody. This is a crucial time.

Long silence.

TOWNSFOLK Will this take long, Captain?

PIERRE Quiet in the ranks.

TOWNSFOLK Only it’s quite cold, you see.

General agreement.

TOWNSFOLK 2 I have some mittens you can borrow.

TOWNSFOLK Ooh lovely.

TOWNSFOLK 2 Pass them along...

PIERRE Look, he’s coming back.

ROUDIER approaches.

ROUDIER (whispering) So, there’s one guard on duty.

PIERRE Is he armed?

ROUDIER Well I suppose it rather depends what you mean.

PIERRE Well, is he or isn’t he?

ROUDIER Because he’s got a gun...

Consternation.

...but he’s also asleep.

Relief.

PIERRE Ah.

ROUDIER So you see, sir, it’s actually quite a hard question to answer.

PIERRE Sergeant Granoux, bring Clément and Picou.

GRANOUX Sir!

PIERRE Come with me. Corporal, you too.

DIDI (VO) Pierre bravely crept into the Town Hall where the guard sat sleeping in a chair, his gun beside him. As the others trained their muskets on the guard, Pierre gingerly picked up the gun.

PIERRE Ho!

GUARD Ha!

GRANOUX Hey!

PIERRE You are under arrest!

GUARD Fair enough.

ROUDIER Oh very well done, sir!

DIDI (VO) Flushed with the success of his first great military campaign, Pierre summoned the rest of his men and they slowly made their way upstairs, towards the Mayor’s office, where Antoine sat composing a proclamation.

ANTOINE ‘Citizens of Plassans, the hour of freedom has struck.’ No wait. ‘Citizens of Plassans, the long-awaited hour of freedom has arrived.’ You getting this?

CLERK (long-suffering) Yes, sir.

ANTOINE ‘The reign of justice has begun’. Oh, I like that ‘the reign of justice’ -

Noise outside.

Who’s that?

Silence.

CLERK Probably the wind, sir.

ANTOINE ‘The reign of justice has begun. Rejoice ye, for liberty is at hand’ - can I say ‘ye’ or does it sound a bit stupid?

Noise outside.

Is somebody there?

Silence.

Come on, who’s out there?

Pause. Then PIERRE and all the others storm the room, yelling. There’s a lot of shouting and a few things smashed. And then a gun goes off and we hear a mirror shattering as the bullet hits it; everything quickly goes silent.

PIERRE (livid) Who did that? Come on, who did that?

PICOU Sorry, I think that was me.

ROUDIER That was really loud.

ANTOINE That mirror what you have just broke is 150 years old.

ROUDIER Was.

PIERRE Antoine Macquart, I am placing you under arrest.

ANTOINE You and whose army?

PIERRE This is the Imperial Plassans Army of His Excellency, Louis-Napoleon, the ruler of France.

ANTOINE What, this lot?

PIERRE Don’t be impertinent.

ANTOINE Is this a joke?

PIERRE No it isn’t.

ANTOINE You wait till my comrades hear about this. They’ll be back in a flash and then the boot’ll be on the other foot.

PIERRE I control this town now, Macquart.

ANTOINE First in line for the guillotine, that’s what you are, Napoleon.

PIERRE No one’s going to be guillotined.

ANTOINE I’m making a list. Get all your names on it. When the rebels come back, they’ll round you up, oh yes.

PIERRE Ignore him.

ANTOINE Even you, you with the gun. Mirror-smasher. What’s your name?

PIERRE Don’t tell him, Picou.

ANTOINE (writing) ‘Mr Picou’.

PIERRE I’ve had enough of this nonsense. Granoux, take him and lock him up?

GRANOUX Where?

PIERRE You, what’s next door?

CLERK The Mayor’s dressing room, sir.

PIERRE Right, lock him in there.

ANTOINE You won’t win, you know! My friends are coming back!

(sings as he’s taken away) Rise up you children of our country!

The day of glory has arrived /

We will fight and defeat all the tyrants!

And we’ll raise up our flag, red as blood!

Yes we’ll raise up our flag, red as blood!

Do you hear in the lanes and the forests

The song of our soldiers so brave

They will come to save us all

And cut the throats of all their enemies

To arms, citizens!

Form battalions!

We march, we march

Let traitors’ blood

Water all our fields!

ANTOINE can still be heard singing behind the locked door.

PIERRE Corporal, would you go fetch my wife? You might want to let the town know that it has been liberated.

ROUDIER How do we do that?

CLERK A proclamation, sir?

PIERRE Very good, a proclamation.

CLERK What about this: (picking a paper from the table) ‘People of Plassans, the long-awaited hour of freedom has arrived. The reign of justice has begun. Rejoice ye, for liberty is at hand.’

PIERRE Excellent. Have that posted up across town.

CLERK Certainly, sir.

DIDI (VO) By lunchtime, the Town Hall was filled with people wanting to hear about Pierre’s brave deeds.

PIERRE Quiet as mice, I order my men to follow me as we prepared our final assault on the enemy’s citadel.

Crowd holds their breath.

We could hear the traitor inside, preparing no doubt plots and stratagems. I gave the signal and we stormed his fortress.

Crowd oohs.

I got the leader by the throat –

Crowd aahs.

And I said to him ‘You’re finished! Your evil reign over the good people of Plassans is finished!’

Crowd applauds.

TOWNSFOLK (excited) Did you kill anyone?

Crowd echo this: ‘yes!’

PIERRE Kill? No, there was no need for that –

Crowd disappointment. Everything goes a bit flat.

ROUDIER Tell them about the bullet.

Crowd perk up again.

PIERRE Oh yes! The bullet.

Crowd very excited.

As I grappled with the Republican devil, a shot rang out.

We hear the shot, but it is distorted because now we are in slow motion.

The bullet flew through the air.

We hear the bullet streaking through the air

I turned my head just in time as it passed within a hair’s breadth of my right ear.

We hear the whoomph of PIERRE’s head turning, the zing as it grazes his ear...

The bullet continued on its lethal path, my men scattering to avoid it.

Slo-mo sounds of soldiers scattering to avoid the bullet.

Until the accursed projectile found its object: this ancient, beloved mirror, a gift, I am told, from Louis Quatorze himself.

Slowly the mirror shatters and the great pieces of royal glass shimmer to the ground.

I wrestled the gun from the traitor’s hand and the Empire was saved.

Crowd applaud.

FÉLICITÉ How many rebels did you have to fight?

PIERRE Um, how many was it?

ROUDIER I saw 50.

GRANOUX I saw 100 at least.

PIERRE All in all, we must have put 300 rebels to flight.

TOWNSWOMAN What if the rebels return?

General consternation.

PIERRE I think that’s very unlikely.

More consternation.

In any case, I am expecting reinforcements.

TOWNSMAN When?

PIERRE Soon.

TOWNSWOMAN How soon?

PIERRE Soon-ish.

More consternation.

Friends, friends! Do not be alarmed. I give you my word: His Imperial Majesty’s army is on the march!

DIDI (VO) Fifteen miles outside Plassans, the rebel army was actually on the march.

BURGAT Alright, this place looks as good as any. We’ll stop here for twenty minutes, take a rest.

DIDI (VO) They had been walking without a break since dawn. Even Miette’s flag was drooping.

SILVÈRE Let me help you with that.

MIETTE It’s alright. I can look after it.

SILVÈRE I know you can.

MIETTE Are you alright?

SILVÈRE Yes, why?

MIETTE You’ve barely said anything all morning.

SILVÈRE There was a soldier back in Plassans. It was an accident, but I hurt him pretty badly.

MIETTE What sort of an accident?

SILVÈRE He tried to get my gun.

MIETTE Well then.

SILVÈRE I know.

MIETTE I have some cheese and bread. Will you share it with me?

SILVÈRE Thank you, yes.

MIETTE Let’s go over here.

They walk away from the other soldiers, off the road.

We can sit here. Give us a bit of privacy.

SILVÈRE Miette?

MIETTE Yes?

SILVÈRE Are you scared?

MIETTE Why, are you?

SILVÈRE I asked you.

MIETTE No I’m not scared.

SILVÈRE I am. I’m very scared.

MIETTE So am I.

SILVÈRE You never seem scared.

MIETTE When my aunt first took me in, the local boys found out about my dad shooting the policeman. They used to call me ‘the murder girl’ and say they were going to kill me.

SILVÈRE They didn’t mean it.

MIETTE I didn’t know that.

SILVÈRE Kids.

MIETTE Anyway, I learned not to look scared.

SILVÈRE What scares you now?

MIETTE Losing the battle. Losing my courage.

SILVÈRE Same here.

MIETTE Losing you too.

SILVÈRE Same for me.

MIETTE I don’t like it, Silvère. I’m a strong person.

SILVÈRE I know you are. You’re the strongest person I’ve ever known.

MIETTE I don’t care if I die. But I care if you die and that makes me hesitate.

SILVÈRE What if I promise not to die?

MIETTE I’m serious.

SILVÈRE I’m serious! I’m really going to try not to die!

MIETTE You make me weak, Silvère.

SILVÈRE I don’t want to make you weak.

MIETTE Maybe you should go back.

SILVÈRE Miette, you don’t mean that.

MIETTE I don’t know what I mean.

SILVÈRE I want to be here with you.

MIETTE I want to be here with you but you make me weak.

SILVÈRE Why?

MIETTE You know.

SILVÈRE What do I know?

MIETTE Don’t make me say it.

SILVÈRE (genuinely baffled) Make you say what?

MIETTE I’ve bloody gone and bloody fallen in bloody love with you.

Silence.

Well, say something, you big silly.

SILVÈRE I don’t know what to say.

MIETTE That’s encouraging.

SILVÈRE No, I just – I don’t – I’ve never –

MIETTE Right. I’m giving you five seconds to finish a sentence or I’m going to kiss you.

SILVÈRE You can’t kiss me, I’m trying to do a revolution!

MIETTE That’s it.

She grabs him and kisses him.

I warned you!

But her joke dies in her throat.

SILVÈRE (weakly) I’d quite like to do that again please.

Beat.

MIETTE Me too.

DIDI (VO) The lips contain a high density of nerve endings which, when stimulated, produce feelings of addiction, want, need, and pleasure, a cluster of experiences which, for convenience, we also call love. The more they kiss, the more they flood the brain, and the more you fall in love. See the blood rising to the cheek, see the eyes shining. Silvère and Miette have fallen in love.

SILVÈRE Miette.

MIETTE Silvère.

SILVÈRE I want this never to end.

MIETTE Does it have to?

SILVÈRE No.

MIETTE Should we get married, do you think?

SILVÈRE (gravely) First, the revolution. Then we get married.

MIETTE It’s a deal.

BURGAT (approaching) Alright everyone, back on your feet. We need to get moving.

SILVÈRE What is this place anyway?

MIETTE Ewww! It’s a cemetery!

SILVÈRE What?

MIETTE Look! You’re sitting on a grave!

SILVÈRE Ewww!

MIETTE Yuk yuk yuk.

SILVÈRE Don’t forget the flag.

MIETTE I won’t forget it - husband.

Dance music.

DIDI (VO) That evening, in Orchères, the rebels danced and sang and ate and drank, knowing that the morning would bring the final battle. Miette and Silvère danced together for the first and last time.

Music disappears suddenly.

In Plassans, Pierre was nervous.

PIERRE Of course I’m not nervous. Why should I be nervous?

FÉLICITÉ You just seem a little nervous, darling. That’s all.

PIERRE I’m perfectly content, thank you.

FÉLICITÉ It’s just you look nervous.

PIERRE Not at all.

FÉLICITÉ The way you’re pacing up and down.

PIERRE It helps me to think, woman.

FÉLICITÉ Jumping at every sound.

PIERRE This is sheer nonsense, my dear.

FÉLICITÉ You need to inspire the people.

PIERRE Plassans is entirely behind me.

FÉLICITÉ Well let’s hope so.

PIERRE I’m sure they are.

FÉLICITÉ Incidentally, have you heard from Eugène at all?

PIERRE No, dammit.

DIDI (VO) If Eugène had not written, thought Félicité, perhaps the coup had failed. Perhaps their boy was in a Paris prison and, even now, Republican soldiers were coming to liberate Plassans and overthrow Pierre and if they did that Félicité would surely follow. So Félicité made a decision.

PIERRE Where are you going?

FÉLICITÉ Out.

PIERRE What do you mean ‘out’?

FÉLICITÉ Out.

Door shuts behind her.

DIDI (VO) Félicité had remembered that when the rebels had first taken over Plassans, they had arrested the Postmaster, so she went to the Post Office and spent the morning searching through the unsorted mail for news. She found a letter in Eugène’s elegant hand, opened it the letter carefully and absorbed its contents. With a grim expression she made her second decision and paid an old friend a visit.

ANTOINE Oh here she comes. On bended knee no doubt. (sings) To arms, Citizens! Form battalions!

FÉLICITÉ You can stop all that now, Macquart, I have a proposal for you.

ANTOINE I bet you do. More tricks.

FÉLICITÉ Not at all.

ANTOINE Go on then. What is it?

FÉLICITÉ I want to offer you your freedom.

ANTOINE My freedom? Yeah right.

FÉLICITÉ Your freedom and one thousand Francs if you will do one thing for me.

ANTOINE Alright, let’s hear it.

FÉLICITÉ I want you gather a rebel army and take back Plassans.

ANTOINE You what?

FÉLICITÉ I think I’ve been quite clear.

ANTOINE You want me to overthrow your own husband?

FÉLICITÉ I do.

ANTOINE You fallen out, have you?

FÉLICITÉ That is no business of yours.

ANTOINE Sounds very dodgy to me.

FÉLICITÉ I can offer you half the money up front.

ANTOINE 500?

FÉLICITÉ Yes.

ANTOINE Now?

FÉLICITÉ Yes.

ANTOINE And I can walk free?

FÉLICITÉ We’ll have to make it look like you escaped, of course.

ANTOINE 600 and you’re on.

FÉLICITÉ You drive a hard bargain, Antoine Macquart.

ANTOINE No one pulls the wool over my eyes.

DIDI (VO) A window smashed. A ladder misplaced. Within an hour, Antoine had left Plassans, heading for Orchères.

FÉLICITÉ Darling.

PIERRE Yes my love?

FÉLICITÉ Do you think the rebels will come back?

PIERRE (jumpy) Why, what have you heard?

FÉLICITÉ Oh nothing to worry about. But the people are liable to be concerned.

PIERRE What are they saying?

FÉLICITÉ They are fearful, husband. Concerned that the rebels may come back before reinforcements arrive.

PIERRE Provincials!

FÉLICITÉ I hear talk of inviting your brother, Antoine, to be Mayor again.

PIERRE Never!

FÉLICITÉ One person even raised doubts about the story of the bullet.

PIERRE How dare they! The insolence!

FÉLICITÉ Indeed, what ingratitude!

PIERRE But what can I do?

FÉLICITÉ Listen to what I have to tell you and do exactly what I say.

We’re in the square. PIERRE is speaking from the balcony.

PIERRE People of Plassans, I know you are concerned, but you have no need. I, Pierre Rougon, guarantee your safety. Imperial reinforcements are, even now, surely making their way to us. If the rebels do return, I am confident we can resist them.

Concern.

And now we are up in the balcony.

Do not – do not be alarmed. I – um –

FÉLICITÉ (whispering in his ear) As your Mayor

PIERRE As your Mayor!

FÉLICITÉ (whispering) I pledge to defend the town myself

PIERRE I pledge to defend the town myself!

FÉLICITÉ Even at the risk of my own life.

PIERRE Even at the – what?

FÉLICITÉ The risk of my / own life.

PIERRE Even at the risk of my own life.

Spattering of applause.

FÉLICITÉ Know this, Plassans.

PIERRE Know this, Plassans.

FÉLICITÉ Pierre Rougon is ready.

PIERRE Pierre Rougon is ready.

Slightly more applause.

DIDI (VO) At Orchères, the rebels kept a look out for imperial troops.

REBEL Sir, sorry to disturb you -

BURGAT What is it?

REBEL You have a visitor.

BURGAT Who is it?

ANTOINE (appearing) Antoine Macquart at your service, Comrade.

BURGAT I thought you were guarding Plassans.

ANTOINE Ah well yes, that’s what I’m here to talk about. I told you that was a dangerous place.

BURGAT What happened?

ANTOINE Treachery, that’s what happened. I was overpowered by superior numbers.

BURGAT But you escaped.

ANTOINE Ah well, you see, that’s where it becomes interesting.

BURGAT Go on.

ANTOINE The Mayor, that’s my half-brother - lackey of the Emperor, lickspittle of the reactionary forces - well his wife wants to come over to our side.

BURGAT Does she indeed?

ANTOINE She does. And she’s asked me to get your men to come, take back the town, and overthrow her husband.

BURGAT Can you trust her?

ANTOINE I can. I have a good nose for these things.

BURGAT Plassans though? It’s hardly worth it.

ANTOINE On the contrary, Comrade. If you let the Empire keep Plassans, what sort of signal does it send out? No, you need to crush ’em, show them you mean business.

BURGAT (thinking) It has some strategic value.

ANTOINE Not half.

BURGAT And the imperial troops don’t seem to be here yet.

ANTOINE There you see?

BURGAT I suppose we could take back the town, keep a larger force there, block off the Nice road that way.

ANTOINE Only thing I ask.

BURGAT What’s that?

ANTOINE I want to be the one who puts Pierre Rougon under arrest.

BURGAT We’ll see.

DIDI (VO) The rebel forces gathered their equipment and began the march to take back the little town of Plassans.

MIETTE You look tired, Silvère.

SILVÈRE I’m alright. How about you? Do you want me to take the flag for a bit?

MIETTE No! I carry the flag! It’s bad luck to give up the flag.

SILVÈRE I don’t believe in luck.

MIETTE You believe in liberty.

SILVÈRE I was going to say science actually.

MIETTE Same thing, you silly.

SILVÈRE Considering how rude you are, I think you’re very lucky that I love you.

MIETTE I can’t help it. I’m irresistible.

SILVÈRE What will you do when we retake the town?

MIETTE Get some sleep.

SILVÈRE Me too.

MIETTE In my old bed maybe.

SILVÈRE But first, I need to go see my grandma.

MIETTE Oh yes. Didi. I’d forgotten about her.

DIDI (VO) Does anyone remember poor Adelaide? When she found her dear Silvère gone and his bed not slept in, her heart hammering in her chest, she went out into her garden, she went through the old door, she looked out across the old field where the bones of old Plassans once lay. Something dark stirred in her, a feeling of dread, a feeling that something would soon be broken that could never be fixed.

In the Yellow Drawing Room, with the doors and windows closed, Félicité sat and awaited the confrontation.

In the Town Hall, Pierre Rougon paced anxiously and awaited news of the reinforcements.

A clocktower bell strikes nine. We are down in the town square.

DIDI (VO) It was nine o’clock that evening the rebels passed - for a second time - through the gates of Plassans. They marched with determination and purpose to the town square where they assembled, armed with pitchforks and conviction, Miette’s flag still held proudly aloft.

ANTOINE (shouting up at the windows) Pierre Rougon!

Silence.

Pierre Rougon! Show yourself, you usurper! You rogue!

DIDI (VO) The rest of the town watched and listened, trembling behind their shutters.

ANTOINE Come out, you coward! You thief! The Republic is at your door!

Laughter.

Show your ugly face, you old fool!

There’s a sound of the balcony door opening. PIERRE emerges.

PIERRE (distant) What do you want, Macquart?

ANTOINE Give yourself up or we’re coming in.

PIERRE I have no intention of surrendering to you, Macquart.

ANTOINE Oh no? That’ll be the worse for you, Pierre Rougon.

BURGAT Is that your brother?

ANTOINE Yeah.

BURGAT How many others are in there?

ANTOINE No more than five I reckon. His little crowd.

PIERRE This is a message to all of you. Leave this square. Leave Plassans. Return to your homes and none of you will be hurt.

ANTOINE Hear that, lads?

PIERRE If you stay here, I will be forced to take action.

ANTOINE I’m quaking in me boots, Rougon.

PIERRE Very well. Gentlemen.

The balcony doors open and boots are heard.

DIDI (VO) Onto the balcony stepped a tall man in the uniform of the French army.

ANTOINE Who’s that then?

MASSON I am Colonel Masson of the French Army. Put down your weapons and surrender.

PIERRE Surrender, Macquart, or we fire.

ANTOINE (to BURGAT) Surrender he says! Who’s going to make me?

MASSON Put down your weapons immediately. This is your final warning.

ANTOINE Is your wife up there?

PIERRE You leave my wife out of this, Macquart. I’m warning you.

ANTOINE (laughs) I’m quaking in my boots, Rougon.

BURGAT I don’t like this. What’s an army officer doing here?

ANTOINE (To BURGAT) Oh he’s just some old fool in fancy dress. What do you say? Shall we storm the building?

DIDI (VO) From the street that led the square to the south stepped a uniformed soldier. Then another. Two more came out of the road to the east. Another appeared on the West side of the square. And still they came. Fifteen, twenty soldiers stood in the moonlit square. Each held a rifle.

Slight consternation but stillness.

MASSON You had your warning. Men. Fire at will.

A volley of shots.

DIDI (VO) The first shot blew off the wheelwright’s jaw. The second shot lodged in a cart-maker’s stomach. Both men stood for a moment uncomprehending. The third bullet struck a pig-farmer in the throat. A fourth embedded in a baker’s shoulder, knocking him to the floor, where he bled. A fifth bullet smacked wetly into a chandler’s groin. Through the smoke, in disbelief, Antoine saw his brother aim his carbine directly at his head.

ANTOINE (to himself, panicked) Don’t shoot. Don’t shoot. Don’t shoot.

DIDI (VO) Pierre lowered the weapon and stared down at his brother. Antoine turned and, sweat running cold beneath his shirt, ran from the square.

More confusion, More firing.

SILVÈRE What do we do? What do we do?

MIETTE I don’t know! I don’t know!

BURGAT (shouting) You two, get behind the fountain?

SILVÈRE What?

BURGAT I said, you two. You can hide. Get behin –

A shot rings out.

SILVÈRE Burgat!

MIETTE (sobbing)

SILVÈRE They shot him. They just shot him.

The shooting dies down. MASSON is distant. We are with SILVÈRE and MIETTE.

MASSON I am Colonel Masson of the French Army. You are surrounded. Put down your weapons and surrender.

Pause. There is a sound of cudgels, axes, pitchforks and a couple of rifles being thrown onto the ground.

You with the flag.

We hear SILVÈRE give a sharp intake of breath, MIETTE whimpering in fear.

You with the flag. Step forward.

MIETTE What do I do? What do I do?

SILVÈRE Stay here. Don’t move.

MASSON Step forward or we open fire.

MIETTE I got to do it.

SILVÈRE Don’t be stupid.

MIETTE I got to.

SILVÈRE Miette!

But it is too late.

MASSON Girl. Lower the flag.

Silence.

Lower the flag or my men will shoot.

MIETTE No!

SILVÈRE What are you doing, Miette?

MIETTE I’m not putting this down.

MASSON Lower the flag or we open fire.

MIETTE They wouldn’t dare.

SILVÈRE Don’t be stupid, Miette. You saw what they did to the others.

MASSON Lower the flag and place it on the ground.

MIETTE I refuse.

MASSON (shouting) I am giving you a count of five to lower the flag.

MIETTE (distant) I will not.

SILVÈRE Please, Miette.

MASSON Five.

MIETTE Sometimes you have to stand your ground.

MASSON Four.

MIETTE Sometimes you have to stand up for what is right.

MASSON Three.

MIETTE Sometimes you have to hold the flag.

MASSON Two.

One.

Two rifle shots. Then a third.

SILVÈRE Miette!

He runs over. Now we’re very close. We can hear sounds coming from Miette. Non-verbal, weak, breathy.

Miette, stay with me. Miette, it’s me, it’s Silvere.

MIETTE (weakly) Sil –

SILVÈRE (calling) Get a doctor! It’s going to be alright, Miette, going to be alright. Hold my hand. Squeeze it. That’s right.

DIDI (VO) Keep talking to her, lad. No matter what.

SILVÈRE Stay with me, Miette. Talk to me. Think about what we discussed, yes? The things we talked about? We’re going to be married, you and me. And we’re going to have children. Two or maybe three children. And a house on the Cours Sauvaire. We’ll both work, course we will. And we’ll share out everything. Work hard. Live as equals. You and me. Miette?

Pause.

Miette?

DIDI (VO) Her heart, her warm heart, her brave fiery heart, had stopped. Her blood was still. Miette’s heart was growing cold.

SILVÈRE (screams) Miette!

A soldier drags him to his feet.

RENGADE You are now a prisoner of the French army. Get on your feet.

SILVÈRE (sobbing uncontrollably)

RENGADE Well, look who it is. The snotty little kid who tried to break my face.

SILVÈRE I didn’t – I didn’t –

RENGADE hits him hard in the stomach with the butt of his rifle. SILVÈRE is still crying.

RENGADE Don’t cry, kid. There’s always more tarts out there.

DIDI (VO) The soldier took Silvère and bound his hands, dragging him off to join the other prisoners. As Silvère looked back he saw Miette, on the ground, wrapped in the red flag, her big eyes staring sightlessly at the sky.

Up on the balcony.

FÉLICITÉ I think that went rather well.

PIERRE Thanks to you, my darling.

FÉLICITÉ Yes I suppose it was, wasn’t it?

PIERRE Though I was rather good too.

FÉLICITÉ Oh yes. And don’t forget to write to Eugene and thank him.

PIERRE Yes alright.

FÉLICITÉ Without his reinforcements...

PIERRE Yes indeed. Colonel, you came not a moment too soon.

MASSON We arrived. That’s what matters.

PIERRE What will you do with the prisoners?

MASSON They will be executed.

PIERRE Oh. Is that absolutely necessary?

MASSON It is.

PIERRE Understood, Colonel. (salutes) To His Imperial Majesty.

MASSON His Imperial Majesty.

DIDI (VO) And Colonel Masson and his soldiers walked their prisoners from Plassans past the city walls until they found themselves on a bare patch of ground, which once bore a market garden and before that a graveyard.

A cold night. Breath on the air. A garden. Shots are fired.

SILVÈRE (panicky) No, please.

MASSON Stand by the wall, boy.

SILVÈRE Please, you can’t!

MASSON Be quiet.

SILVÈRE There, please.

MASSON What is it?

SILVÈRE Let me stand by the door in the wall.

MASSON Why?

SILVÈRE Please.

MASSON Alright, kid.

DIDI (VO) And Silvère took up his place by the door, on the patch of grass on which, over countless nights, in another time, in another world even, he had stood, talking to a strange, beautiful girl about justice.

MASSON Squad get ready.

SILVÈRE Didi. Didi. Didi.

MASSON Take aim.

We hear DIDI’s voice calling ‘My boy?’ from the other side of the wall.

SILVÈRE Didi! Help me!

MASSON Fire.

SILVÈRE Didi!

The word stops dead as the bullets slam into him. Silence.

MASSON Is he dead?

SOLDIER Yeah.

MASSON You, prisoner. What’s on the other side of this door?

PRISONER Used to be an old woman. Can’t remember her name? Weird. Like a witch or something. She can’t still be alive.

DIDI (VO) Does anyone remember poor Adelaide?

Some say she died.

Some say she moved away.

But I did not die.

And I did not move away.

I, Adelaide Fouque,

A century old and full of hatred.

Blood in my mind and ice in my heart.

What did I bring into this world?

Wolves. Nothing but wolves.

I have raised a family of wolves.

What did I do?

All that blood.

The blood of the Rougon.

The blood of the Macquart.

It’s my blood.

My blood that seeps slowly through France.

My bad and broken blood.

That night, in my garden, I heard my Silvère call to me and the bullets slam into the old door.

I was found the next morning. I had clawed my face raw with grief. My son, my own son, placed me here. Les Tulettes. The madhouse.

I am told this is the very room in which my father died.

But I am not dead.

I have watched their years. I will tell their story. Crime by crime. Blood by blood.

They are wolves.

Wolves!

Her voice echoes. For the first time, we hear it in a real place. A voice echoing down a long white-tiled corridor.

The Yellow Drawing Room.

PIERRE Gentlemen, I think we should congratulate ourselves on a most satisfactory outcome.

Hear hears. Glasses chinked.

France is saved from socialism. We have at our country’s helm a man of destiny.

Hear hears.

Gentlemen, I propose a toast. To Emperor Napoleon III.

ALL Napoleon III.

PIERRE And now I suggest, we eat.

Gratitude and hunger. They all sit. Plates, knives, glasses. They start to eat.

DIDI (VO) (down a corridor) Wolves!

Fade into the sound of eating the slobbering of animals at the trough.

Paris. The Bells of Notre Dame. A grand room.

EUGÈNE May I suggest we raise a glass to Your Imperial Majesty’s health and the Second Empire.

DIDI (VO) (echoing) They’re all wolves!

We hear the howling of wolves over the rooftops of Paris.

DIDI (VO) (echoing down the corridors of Les Tulettes) I curse you. I curse you Rougons. I curse you Macquart. I curse the whole line of you. I cu – I curse you all. I cur cc

A spangly heavenly shimmering sound.

I c cc cuccuccu

The shimmer drowns her.

Music.

End.