

THE BLACK BORDELLO

A Full-Length Play

There must come a time when we allow ourselves the kindness we afford strangers.

DRAMATIS PESONAE:

A MAN, an elderly alcoholic

ALICE, a girl in her mid-twenties

HUGO, a handsome man reminiscent of the nameless character's boyhood years

SCENIC DESIGN:

The Black Bordello is a rundown cafe with two floors. The wooden interiors show discoloration and peeling varnish after years of disuse.

The first floor displays a lit display case of various liquors behind a black marble countertop, complete with leather seated barstools. A small stage thrusts from the bar.

An old jukebox is to the corner. In center is the cafe dining area--- three circular table sets that seat two. To the left are the grand double doors which open into the performance space. To the right is a door which leads to the wash. A staircase is on the left which leads to the second floor.

The second floor is represented by a wooden banister with iron wrought filigree. Three doors can be seen behind the banister. The one furthest to the right is always open.

SYNOPSIS:

An aging ruffian takes shelter from the police in a broken-down pub. He is surprised to find the place is pristine condition. A beautiful woman who looks vaguely familiar asks for his drink order. Her name is ALICE. The drink has strong effect on the nameless man or perhaps the place has some supernatural control over him. Alice lets on that he knows the man and that he has some unfinished in business in the pub, the Black

Bordello. Alice puts the man under a trance and suddenly he cannot move, the jukebox on the corner keeps playing songs by itself, an unseen couple quarrel from the second floor --- this argument gives the man a migraine. The woman asks if the man is hungry but does not wait for an answer. She cues HUGO to enter holding a chafing dish. The chafing dish holds a stillborn fetus. The police are already at the door but is barred from entrance by an invisible force. Alice asks the man which he would like to confront, the police or his past. The man decides to stay.

A flashback. A pregnant Alice and Hugo, owners of the Black Bordello are facing a financial crisis. The man enters as Hugo's previous employer in a mysterious drug company. The man offers the couple an irresistible offer, to use the drug on Alice's baby. She cannot believe that Hugo agrees to the deal. The couple's argument from the first part of the play is redone but the players this time are Alice and Higo. It is revealed that Hugo and the man's parts have been switched in this macabre marionette show, the man is Hugo from the past. Therefore, the nightmare was for his benefit.

The last act of the play has the man deal with his personal demons in cocktail form. Alice and Hugo become his tormentors. Every drink allows him to come to full remembrance of his evil deeds. The man downs the last drink called Baby. In fact, the baby survived the chemical test and has become the house. The child is the Black Bordello. The house itself grows and becomes smaller, as if breathing. The police are once again banging on the doors. This time, the man stands ready to confront his present problems after dealing with the demons of his past.

ACT 1: The Carnival of the Macabre

(Through the darkness of the stage we see the light of the couple's room open on the second floor. We hear a sudden downpour of rain. Lights on the stage flicker on and off to reveal the Black Bordello until it settles on a sickening yellow.)

(Police sirens are heard passing by. The MAN enters through the grand doors which he closes behind him.)

MAN

Anyone in here? Do you hear me? Is anyone home? I've got a gun. Fair warning...
(Noticing that he is alone, sheathes his gun in its holster) Must've been grand in its heyday but it looks like a dump right now. I wonder why the electricity still works, a whole in the pocket if I ever saw one. *(Shrugs)* Beggars can't be choosy. I'm lucky enough to have a roof over my head while the heat cools off. *(Pulls the dust off a table with his finger)* Swanky place, such a grand shame.

There's a bar. Stock full. *(Walks behind the bar)* They've got the prime stuff too, bottles still sealed and corked. *(Picks up a bottle)* This one could settle a down payment for a nice house, can make the missus real nice and happy. But, let's admit it, creeps like me deserve crap, *(Raises a cheaper bottle and opens it)* even bandits go by castes, and I belong to the lowest of the low, lower than bottom feeders, *(Pours its contents down a*

dusty whisky glass) God's golden piss may you cleanse me for the Kingdom that'll come. *(Drinks all the contents in one gulp)* Blessed Mother Mary, save us all from the fires of hell! That hit the spot. Wipes the soul clean and cute like newborn's bottom. *(Pours himself another drink and downs it in one gulp)* That puts the fire under an old man's bones.

(Walks to the jukebox on the corner) I haven't seen one of these for a very long time. Wonder if it still works... *(Grabs a coin from his coat pocket and slides it in the slot)*

(Edith Piaf's "La Vie en Rose" plays.)

(Starts swaying to the song) One of my favorites.

(Sings to the song)

Des yeux qui font baisser les miens

Un rire qui se perd sur sa bouche

Voilà le portrait sans retouches

De l'homme auquel j'appartiens

Quand il me prend dans ses bras

Il me parle l'a tout bas

Je vois la vie en rose

(Puts his hands to his head and begins massaging it) God, I'm a bonny babe. The poison's gone straight to my head and that barely whet my whistle. I can't believe I'm saying this, but enough of music!

(He fiddles with the controls, but they no longer work. The song continues to play. He crawls behind the machine and unplugs it. The song stops. He stands, stretching his back.)

Must be a bad memory.

(Sirens are heard from the outside. The MAN points his snubnose at the doors.)

(ALICE enters carrying a clear umbrella over her head. She closes the umbrella and wriggles the excess water off. The MAN stares at ALICE, his gun still pointed at her.)

ALICE

(Walks up to the MAN, undisturbed by the gun) Welcome to the Black Bordello, good traveler. Make yourself at home, as you should.

MAN

(Drops his glass; stammers) Terribly sorry, missy. I have money, not much but I can pay. *(Wiggles inside his pockets for change)*

ALICE

Your money is no good here. This establishment doesn't take coins or paper, mister.

MAN

(Looks around him) Are you sure? This place is going to fall apart soon without some cash flow. I mean just look at the state of the furnishings. Nice, but too old for the modern drinker's tastes.

ALICE

Quite the designer, are we? This is the Black Bordello. We keep it as it should be. And we only serve to a very specific clientele, mister---

MAN

(Points his gun to ALICE) If this is some trap, I'm warning you, what you see before you is a beast driven to the wall, and even if I look old my claws are sharp enough.

ALICE

You are welcome here. Mi casa es su casa. Please put the gun down. It is unnecessary.

MAN

(Sheathes his gun) Forgive me, I don't quite understand. You see, I've been having these migraines, and I've been having trouble putting two and two together---

ALICE

You're a guest in the Black Bordello. *(Picks up the bottle the MAN opened)* Why are you drinking the cheap liquor? We have quite the selection, aged stuff from the old country. Have a seat like a good boy, and let me take care of you. Go on.

MAN

Sorry, Little Sparrow. *(Goes and sits one of the leather barstools in front of the counter)*
I wonder why I called you that.

ALICE

(Smiles) I like it. *(Clears her throat)* What'll it be then? A Manhattan? Long Island? Let me guess, a Bloody Marry?

MAN

No. Nothing fancy. Just let me have an Old Fashioned.

ALICE

(Smiles coyly) On the rocks. A man of good taste.

MAN

Someone once told me that liquor mixed with anything ain't liquor. Just pour the good stuff with some ice and that's good enough for me.

(ALICE transfers some ice from the cooler into a whisky glass and pours some whisky from the bottle the man first picked up.)

ALICE

I see. A simple man of simple tastes, no frills, you just want it straight. It will be a distinct pleasure serving you. *(Hands the MAN the drink)*

MAN

Are you sure you can spare the expense? Not to be rude, but saying that it's a slow night is downplaying it. There's no one here.

ALICE

Nonsense. Like I've said, we've been waiting for you. You're all the influx we need for the night.

MAN

Got nothing on me but the clothes on my back. This is mighty kind of you but charity won't pay the bills, Little Sparrow. This ain't my business but *(Drinks)* how long have you been open?

ALICE

Since the clock first began ticking, and men began drinking. Stop worrying about the register. This is the Black Bordello, a unique wayside for the lost to drink and mull about their troubles. We're open as long as you're thirsty. Tell you a trade secret, we sell service for stories.

MAN

Service for stories? Sounds too good to be true. I'll tell you a good one...

ALICE

Not stories like that. We want them raw and true. *(Gets the MAN's glass)* If you would need anything else, please don't hesitate to tell me.

MAN

(Leans closer) Well, only 'cause you mentioned it. You look mighty pretty, like an old flame of mine I left a long time ago. Must still be pining for the man who never came home.

ALICE

(Leans closer) Don't you say?

MAN

It's not the booze. You're a sight to behold, and you take care of me. If you're not careful, I might fall in love with you.

ALICE

(Coyly) Oh, don't tease my innocent heart.

MAN

Ha! These old bones can still kneel and offer you a ring the size of the moon, Little Sparrow. Oh, Little Sparrow, won't you build a nest in my heart. I'll keep you safe and never let you fly away.

ALICE

(Smiles) But, you don't even know my name.

MAN

(Empties his drink) Pray, tell me so I may know the name of the Goddess to whom I should address my prayers to.

ALICE

Aren't we the sweet talker? It's Alice. Nice to make your acquaintance.

MAN

Alice. May our acquaintance speed to the marriage bed.

ALICE

(Slaps the MAN playfully on the hand) You're getting me hot and bothered, mister. I think I need a drink as well. *(Pours herself a drink)*

MAN

Go ahead. It's a party. Party!

ALICE

It is, and as this is a bordello. The black one which wants you to be very happy. *(Downs the drink down)*

MAN

It "wants," you say? Does this old place have a mind of its own?

ALICE

Yes, and it wants you satiated, and so I am obliged to perform.

MAN

You don't have to, not on my account anyway---

ALICE

Hush. *(Snaps her fingers, and the jukebox starts playing)*

MAN

How? I thought I unplugged that.

(The MAN is dumbstruck as ALICE slowly takes off her clothes. First her blouse, and then her skirt. She is revealed in white lingerie and black leather boots.)

ALICE

Don't you like what you see, sir?

MAN

I was kiddin earlier but I didn't think you'd be so forward. *(Gulps down air)* I want you.

ALICE

(Walks to the stage) Then take me, and let me make you feel young again.

MAN

This isn't right. I'm a married man. *(Stands)*

ALICE

Sit, doggie.

(The MAN follows; it as if an invisible force is keeping him from moving.)

(Sways her hips to the song) Look at me. Supple, young, and beautiful, everything that a man could desire. I give you my face, the charmer, the petals of a rose. And now, my breasts, milk giver, sustainer, with a deep cleavage to keep your face warm. My navel and my abdomen, slim, tight. My womanhood, wet, ready, and wanting. What's the word? Moist. *(Goes to a spread eagle position)*

MAN

Moist? I'm sorry. I want to go home.

ALICE

Come on, have your way with me.

MAN

I can't. I will not.

ALICE

Figures. *(Snaps her fingers)* Hugo, won't you come down here? We have another one who can't get it up.

(HUGO appears from the open door on the second floor. He is completely naked. His body is perfect, big, chiseled, and strong. ALICE sings the last words to "La Vie en Rose" as HUGO makes his way towards him.)

Et, dès que je l'aperçois

Alors je sens en moi

Mon coeur qui bat

La, la, la, la

Lalalala, lalalala

(HUGO is now face to face with ALICE. He envelopes her within his arms and pulls her for a kiss.)

(Before the kiss) As soon as I notice him, I feel inside me, my heart beating. La, la, la, la.

(HUGO kisses ALCIE on the mouth. The MAN winces, and struggles to free himself from his paralysis. He begins to cry. Slowly the MAN goes down on ALICE, savoring her flesh.)

MAN

Have you no sense of decency? You're no better than the mongrels on the street. Set me free, let me shield my eyes. Oh please save me from being a witness to this dirty deed.

(HUGO and ALICE make love. The song plays louder. The MAN screams.)

Do not make me into a cuckold. Please clothe yourselves. Please do not show me what I cannot have.

(ALICE climaxes. HUGO exits. ALICE puts her clothes back on.)

(As soon as HUGO has fully exited, the song stops playing. The MAN falls from the barstool.)

(Charges at ALICE) You vile witch! What did you do to me?

ALICE

Nothing. That's your problem, isn't it? We did nothing. *(Turns away, fixes her hair)*

HUGO

This might be your place, but you don't do that to people, not even to trash like me. It's--
- It's--- Unforgivable! *(Points at ALICE)* You're unforgivable!

ALICE

Hey, don't you dare point that limp thing at me. I gave you offered you choice. You simply weren't man enough to make it.

MAN

How did you that? Did you put a spell on me? I couldn't move.

ALICE

What are you talking about?

MAN

It was like magic. Dark and evil. A curse.

ALICE

Magic doesn't exist. You didn't move because you didn't want to move. 'Cause you wanted to watch, pervert.

MAN

I don't understand anything that's happening right now. How did I get here? Where is this place? Wait a second, what was I doing before I got through those doors. It's all a haze. *(Points his gun at ALICE)*

'Fess up before I blow your brains out!

ALICE

You've woken from a dream, sweet prince. And, now welcome to the real world.

MAN

You're talking in riddles; that's a dangerous game when you're facing a desperate wolf with a gun.

ALICE

You won't shoot me. I'm sure of it.

MAN

And, why not?

ALICE

Because you don't even know why you're holding a gun. Where did you get the gun, Mister Man?

MAN

I don't know.

ALICE

Perhaps you're a policeman, a soldier, someone with honor. You won't tarnish your reputation would you?

MAN

What if I'm a thief, a murderer? What if this is what I'm supposed to do after all?

ALICE

Would you be willing to risk that, Mister Man?

MAN

I-I'm not sure... But, you shouldn't test me.

ALICE

Tell me one thing, do you even know your name?

MAN

(Comes to him in a shock) No. Maybe I'm not real. Hold on, hold on. You told me you were waiting for me, that I was special clientele. You must know me.

ALICE

(Laughs) And you believed me? This is a business. I'm supposed to say things like that. It's a dog-eat-dog world.

MAN

This place a business? Don't kid around! You haven't charged me a single cent. Not for the booze. Not for the show. You would have fucked with me for free. What the hell is this place?

ALICE

The Black Bordello always gets paid, don't you worry. Stories, I said. Stories and misery.

MAN

My head hurts. There's just so much I don't understand. *(Hits his head with the hilt of the gun)* It hurts. It hurts. It... *(Drops his gun)*

(A tense tableau: ALICE and the MAN staring at the gun. ALICE walks over and picks it up. The MAN raises his hands. ALICE walks over to the trembling MAN and returns his gun.)

ALICE

Maybe you just need some food in you. That'd spruce you up to thinking condition.

Hugo! (*Sets a chair down on one of the tables and sits*)

MAN

No. You're going to do the dirty again, and you're going to make me watch. Never going through that again even if I have to shoot myself!

ALICE

Relax. I'm a lady, and a lady never does the deed twice a day. We have to keep some of the mystery, shouldn't we.

MAN

A lady! That's not what you looked like earlier.

ALICE

Hugo! Two steaks. Make 'em bloody.

MAN

(*Sets down a chair opposite to ALICE and sits*) Don't you know what eating raw meat could do to you? Tapeworms! They'll multiply in your gut and wriggle right out of your eyeballs.

ALICE

As far as you're concerned, you're not even real so why worry 'bout tapeworms?

MAN

That's right. How could I be so forgetful? I'm not real.

ALICE

O, mister for me you are and the Black Bordello, you are as real as real gets.

MAN

But, what if you're not real too? And , this place, looks like it sprang out one of 'em Penny Dreadfuls!

ALICE

Okay, point taken. I do look like I'm out of this world. (*Considers*) For you, you're real. You believe you're real, don't you?

MAN

But, what if I'm not real? It's just going round and round. This is never going to make any sense! A complete nightmare! A maze with no conceivable ending.

ALICE

(*Slaps the MAN across the face*) Did you feel that?

MAN

Why did you do that?

ALICE

What does it matter, you're not real, are you? *(Squeezes his groin)*

MAN

Hey!

ALICE

(Kisses him on the cheek) So what if you woke up in a dream? You feel, right? You make your own decisions. Leave the complicated stuff for the philosophers, and just live. We're all just suffering from one moment to the next, and that's enough. Even if we are just dreaming.

MAN

You still shouldn't eat raw meat.

ALICE

I just get an awesome hunger after sex. *(Calls out)* Hey, Hugo! Are we going to starve to death here?

MAN

Maybe I'm dead and this is hell.

ALICE

You wish.

(HUGO enters from the door behind the counter, dressed in a bartender's uniform. He carries two trays, each with a plate covered with a silver food warmer.)

MAN

Praise be the Lord almighty, he's clothed. Though that shirt is still awfully tight. Does he always dress like that? I mean, bravo for the man keeping form, but at this point he's just being boastful.

ALICE

(To HUGO) Don't listen to him, Hugo. He's just jealous.

(Without a word HUGO sets the two trays down the table, and leaves.)

(Puts her arms on the table) Well, have at it.

MAN

This is obviously another trick.

ALICE

You're a pussy. No wonder you didn't fuck me. Come on, have a peek. Hugo slaved over the stove for us *(Opens the food warmer slightly)*

(The MAN gets a tremendous migraine. He puts his hands to his head, massaging it and then almost crushing it between his palms. "La Vie en Rose" plays on the jukebox. The lights in the cafe start to flicker on and off except for the light on the open door on the second floor which remains constant.)

(Bored) Here we go again.

(We hear a couple fighting on the second floor. The woman sounds suspiciously like ALICE. What follows is their argument:

WIFE: How dare you?

HUSBAND: Darling, Sweet Sparrow, this is for us. This is for the life that we deserve. The life I promised you when I knelt down on one knee.

WIFE: You're not the man I married. I don't even know you anymore.

HUSBAND: Spit at me. Hurt me. But, I have to do this.

WIFE: Please. Please don't.

HUSBAND: Forgive me.

WIFE: Ask forgiveness in hell!!)

(A picture frame is thrown from the open door. It misses the MAN's head by a fraction of an inch.)

(The jukebox stops playing. Lighting returns to normal.)

(The MAN picks up the picture frame.)

ALICE

Don't sweat about those two. The owners. They've been fighting since they opened the place.

MAN

It's you.

ALICE

It was me.

MAN

This is the first time, I've seen you show remorse. And, you've done a lot to be remorseful.

ALICE

What can I say? Even phantoms can be melancholic.

MAN

But, how can you be up there and here at the same time? It's not possible.

ALICE

This place is funny like that. Must've inherited the trait from its father.

MAN

If this is you before, you were definitely much more beautiful. Your eyes show innocence, promise even, as if they were the eyes of an eagle which can stare right into the sun. What happened to you?

ALICE

A lot of slings and arrows that count up to a life.

MAN

I could fall in love with this woman. Not the type of love that men throw around just because they want to get into a woman's drawers. Genuine love. The love a martyr would offer to his God.

ALICE

Tell me more, sweet talker.

MAN

And, this man. He's Hugo, right?

ALICE

Can you give me that picture? It deserves a place in the bin.

MAN

He dressed much more conservatively back then.

ALICE

Give it to me.

MAN

You two looked happy.

ALICE

Looks can be deceiving.

MAN

With proper clothes on, he looks familiar.

ALICE

I thought you were having a migraine. *(Play acts like the MAN)* Give me the photograph.

MAN

(Hands over the photograph) I know you. I know me. Or maybe it's all just a dream.

ALICE

Congratulations. La-di-da. Finally, I didn't know you'd need that big of a hint.

MAN

Let's eat. *(Reaches to open the food warmers)*

ALICE

Stop. The joke's gone stale that it wouldn't even matter.

MAN

I'm hungry *(Reveals the contents of the plates, on each plate is a severed head of a man)*.

ALICE

(A mock scream of fright) Aaaaahhhh!!!! Severed heads. They're bloody. I'm getting a migraine. I'm leaving! See that's how it should've gone, joy killer. *(Goes to the bar)* I'm having a drink. You want one? *(Makes two glasses of Old Fashioned)*

MAN

I know them. Him. It's the same person, isn't it? I have memorized his features, etched them to my very soul. He was the beast of my youth, his brow always furled, eyes sharper than daggers, and a nose that always seemed like it was being offended. I was always a child in his eyes, perpetually incapable of standing up for myself, of being a man. In his gaze, he held me forever the whelp. Though now that he is at peace and can no longer hurt me, I see that there is kindness in him after all. *(Pauses)* Wait, he won't open his eyes, right? I mean, the horror has to stop somewhere, right?

ALICE

(Walks to the MAN and offers him a drink) Here, to your good health.

MAN

I just recalled. I'm a recovering alcoholic.

ALICE

More for me then. *(Drinks both glasses of whisky)*

(Police sirens wail from the outside. We hear the eye of the storm passing. The thunderstorm grows even louder.)

MAN

Outside, there is a world waiting to judge me and punish me for the sins I have committed. Every single action I have taken for and against my fellow man is jotted down on a gigantic book and beside that arbitrary list of events is a corresponding list of consequences. They want to hurt me, Alice.

ALICE

The moment you step out of those doors, they'll catch you. Who knows what they'll put you through.

MAN

But in here, I have to face dive into the darkness of my very soul, and contend with the demons I find within.

ALICE

I wonder what will hurt more; the punishment they have in store for you out there or the punishment you inflict yourself in here.

MAN

I believe I am starting to remember. I know you. I know this place.

ALICE

So, are we going to do this?

(The MAN starts walking up the stairs. As he passes the jukebox, "La Vie en Rose" starts to play.)

MAN

I used to love this song.

ALICE

Welcome home, papa.

(Lightings starts to dim to darkness. Both the MAN and ALICE enter the light in the open door.)

(Darkness.)

ACT 2: Through the Looking Glass

(Light blooms within the Black Bordello, brighter and livelier as compared to the first act. We hear the bell ring and a short conversation between HUGO and a customer from the outside:

Customer: Thanks, mate!

HUGO: Please come again.

Customer: Next time, you should drink with us.

HUGO: I'm a recovering alcoholic!

Customer: A recovering alcoholic who owns a bar, funniest thing I've ever heard.)

(HUGO enters the cafe. He now wears a heavy brown coat over his bartender's uniform. He gets the contents of the table used in the first act and places them behind the counter.)

HUGO

Little Sparrow, O, Little Sparrow? Are you here?

(When HUGO realizes that his wife is not present, he reveals a couple of envelopes from his back pocket. He sits down on a bar stool and examines the missives within.)

No one writes me anymore, except those damn collectors. Can't be helped, I guess. Dreams cost money. It'll be a miracle if we can make it this month. I'd have to ask for another loan---

ALICE

(Enters from the room on the second floor) Hugo, honey!

(ALICE's demeanor is more innocent and all together more pleasant. She runs to HUGO.)

HUGO

The Little Sparrow mustn't know.

ALICE

Dear! I have fantastic news! Dance with me.

HUGO

You know I have two left feet.

ALICE

You can have three, and I'll still love you. Come on, dance with your wife.

HUGO

What's gotten over you?

ALICE

Is there anything wrong when a woman asks to have some fun with her husband?

HUGO

It's not that. You're happy. It's been a long time since I saw you smile.

ALICE

(Saunters to the jukebox) Well, today's different! Today the past has been wiped clean, and the future looks spectacularly bright. (*Plays "La Vie en Rose"*) It's your favorite song; torture my feet a bit, Hugo.

(HUGO walks over to ALICE embraces her. He sways her awkwardly back and forth as he melts in his arms.)

I'm sure we're going to make it. More and more customers are coming in by the day. New faces, new appetites, everyone single one of them thirsty. And let's not forget, you're doing a good job making sure they come back.

HUGO

(Surprised) T-thank you. You don't have to tell me those sorts of things, but I appreciate it. Makes me feel that you believe in me. That you still love me after everything I put you through.

ALICE

Of course, I believe in you! I did marry you after all. Sway me harder. Throw me to and fro like a feather in a tempest!

HUGO

(Carries her torso above his head) I will never leave your side, Little Sparrow. Whatever the world does to us, I will always come home.

ALICE

And, I will always have a warm cup of coffee waiting for you, my one and only. Black as death and hot as hell.

(HUGO gently brings ALICE's to lips to his. They kiss passionately. ALICE'S feet land on the floor.)

(HUGO turns to take the dishes to the kitchen. ALICE sees and grabs the envelopes from HUGO's back pocket.)

Love letters from your admirers! Should I be jealous?

HUGO

(Pulls the letters from ALICE's hands) No, you mustn't open these.

ALICE

I was kidding about the other lovers, but now I'm getting a tad insecure. Are they more beautiful than me?

HUGO

Fine. *(Hands the letters to ALICE)* But, I don't want you to stress about these ---

ALICE

(Reads the contents of the letter) We haven't paid for anything. Not the electricity. Not even the water. How will we afford the staff's salary? Oh my, they're going to take the building. God! Where will we live, Hugo?

HUGO

It's just a first warning. We expected this, Alice. The Bordello needs a little more time. You said it yourself, more and more---

ALICE

I thought you were on top of things. How many warnings do we get?

HUGO

It'll get better, I promise.

(Silence.)

ALICE

Maybe, it's time you go back to work.

(HUGO brings the dishes to the kitchen.)

These are tough times. No one has money to spend at a fancy place like this.

(HUGO returns from the kitchen, and the chairs on the table used in the first act.)

Maybe you can talk to your father. I heard his practice is going well. A lot of people turning sick and all the more money for him.

HUGO

You don't know what he'll make me do.

ALICE

Then go take a job at the papers, I'm sure they'll be wanting the help. That place almost closed down when you up and left them. If you want, I can even keep the place running. The money you'd bring in would be enough to handle all those bills you keep hiding from me.

HUGO

Alice, please stop talking about things you don't understand.

ALICE

How can I understand anything if you don't tell me. If you don't explain them to silly old me. *(Sighs)* Being married to you is like being married to a brick wall with a painted smile. All you want to share is the good, never what's behind that stony facade.

HUGO

If you knew what I did back then, you wouldn't look at me anymore. You'd run far, far away back to your family in the province. No matter how long it's been, what I do to repent, I still disgust myself.

ALICE

You were just doing your job, and besides what's the worst a writer can do?

HUGO

A lot, my love. People take what the papers say as the truth. If the paper prints that we're doing well, then we're doing well even if the enemy's knocking on the door. Don't you understand, I want to start an honest life?

ALICE

What about me? Can your honesty feed me, clothe me---

HUGO

I'll take care of you. I promised, again, and again. Just trust me, Alice.

ALICE

(Goes behind the bar and makes herself a drink) Do you want one?

HUGO

You know I shouldn't.

ALICE

(Drinks her whisky straight) I'm pregnant, Hugo.

HUGO

Then why'd you have to down all of that. That's bad for you. Wait, you're kidding, right?

Right?

ALICE

No.

HUGO

This isn't the right time for jokes. We can't afford to have a child right now.

ALICE

Then you should have thought of that before you made love to me. It's not like I made this by myself.

HUGO

We're ruined!

ALICE

This isn't exactly what I expected when---

HUGO

Do you think any of this is expected, Alice? Grow up, Little Sparrow. This is the real world. Excuse me. *(Goes to the wash)* Fuck!

(The bell on the door rings. The MAN enters, now dressed in an a black suit. His demeanor has changed as well, now more coarse and confident.)

ALICE

We're closed.

MAN

This the Black Bordello, am I correct?

ALICE

Come back tomorrow.

MAN

I have come a long way, will you at least allow me to rest my tired old feet?

ALICE

Suit yourself, but you're not getting any service.

MAN

(Sets a chair down from a table and sits down) Sweet girl, tell me, are you the wife of the owner?

ALICE

Yes.

MAN

Your name is Alice?

ALICE

Do you know my husband?

MAN

You could say that I made the boy, groomed him to be the best of the best. But my investments were not returned. I lost him to love and to self-enterprise. He sent me a photograph of you when he left my house with his inheritance. *(Hands a calling card from his pocket)* In case, you need anything.

(HUGO reenters.)

HUGO

(Wiping his hands on a cloth; without looking at the MAN) Please don't listen to my wife. Of course the Black Bordello's doors are open and we will cater to your every desire. The cut of steak here is prime, and the wine is --- *(Looks at the MAN)* Father.

MAN

At ease, boy. This is your establishment. I am but a humble guest.

HUGO

Of course, sir. Would you like a drink? Some food? Alice, go ahead and cook my father a nice---

MAN

No need to fuss over me.

HUGO

I thought you said you never wanted to see me again. To what do we owe the pleasure?

MAN

I came to see my son. If the prodigal child will not come home and then the father will seek out the prodigal child. I've come to ask you to come back with me. I forgive your ridiculous obsessions, first the writing and then this. My son, leave this foolish place. We need help at work.

HUGO

I apologize but I must disappoint. My heart and my hands belong in the Black Bordello.

ALICE

Hugo, we talked about this. If you make amends with your father---

HUGO

And, I said no, Alice. I'm sorry. But I cannot go home with this bigot.

ALICE

Apologies, father. May I call you that?

MAN

Of course and no need for apologies. It takes a certain character admit defeat, and it appears that Hugo is stuck with his stubborn delusions.

HUGO

Apologies, father.

MAN

I must be off then. My mission is a failure, and retreat is imminent. *(Stands)* It must be hard though, especially with a baby *(Sniffs)* boy coming.

ALICE

How did you know?

MAN

I can smell these things, my dear.

HUGO

(Coming between ALICE and the MAN) You must leave now.

MAN

(Smiles) Call me when need arises. *(Exits)*

ALICE

What did you mean? Bigot? He seemed like a pleasant old man.

HUGO

Looks can be deceiving. Do you know how he made his money? He works for the government and he gets paid well. The Ultimate Solution to the poor and the unwanted he call his noble contribution. This was who I was before I met you, an assistant to the mad doctor.

ALICE

I do not understand.

HUGO

Politics is a strange and dirty thing. For the progress of the nation, so many sins are being committed. Every imaginable field of study is being demonized in the name of progress. And, I do not want to be a part of it.

Alice, I promise you, I will suffer and toil for you and the child my own way. Believe in the man you married.

ALICE

(Kisses her husband) Things will get better.

(HUGO pulls ALICE's hands, and leads her back to their room on the second floor.)

(THE MAN reenters. He removes his cap and puts it in front of his heart.)

MAN

This is a cruel part that I must play. That I must stand here and become the instrument of my own destruction. I now wear this mask, this patch of cruel skin on my face to become what I despise the most. I must kill whom I love most dearly in the world. Is this the trick of the Black Bordello, a macabre theater show where I relive my downfall again and again without the agency to save either myself or her? Where every harsh sting of life is repeated ad infinitum, and I a prisoner-spectator whose eyelids are kept open by invisible straps!

(We hear the couple's fight from the first act.)

We fought so much that in my memory all our little screaming matches have sewn together into a tapestry of singular epic war. We used the same ugly names, the same curses, we dug the same old reasons for hating one another. I cannot determine where one fight began and ended. Our marriage bed has been seeped in spite, all because of the failure of a man I was. I am.

(The same photograph from the first act is thrown from the second floor. It falls near the MAN.)

(Looks at the photograph) But even through all of those hurtful things we said to one another, the little heartaches that we caused, I never did stop loving you. I just had a funny way of showing it, I guess. *(Wipes a tear)*

(ALICE appears from the second floor. She is dressed as if she is mourning, her pregnant belly already showing a little bit though her dress.)

I am glad you called me, dear.

ALICE

(A slow drawl, as if she has been robbed interest and energy) Thank you for coming in such short notice, father. *(Walks to the first floor)* If I may still call you that.

MAN

Of course, my dear.

ALICE

I no longer understand your son. He keeps his hopes up for this money trap, refusing to work, refusing to seek aid. Oh, such an. unconscionable fool. I worry about your grandchild, father. Perhaps, you can explain him to me.

MAN

I cannot pretend the goings-on in his mind. We have never been in good terms.

ALICE

Then please help us.

MAN

I do not believe in charity, young lady. Perhaps you can earn some money under your sheets, if you understand my meaning. (*Kisses ALICE's hand*)

ALICE

Oh... Perfectly. Can we set a wager?

MAN

If the terms are acceptable, I see no reason we cannot have a friendly gamble.

ALICE

How do you think he will react to this rendezvous? This secret meeting between a husband's wife and his father?

MAN

We are doing nothing wrong. Just in-laws in friendly conversation. And we are in your territory as well.

ALICE

But, we are going to do something very wrong soon.

MAN

Semantics, my dear. Nothing is wrong or right in the world. These are just moralizing labels of the grand narrative imposed upon us by our betters. In reality, right and wrong do not exist.

ALICE

That is not true.

MAN

Consider then the capital sins. For instance, murder. Is murder wrong my dear?

ALICE

Why of course!

MAN

Is human life so valuable that you would never consider killing?

ALICE

I will never kill.

MAN

But I have killed in the name of the Motherland and her people. I killed to save to save those I hold dear, my son included. These are difficult times, and there is not a lot to go around. So the answer, kill the riffraff so that we can eat. Do you not think this is an invaluable service? That I kill so you can eat. So that your child can eat?

ALICE

But you kill people.

MAN

So you can eat, there are concessions to the ironclad rule. All for unity, my dear.

ALICE

Life is precious.

MAN

Oh, yes, life is precious but not equal. We killed so that we could continue living the lives we were accustomed to. Are our lives more valuable than theirs? Like your husband, the soldiers he killed had wives, had families who mourned for the men they will not even get the chance to bury. Are you playing favorites just because you prefer your husband to strangers? That's unfair.

ALICE

Fairness has nothing to do with it. Of course, my husband is special to me.

MAN

Your logic is flawed but you are standing before me, headstrong. Yet, you keep our meeting from his knowledge. Let us return to your initial wager. I will take the side that he will at first be angry with our meeting, but after he sees the fruits of our union, he will consider me a hero who single-handedly saved his family from the gutter.

ALICE

How can you say that with a straight face?

MAN

Because I knew your husband. Because I know how the human mind works. We do not base our actions and reactions based on childish concepts such as good and evil. Profit rules the heart. As long as a man can profit from something, he will do it, no matter how vile the deed is.

ALICE

We shall see, arrogant old man.

(Drops her clothes. Silently, she walks slowly to the MAN; her breath staggered, her eyes wet with tears.)

(ALICE inches before him, the MAN snickers, and lets out a guffaw. ALICE runs to her clothes, ashamed, and wears her dress.)

MAN

I'm sorry. I couldn't stop myself from laughing.

ALICE

I thought that's what you wanted!

MAN

Your flesh? Your body! Sweet, sweet, miss, I have no interest in you.

ALICE

Then why did you let me make a fool of myself!

MAN

Because I enjoyed it!

ALICE

I'm no joke, old man.

MAN

If you just saw yourself earlier, a virginal saint walking into the gaping mouth of the wolf.
You were so dignified.

ALICE

What do you want then? I have nothing else to offer for the sum you offered over the phone.

MAN

Wait, wait, and let me calm myself first. (*Laughs out loud, covers his mouth, settles*)
Forgive me, you just looked so moronic.

ALICE

Are you done?

MAN

(*Takes a vial from his coat pocket*) I want you to take this.

ALICE

What is that? Poison.

MAN

Nothing of the sort; just some herbal concoction.

ALICE

(Gets the vial) And, what is the intended effect?

MAN

You are pregnant. About three months. Yes?

ALICE

Yes.

MAN

After, you drink this, you will no longer be pregnant.

ALICE

(Puts the vial and quickly moves away from it) What?

MAN

The fetus will die and be expelled from the body. Do not worry the host shall live.

ALICE

It's my child!

MAN

And, that is the condition. Your child's life for the money; enough money to live comfortably on for the rest of your lives.

ALICE

What possible gain will you receive for the death of a baby?

MAN

I wouldn't exactly call it a baby; the terminology is all wrong. That thing barely even looks human right now.

ALICE

That doesn't give you the right to kill it.

MAN

You already know that I am a physician in the army, a researcher. Well, this drug is one of our most important experiments. You see, there is value in the death of the fetus, and the preservation of the life of the mother.

ALICE

What is the value in that?

MAN

Let's see. (*Thinks*) Perhaps when the nation still need able bodied workers but no use for babies. We are in for a nationwide recession. I really dare not say. I am, after all, just a researcher under the pay of the nation. Considering the drug's practical application is not my responsibility.

ALICE

You are a monster.

MAN

Perhaps.

ALICE

And you wagered that my husband will go along with this!

MAN

Let me up the ante. I believe he will administer the medicine himself. If he does not, I will give you the sum I promised without consequence. Whatever the result of his internal war, you get a paycheck! The odds are stacked against me now, but I am a fan of this new study called Psychology. All I require is your silence. What do you say?

ALICE

You're a fool.

MAN

Who shall emerge the victor, the Hugo you married or the Hugo who is nothing but a dog, following orders. Between us two, let us see who is the fool, shall we?

(The bell on the doors rings. HUGO enters, his clothes disheveled.)

ALICE

You've been drinking.

HUGO

(Caught in a lie) No.

ALICE

You stink like a sewer. You know you shouldn't drink, what it does to you. You promised!

HUGO

I'm sorry. I couldn't take it anymore. I had to escape, needed a day off from myself.

ALICE

A day off from the life you chose.

HUGO

A day off from the trap I've fallen into. Oh, I wanted this to work, did everything I could, but in the end I was incompetent. Everything I touched turned to shit. I mean, look at you. (*Notices the MAN*) What's he doing here?

MAN

I was called to assist as I expected.

HUGO

We don't need your charity, Capitan. Go back to your lab and make the people you call rats suffer. I wash my hands clean of you.

MAN

Oh, if I may you may never escape from your past. What's done is done, you are as culpable as I am.

HUGO

Go away.

MAN

I can't. I am your specter, and right now, your savior.

HUGO

What does he mean?

ALICE

He's offering us money.

MAN

(To ALICE) Shhh, my sweet, don't give the game away. *(Stern; to HUGO)* A way out.

A chance to begin again.

HUGO

Blood money.

MAN

Well, yes.

HUGO

How much?

MAN

Enough to open five Black Bordellos. Or perhaps you can enter a more sensible enterprise. I hear bullet manufacturing is very profitable these days.

HUGO

At what cost?

ALICE

I can't take this anymore. I will not part with my child. *(Runs to their room on the second floor, and locks the door)*

HUGO

What does she mean?

MAN

She simply drinks this and you two become rich beyond your wildest dreams. An abortifacient. *(Points his head to the vial on the table)*

HUGO

Why do you think we would agree to such a thing?

MAN

I'm certain she wouldn't take the bait, but you, you are different, Hugo. You were once called The Bloodhound.

HUGO

That was a long time ago.

MAN

True, now you are more like a dire wolf, starving, alone, backed to a corner. I know how animals work, Hugo. Think about it. With a simple sip of this poison, you'd be rid of two problems.

The unwanted child will perish, and you can start again, a real man, and make a name for yourself. When you are more prepared, then you can make more children. It's a simple mechanical procedure. As many as you want, but that time it would be more responsible.

And---

HUGO

I can't.

MAN

You should. You are a soldier, Hugo, through and through. More than following orders, you know when it is right to pull the trigger. It is not murder but euthanasia. Destroy the soulless abomination and you save your life and hers. And, hers! The life you promised her would be hers. Come on, man, be a man. Two against one. It's simple Mathematics.

HUGO

She will hate me.

MAN

Better hate than death, Hugo. As long as she's alive, you'll have a chance to beg for forgiveness.

HUGO

Where's the money?

MAN

My boy, you know I'm good for it.

(HUGO takes the vial from the MAN. Quietly, he gets a glass of water from behind the counter and walks up to the room on the second floor. He gets a key from his pocket and opens the door. ALICE pulls it shut, but HUGO then kicks it open. HUGO enters the room.)

(To the audience) I know what's happening up there, like a piece of film that runs in a loop in my head. Even when I close my eyes I am never free from the gruesome scene.

I see it in my mind's eye. The way he pleads, his tone sweet and mired in drink. His eyes watery with tears. The promises he made, recycled from past concessions to their marriage vows, now sound hollow with the unmistakable heavy-handedness of lies. Yet, he meant them, even now, as he kneels in front of the goddess whose eyes were big as

universes, swallowing his deceit and his greatest crime to be. The light in those orbits was not anger but the cold flame of disappointment. She had lost the wage she made with a monster.

And then, the unthinkable. The man holds his Little Sparrow's throat, and forces her mouth open with his index finger and his thumb. Even though, she knew she her fate was sealed, she still fought, for the child growing inside of her, but even more than the child, she fought for what the sad outcome of their hasty marriage, their lost happiness, the man he was, and the woman she thought she could be. The woman tries to spit out the poison but the man closes her mouth with his palm and forces her to swallow.

The woman is now weeping, inconsolably. The man tries to reach her with his hand, with his apologies, but it's as if she has flown off to a distant star far, far away from his reach. And, she begins to run with her weakened frame.

(ALICE ambles to the banister. HUGO follows.)

MAN and HUGO

I'm sorry, my Little Sparrow, I needed to unburden you so we may once again be lighter than air. Let us fly now to our world that is ours and ours alone.

(As HUGO advances, ALICE retreats to the banister.)

ALICE

Stop, stop, you're not making any sense. You betrayed me for your own convenience. A parasite, a parasite! I should have never believed in you.

HUGO

Speak, at least then I can still hear your voice.

ALICE

No more then.

(HUGO lunges forward, grabbing ALICE by the hand. ALICE falls down the staircase.)

HUGO

No! My Little Sparrow! *(Runs for ALICE and weeps over her limp body)*

MAN

Through the fog of memory, through the misshapen forms that appear before me in this erudite looking glass, this part has always been unclear. Did she fall or did I push her? Was I so repugnant that she wanted to die because she was associated with an abomination such as I or was I too embarrassed of my choice to kill my own child that I pushed her that can remind me of my weakness? I do not know; I am afraid to solve the puzzle because I do not know which is worse. Which would make me a worse man? A

Bluebeard or a pariah.... I wish she would just tell me. I'm not smart enough to figure it out.

(HUGO leaps at the MAN, strangling his neck.)

HUGO

Look at what you've made me do! You told me she would live, but she's dead.

MAN

That was your own doing, my boy. Not my fault

HUGO

I'm a good man. I quit your command. I made a path for myself. I tried to protect what I loved.

MAN

But, it was your hand who took her throat, your eyes that played blind against her pleading tears, your choice that ended the child's life, and hers.

HUGO

But, it was you who provided the toxin!

MAN

(Laughs) Surely, you jest. This was your preferred outcome all along. With the girl and the child dead, your past has become blame free, and your future a blank canvass you can once again mess up. I simply provided the catalyst.

HUGO

You're right. And, with you out of the picture there will be no witnesses.

MAN

That's right. End my suffering, and go along your way. Run, Hugo, run.

(HUGO releases the MAN, and steps back from him.)

What are you waiting for? End it!

(ALICE stands. Both HUGO and ALICE laugh at the MAN.

The jukebox plays La Vie en Rose.)

ALICE

You're not getting off that easy.

MAN

You were dead.

ALICE

Ghosts never truly die. Now, Hugo, bring this piece of meat to the carving table.

(HUGO drags the MAN to the kitchen.)

MAN

Just end it! End it.

ALICE

Funny, old man. This hell. Your suffering will never end.

(Lighting dims to darkness.)

ACT 3: Seven Sins, Seven Drinks

(HUGO stands over the MAN's table. HUGO is a tray holding several bottles, and glasses. The MAN is already sluggish and red in the face from drinking.)

MAN

No more, please.

HUGO

Just seven more, sir.

MAN

Why seven?

HUGO

Does the number even matter? You're a drinker through and through! That's what you once said time and time again. I should know, I am you.

MAN

(Clutches at his abdomen) I feel like my insides are being torn apart. I can't possibly---

HUGO

(Fills the MAN's glass with a tawny yellow substance) Try this one. It will make your pain go away.

MAN

(Weeping, he drinks; sticks out his tongue in disgust) I don't care for it. Too sweet like honey mixed with sugar. It sticks to the throat like phlegm.

(ALICE slowly walks on-stage; younger and more innocent as she was in the beginning of the second act.)

HUGO

Isn't that nice? Now, for the performance. (*As a Master of Ceremonies*) Tonight, the Black Bordello presents for the private enjoyment of an audience of one, mister, mister, give a big round of applause our very own bird of hope, the lone glimmer of starlight in the bleak dark night which you call your life, the goddess to whom with address all our prayers to, gentleman, the Little Sparrow!

MAN

No. Have I not suffered enough? What more can be said?

HUGO

Volumes. Now shut up, drink, and listen.

ALICE

Dressed in a shirt two sizes bigger than his frame, he gated like an awkward giraffe in my periphery. Advancing and retreating, a war being waged in his head. And yet, I looked down and pretended not to notice. We were in a bar, much like this. The only customers who have sought shelter from the rain. Perhaps the coward in him won, as he sat down. But little did he know, that was what won my heart. I couldn't help but allow my lips to angle my cheeks into reddish apples. I hope he didn't see.

His shyness was the prime factor for my fall. The nights after, I came to that same bar and at the same time. The pit of my stomach was burning from the diet of a beggar but I could afford a beer per so I might watch him in my periphery, watching me from my periphery.

His silence spoke volumes. His meekness were heroic deeds.

And then came the song, a song about a life through rose colored glasses, that was the first time, I saw him dance. It was funny, like an epileptic having a seizure in slow motion. I couldn't help myself, and lead the dance.

He told me his name, and I told him that I was a bird, and that he could not catch me twice. As it happens, he didn't need to catch me. As nightly, I flew freely into his ribs, and one night, when the moon was red and full as if it was going to fall onto our heads, I closed the doors, and threw away the key. I knew I would be safe in his heart; even if the world were to end, I would survive.

MAN

Stop it! I do not deserve your adulation. It's because of me you're dead. It's because of me.

ALICE

(Continues) He would die before any harm would befall me. *(Bows like a theater actress on a stage)*

HUGO

(Hits the MAN over the back of his head) Applaud, you ignoramus. That's what you do when an actress bows.

(The MAN applauds half-heartedly.)

(Applauds and cheers) Bravo! Bravo!

We now proceed to the second vintage. *(Gets another bottle)* This one is spiced and made pungent by human tears; a good palette cleanser to the sugar of what preceded. It might not be a crowd favorite, but we must, time to time, drink our medicine *(Pours the contents of the bottle into the MAN's glass)* Bitter Truths.

ALICE

(Begins to scowl, as if a monster) But sooner or later, love sours. The way he looked at me all the time, eyes widened, his pupils dilated, it annoyed me. As if he were a dog looking at me for to be defined as a dog, to be owned. I wondered if he really loved me or if he was just happy he found another master to serve. Never did he talk about his time in the army, but it was as if he never left!

“Little Sparrow, what do you need?” He would ask me.

And, I’d say, “A trinket, a house, a business, a family,” in the sweetest voice I could muster just to shut him up. The truth is I the only thing I wanted was silence.

MAN

How dare you!

HUGO

(Slaps the back of the MAN’s head) Don’t interrupt!

ALICE

There was this one day, he came home with a bold claim. “I never want to drink again!” That’s how we met, drinking, and out of the blue, he severs the only real connection we had left. I couldn’t stand him when he was sober. He was too timid, too unimaginative.

MAN

I did that so I could be a better person. It was for you, it was all for you.

HUGO

(Smacks the MAN across the face) You talk one more time, and I’ll pull off your tongue.

ALICE

Somehow, he might have figured out that I've fallen out of love with him. I was already looking for a way out. That's why he opened this place out. A business owner never really wants for masters, he serves everyone. From employee to customer, from supplier, to creditor. He became too small for me. When something's no good you throw him in the trash. Because that's what he is. Trash.

MAN

How can you say that? I gave everything up for you!

(HUGO slams the MAN's head down the table, and pulls at his tongue with bare fingers.)

HUGO

I told you not to speak. Now, look at what you're making me do. Does it hurt?

(Releases the MAN's tongue) Just kidding. As your sommelier, I want you to savor our entire inventory.

(Opening another bottle) The theatre has two masks. Every joy comes with its twin tragedy. Though common and cheap, this wine is robust and creates a sensation of being full. The aphrodisiac of the disenfranchised! I hope we enjoy what we call Despair. *(Whispers)* Tastes a little like pilsners.

(Pours a glass and sets it before the MAN) Now, drink, drunkard. That's all you're good for.

(The MAN downs the drink, his eyes transfixed at HUGO's in compliant defiance.)

Good boy.

Now, I tire of words, words, words. An endless barrage of meaningless words.

MAN

That was my life she was talking about!

HUGO

Let us have some dancing.

(HUGO claps. The jukebox plays a wordless La Vie en Rose. He walks up to the rostrum with ALICE.)

ALICE

It's sort of late in the game, but I have to get it off my chest. When he felt weak, I felt weak. And, I have never considered myself as a weak girl. I am a woman on fire, and I needed strong men to match the intensity of my flame.

(HUGO and ALICE dance an extremely sexual tango, a physical double entendre. As they dance, ALICE moans out male names.)

Aaron. Adolf. Albert. Aldous. Aris. Arthur. Baptiste. Claude. Clancy. Gabriel. Hayao.
Haruki. Herman.

MAN

What are these names, Alice?

ALICE

Franz. Lewis. Glenn. James. Jacinto. Jay, the Second. Jay, the Third. Jean. John. Kiek.
Leonardo.

MAN

Who are these people?

ALICE

Justin. Martin. Marcus. Mark. Nicolas. Paul. Ray. Ron. Ricardo. Richard. Sam.
Sephirino. Soc. Stephen. Synge. Tennessee. Vincent. Walt. Wilfredo. William.

(The song and dance ends.)

(Panting) Strange, I thought there would have been more.

MAN

Who are those men?

HUGO

(Jumps off the stage and resumes his position behind the MAN) Now, you're not sure who the father of the baby is are you?

MAN

(Stands) Who are they!

HUGO

(Pulls the MAN back to his seat) Sit down! You have four more toxins to taste.

(The MAN pushes HUGO aside, and points his gun at him.)

MAN

Enough! I'm done. The alcohol might've gone to my head but fuck it all! I was a man. I did all those things, and she did all those things.

HUGO

Men, you meant. She did all those men.

MAN

Shut up. And maybe it all went to the shitter but I did my God damned best. I did what I thought was right. Fuck it, I'm only human; I deserve the right to fuck up once in a while don't !! I fucked up! I fucked up everything up! And now, I have nothing, and I'm running away from a past I don't even remember!

HUGO

Would you look at that, I didn't have to force the next drink on you. It was aptly named Honesty. To Honesty! Cheers. *(Drinks the glass of Honesty)*

MAN

I really want to shoot someone right now, but I don't want to shoot her. And, if I shoot you...

HUGO

You're afraid you might die. A coward until the end. Why don't you go ahead and just leave if you don't have the courage to deal with this. No one's stopping you.

(The MAN drops his gun and runs to the door. Police sirens wail from the outside.)

You can't.

MAN

(Sits down on his previous chair) Go ahead, perform. I came here to the Black Bordello to drink and enjoy myself. Sommelier, pour me another drink.

HUGO

This isn't going to be fun if you're going to enjoy yourself.

MAN

Your fun is none of my concern.

HUGO

Stop acting brave just because you've got a gun.

MAN

Here. *(Picks up the gun, and hands it over to HUGO)*

HUGO

O-okay *(Unsure of what to do with the gun, puts it in his back pocket)*. The festival of horror continues. What was the next drink? The drink. The drink.

ALICE

(Breaks from her mannequin pose) The black bottle.

HUGO

That's right, the black bottle.

MAN

That's rich, you're letting her boss you over again.

HUGO

Shut up.

MAN

Okay. *(A mock yawn)* How will you introduce this one? This is feeling like one of those contrived events where rich clients pay poor originals money for a show. So insincere.

HUGO

(Hastily pours a glass from the black bottle) The Miner's Little Bird. *(Hands it to the man)*

MAN

A somber drink. Mournful. Let me taste my greatest downfall. *(Sips from the glass)* It brings back memories, fragmented though they are though the drunkard's haze. Delicious. My private hell.

HUGO

You're stealing my lines.

MAN

Your lines are mine. You are but an understudy to a great ageing thespian. Younger, more handsome. But, less talented. I believe she is going to sing? An original song, an extravagance for such a poor company.

The Miner's Little Bird. I guess she will die soon. Cue the jukebox.

(The jukebox plays the opening chords to the Black Bordello, an original song.)

(HUGO drinks from the MAN's bottle.)

HUGO

(Sits down across the MAN) You're right, it does have a somber tone.

MAN

Buy your own drink. *(Grabs the glass from HUGO)* A song, Little Sparrow!

ALICE

His hands that were once soft,
That held my future, that held my life
Had turned into stony marble, cold frost
Going into my throat like steely knives.

I thought I could trust you.

I thought I could love you.

Was I wrong?

I sing my birdsong.

Your eyes that once smiled,

When they crossed mine,

Became intent to killing a child.

Your truth has been defined.

When you betrayed my love.

When you betrayed our love.

I lost my sense of person.

Who have I been trying to be all along?

You ask me if I jumped as my bones shattered

Or if you pushed me to the river Styx.

Does it matter?

Love, life, us, ended long before I flew to the skies.

In the end, we all float, victims to the water's motion,

Our eyes to the dark depths of the ocean

Or the expanse of the great big sky.

We were dead even before let out our first cry.

Do I blame you? Do I blame you?

It doesn't matter we're through.

*(ALICE falls to the floor as if her bones have been broken by
a great fall.)*

Do I blame you? Do I blame you?

It doesn't matter we're through.

We're not the people we once knew.

(The MAN stands and walks up the stage.)

MAN

We met as a chapter of my life closed. I was someone that I did not want to be anymore, and I was so excited to change. I saw you and grabbed the opportunity to become someone better, someone I could actually be proud of. But, it was so difficult.

My Alice, perhaps my love for you was impure. But, I loved you nonetheless. I'm sorry I can't change the past. I can't bring you back to life.

HUGO

You're going to love this next drink. *(Jumps from the stage)*

MAN

Bring it on.

HUGO

It's titled Baby. *(Hands the MAN a glass of another drink)*

MAN

For a drink in the house of horrors, this sure is a cute drink. *(Drinks it in one gulp)*

HUGO

The baby. It survived.

MAN

(Taken aback) But Alice died, and she took the medicine. She was on her first trimester.

The child couldn't have lived.

HUGO

But, it did. It wanted to live so bad that deformed, and poisoned, it clung to breath.

MAN

That was fifteen years ago. He'd almost be a man right now.

HUGO

Yes, a man.

MAN

My son...

HUGO

I don't think you have the right to call him that. After you killed your captain, you just ran away. From that moment on it carried the will to avenge its mother's murderer. Now, it is monumental. It envelopes you.

MAN

You lie.

HUGO

This place is a home to half-truths. Meet your baby boy, the Black Bordello (*twirls and presents the set*).

MAN

My son possessed the Black Bordello?

HUGO

It has kept itself in stasis, surviving the elements, time itself, only to meet its father. *La Mason*, he's finally here! Look at the face of your killer.

(The jukebox plays again. The light from the second floor flickers. We hear the fight between husband and wife. The photograph is once again thrown from the door, landing inches away from the MAN.)

ALICE

And, the house will never set you free.

(The MAN caresses the table.)

MAN

I do not know what the truth is anymore. I think I've gone mad. This is a fantasy world, nightmare scape, but even in the land of dreaming, I have my consciousness, if the child did survive to become this place, I cannot do anything but apologize. If that was a

lie, then I can only apologize as well. I am truly sorry. If I could make amends I would, but I cannot.

Did you become the house because I loved it so much, a love I could not give you?

(Opens the buttons of his shirt) Go ahead, phantoms, if you do wish to do me harm, then do it now.

(The jukebox stops playing.)

(To HUGO) You have the gun, shoot me.

HUGO

Not yet.

MAN

It's running late, and I have places to be. People are looking for me.

ALICE

You need to have the last drink before you can leave.

MAN

What is it?

ALICE

You. It's called You.

HUGO

The drink is you or rather inside you.

MAN

Oh my god, this place is depraved. If this is a dream, I'd have to go to the shrink right before they send me to the gallows. Okay. It's in me. So.

(The MAN plays Edith Piaf's No, je ne regrette rien". He takes three glasses, sets them on the floor, he unzips his pants and fills them with urine.)

(Picks up the glass) Salud! *(Drinks his own urine)* There I have settled my debts and faced my demons. I am not absolved of my past, but I will now stop punishing myself! It is time to move on.

ALICE

Your fly is still down.

MAN

Let it hang. My friends, this was a terrible experience but I think I needed it.

(The police sirens wail from outside)

And, I hear that my ride has come for me. Adieu! *(Walks to an exit)*

HUGO

(Points the gun at the MAN) Stop! They'll hang you for your war crimes. The gallows man will walk to the gallows.

MAN

Then so be it. *(Stops)* I have already judged myself, whatever they decide for me, I will go willingly meet my destiny. *(Exits, and closes the double doors behind him)*

(Shouts from the outside) I am a criminal, my sin was to live. Come at me, my victims.

(Gunshots are heard from the outside.)

(Silence.)

ALICE

Did you think he would actually drink his own piss?

HUGO

He's crazy.

ALICE

But, you were him, right. So you're crazy too or you will be crazy, eventually.

HUGO

Whatever, it was just a part. Let's go upstairs while we wait for our next customer.

(Heads up)

ALICE

I wonder who it will be. *(Follows HUGO)*

(Lighting dims to darkness.)

END.