

ACT II

Afternoon. There is no one on stage. The telephone rings. BERTHA enters and answers phone.

BERTHA Hello. Yes, that's right. No, he isn't here at the moment. It's Bertha. Oh! It's you, Mlle Gretchen! You're in Paris? Already! Oh you are early. Yes oh I see, right, right. Well, then, see you later. *(She hangs up. Doorbell rings)* Oh good God alive, who can that be? All this coming and going. It's no life for a maid, no life for anyone. *(She answers door)*

ROBERT *(off)* It's only me.

BERTHA *(off)* Oh. It's you, Monsieur. *(She enters.)*

(ROBERT enters with cases)

ROBERT Could you?

BERTHA No, I couldn't.

ROBERT There was a queue a mile long at the station. You do wonder why there are so many people in Paris. It's much more peaceful back at home in Aix.

BERTHA It wouldn't be so crowded in Paris if the people from the provinces didn't keep piling in.

ROBERT No, I suppose not.

BERTHA And what do you want with all these bags? I thought you were only here on business.

ROBERT I always believe in being prepared.

BERTHA I hope you're not going to stay too long.

ROBERT Goodness me! You're not very welcoming to your master's friends, are you?

BERTHA I'm only telling you for your own good. Just you wait and see, people coming and going all the time. You'd have been better off at the station and there'd have been more room for your bags!

ROBERT I'm a guest. I have been invited, you know.

BERTHA It's not a hotel.

ROBERT Everything seems beautifully organised.

BERTHA Organised. That's just it. It's too organised. Shall I tell you what I think?

ROBERT Well – I don't know.

BERTHA It's not human! That's what I think.

BERTHA It's all very well for Monsieur Bernard giving out invitations, left, right and centre, but I have to do all the work. What with you and your luggage and now Germany.

ROBERT What about Germany?

BERTHA She's just rung to say she's on her way.

ROBERT Well, that's all right, isn't it? Mademoiselle Gabriella has just taken off.

BERTHA I know, but Germany wants to stay for three days. She just said it to me, thinking it'll be a nice surprise for Monsieur.

ROBERT For me?

BERTHA No. For Monsieur. My Monsieur.

ROBERT You have a Monsieur?

BERTHA Of course I have a Monsieur.

ROBERT Oh, I see.

BERTHA My boss, I mean.

ROBERT Oh. Right. So, what does it matter if she stays three days?

BERTHA There may be friction... Well, it's nothing to do with me, of course. But Mlle Gloria – that's the American -

ROBERT Yes, I know. I've seen that one.

BERTHA Well, she's due back on Monday.

ROBERT Yes. Well, not to worry. It's only Saturday. Bernard will have plenty of time to work something out. Where shall I put my bags?

BERTHA You put them where you like. (*ROBERT crosses to Door 7.*) Not there, there won't be enough room there. (*ROBERT crosses to Door 1*) No, not that one. That's Monsieur and his wives' bedroom. So, not that one. Over there if you like. (*indicates Door 5*) It's quieter there on the courtyard. Oh just make yourself at home.

ROBERT Thank you very much indeed Bertha. That's very kind of you. (*Crosses to go out Door 5.*)

BERTHA No, it's not. I'm just doing what I'm told. I've got enough to do, thank you very much, without being kind to all Monsieur's guests.

ROBERT If you don't like it here, why don't you change your job?

BERTHA No! New Job. New problems. What's the point?

ROBERT Well that's an optimistic view.

BERTHA Look Monsieur, I'm a cheerful soul at heart. I like a bit of fun, but this place goes too far. But what can you expect if you're in domestic service? I mean there's no dignity in being a maid.

ROBERT (*carrying a case to Door 5*) Right. Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll get settled in.

BERTHA Stick your bags in there. They're in the way here. I'd help you with them myself but when I was a little girl the doctor told my mother – 'She's a great trier, your daughter, but not very strong, she must be very careful not to lift anything.'

ROBERT Not to lift anything. (*takes cases offstage*)

BERTHA So I try to be careful. And when you think about it, the body's not much of a thing, is it? Very feeble. It gets tired. It wears out.

ROBERT (*re enters*) That's absolutely true Bertha.

BERTHA So I let other people wear themselves out.

ROBERT I see what you mean. You are quite a cheerful person at heart, aren't you Bertha?

BERTHA Thank you. You don't often meet people who appreciate a maid's personality, do you?

ROBERT Quite, quite! Right, well, see you later.

BERTHA Oh, has sir had enough of me?

ROBERT No, no. Not at all!

BERTHA Oh yes. You've had enough of me. When people say, "See you later." especially to a maid, it always means they've had enough.

ROBERT No, I assure you.

BERTHA I'm getting on your nerves.

ROBERT Nonsense.

BERTHA Yes. I'm getting on your nerves.

ROBERT You are not getting on my nerves, look...

BERTHA Oh yes. Oh yes. Monsieur Bernard's exactly the same. Always brushing me off. Never wants to talk. But, you know monsieur, conversation is the only thing that separates humans from beasts. If human beings didn't speak they'd be beasts.

ROBERT Uh, yes. Yes, that's right. Beasts.

BERTHA It must be awful to be a beast.

ROBERT Huh!

BERTHA Don't you think?

ROBERT Yes yes, I suppose. I don't know anything about it.

BERTHA Well, I don't know anything about it, but I'm guessing...I sense it! A beast! What is a beast? Even less than a maid. That just about says it all! It's lucky I'm an optimist. That's what keeps me going.

ROBERT Could I have a bit of ice?

BERTHA No!

ROBERT Why?

BERTHA I'm defrosting the fridge.

ROBERT Oh. Right

BERTHA So, there's no ice.