

~~goes to the bathroom and washes his face. With a towel round his shoulders he impersonates Bernard. He tries some of Bernard's aftershave which he accidentally sprays in his eyes. He sits down with the towel over his head to remove the aftershave.~~

GRETCHEN *comes out of Door 1 and not recognising ROBERT throws herself at him.*)

GRETCHEN My love! My darling lover!

ROBERT Oh God!

GRETCHEN Excuse me. Sorry, sorry.

ROBERT No, really. Don't mention it.

GRETCHEN But, oh Monsieur, I'm so sorry.

ROBERT No harm done Mademoiselle, on the contrary.

GRETCHEN What are you doing in my flat?

ROBERT Your flat? Don't you mean Bernard's flat?

GRETCHEN If you like. But it's still mine – mine or Bernard's, it's the same thing.

ROBERT I'm an old friend of Bernard's. An old school friend.

GRETCHEN Oh?

ROBERT My name's Robert – I've forgotten my own name. Robert Castin.

GRETCHEN How do you do?

ROBERT How do you do? And you must be Gretchen?

GRETCHEN He's told you about me?

ROBERT Told me! My dear girl, it's Gretchen this, Gretchen that; here a Gretchen, there a Gretchen. It's Gretchen – Gretchen – everywhere.

GRETCHEN How divine!

ROBERT He hardly mentions anybody else.

GRETCHEN But how come you are here when he's not?

ROBERT Well – Bernard's just gone out.

GRETCHEN On business.

ROBERT That's it! Yes – on business. And he told me to wait for him. I just arrived – this morning – you see – from Aix.

GRETCHEN From Aix!

ROBERT Yes.

GRETCHEN It's not true!

ROBERT Oh! Yes, it's true – this morning on a train – from Aix.

GRETCHEN But that's marvellous.

ROBERT Yes, I like trains

GRETCHEN My mother lives in Aix.

ROBERT Not really.

GRETCHEN She's lived there for years. Whereabouts do you live in Aix?

ROBERT Near the station. Number 27.

GRETCHEN It's not true! The Bahnhofstrasse!

ROBERT The Bahnhof what?

GRETCHEN The Bahnhofstrasse.

ROBERT Oh! You mean the station.

GRETCHEN You must know my mother's house. It's on the corner of the Friedenstrasse.

ROBERT The Frieden – what?

GRETCHEN The Friedenstrasse.

ROBERT I don't think I know that one.

GRETCHEN But you must. It's the next street down from the Bahnhofstrasse.

ROBERT Is it?

GRETCHEN Come on! You know it.

ROBERT Know it! I can't even pronounce it.

GRETCHEN Well, you know the corner? Where Napoleon is?

ROBERT The grocer?

GRETCHEN You're not trying. No – Napoleon, the chap on a horse. A statue.

ROBERT A large statue?

GRETCHEN Enormous.

ROBERT I don't know it. No, I assure you. I've lived in Aix all my life. I can show you my papers, I can show you my credentials. My grandfather made olive and sunflower oil, my father did almond oil and I do walnut. Walnut oil I mean. In short, my family have oiled the whole of Provence!

GRETCHEN Provence?

ROBERT Yes. Aix is in Provence, isn't it?

GRETCHEN But I was talking about Aix-la-Chapelle?

ROBERT I was talking about Aix-en-Provence.

GRETCHEN Obviously.

ROBERT So we are both from Aix, but not the same Aix.

GRETCHEN I suppose so. I really am very sorry.

ROBERT It's too disappointing. You would have made a marvellous neighbour.

GRETCHEN You're very kind.

ROBERT Not at all, Mademoiselle –

GRETCHEN Gretchen. You may call me Gretchen, since you're a friend of Bernard's.

ROBERT And I'm Robert Castin.

GRETCHEN I shall call you Robert.

ROBERT Good Gretchen. How do you do.

GRETCHEN How do you do. You won't say anything to Bernard about me kissing you, will you?

ROBERT Only by mistake, unfortunately.

GRETCHEN A mistake yes...but a kiss all the same.

ROBERT Don't worry. I won't say a word. But even if it hadn't been a mistake, I wouldn't have told him anything.

GRETCHEN Thank you, you're a gentleman...But if there hadn't been a mistake I wouldn't have kissed you, so...

ROBERT Yes, and anyway, a mistake like that, well, it doesn't really count, you know. It was so sudden. I've forgotten about it already.

GRETCHEN Didn't it mean anything then?

ROBERT You didn't give me much time. And there was no anticipation and I think that's very important, don't you? So –

GRETCHEN So – ?

ROBERT So to ensure my complete silence and my absolute discretion, perhaps you'd better give me another one.

GRETCHEN Another one?

ROBERT Another kiss. I quite liked the first one.

GRETCHEN Because you weren't expecting it...It's the element of surprise.

ROBERT Hmm...Yes...but it could have been a nasty surprise...whereas it was a nice one and I wasn't able to get the full benefit, you see, completely...That's why, if you wouldn't mind doing it again...

GRETCHEN Again?

ROBERT Just once.

GRETCHEN But it would be awful of me to do it again! I'd have no excuse for my mistake this time and I'd regret it for the rest of my life.

ROBERT Let's not exaggerate.

GRETCHEN I see you don't know the German soul.

ROBERT Uh, no...not very well.

GRETCHEN That's why you don't know what the knowledge of good and evil is like.

ROBERT Evil? But when you get married you'll have to kiss all of Bernard's friends.

GRETCHEN Not on the mouth! And anyway, when the bride kisses the friends of the groom, it's in front of her husband. He's there watching.

ROBERT I've never thought that quite fair, have you? There are particular circumstances. Ours for example.

GRETCHEN I don't see that our case is so special. In fact, I think we should both feel very guilty. We are all alone in my fiancé's flat –

ROBERT Please don't make a tragedy out of it. It's not enormously important.

GRETCHEN Then why are you insisting?

ROBERT Because we 're from Aix.

GRETCHEN But not the same Aix. Not the same Aix at all! Aix-la-Chapelle.

ROBERT Aix – Aix – Aix. All you can talk about is Aix. Can't you allow yourself one innocent kiss?

GRETCHEN It would be the second.

ROBERT I didn't count the first. That was just my way of saying hello.

GRETCHEN You really are very incorrigible.

ROBERT You really are very beautiful.

GRETCHEN But I am engaged to Bernard.

ROBERT Exactly. You won't get another chance. And nor will I. If we lived in America we could kiss each other at the drop of a hat, and if it wouldn't be wrong in America, why should it be wrong here? After all America's a great country.

GRETCHEN So is Germany. (*She kisses him abruptly and breaks off.*) You see? We're a great country too.

ROBERT You crept up on me again. I was n't expecting it. Where are you going?

GRETCHEN I'm just leaving you; otherwise you'll end up persuading me that American fiancées always kiss their fiancé's best friends twenty-five times on the mouth, and I'm sure that's not true!

ROBERT Well, now I've heard cases where...

GRETCHEN No! Shut up! What you're doing isn't right!

ROBERT You're just afraid that I'll manage to convince you...

GRETCHEN No...but you do have advantages. You're charming and quite funny so I need to be careful...And I love Bernard....There...Auf Wiedersehen.

ROBERT Gretchen.
(She goes into the stage right room and shuts the door just as BERTHA comes in with cigarettes)

~~BERTHA Here we are.~~