

DANIEL

I won't eat another thing in this place!

(She goes out laughing. DANIEL paces up and down.)

Keep calm. Keep calm. Got to keep calm.

(He picks up a paper, tries to read, then throws it down in disgust. He makes a sudden decision, collects an empty suitcase from upstage and runs upstairs. The stage is empty for a moment. Then a cracked voice is heard outside, singing. MERLUCHE appears on the terrace. He is about fifty, tattered, jovial and very shaggy and carries a haversack.)

MERLUCHE

(knocking on the window) Anyone at home? Who'll treat Merluche to a drink then? Don't all speak at once.

(DANIEL comes downstairs.)

DANIEL

Who are you? What are you doing here?

MERLUCHE

(bowing) My apologies! And a very good morning to you! Allow me to introduce myself. Merluche is the name. Artist by profession. I'm on holiday just now. Do you know, a very unhappy thing happened – I was sitting down to my breakfast this morning, by the rocks, in the sunshine, with my feet in the stream, when plop, my bottle of red slips right out of my hands. All that lovely wine in the river! What a waste. So I said to myself, there's a chalet over there among those trees, I said. I'll see if I can't borrow some liquid refreshment. Which I'll pay back, of course, in cash or in kind, whichever suits. You wouldn't have a bottle of wine to sell, I suppose?

DANIEL

(putting some clothes into a suitcase) No, I'm afraid not.

MERLUCHE

Whisky, Brandy, Rum?

DANIEL

Look, would you mind . . .

(He indicates the door.)

MERLUCHE

Right. Right! You take me for a tramp.

DANIEL

No, no –

MERLUCHE

I'm an artist. I tell you. The prosperous classes always confuse artists with tramps. being the two

social groups who don't wash every day. I'm not a tramp, sir. I have papers.

(He takes some papers out of a battered wallet and points with his finger.)

'Brissard. Paul. Known as Merluche. Profession. artist.' Merluche is a nom de plume. Or nom de brush, as you might say. Of course, this card is eight years old . . . since then I've had my setbacks. Woman trouble. Ah, women!

DANIEL Don't tell me!

MERLUCHE Ah, you've been through it too, eh? Then you understand. that's a great help.

(He eyes the bottles of drink.)

Would it be agreeable if I had a little something?

DANIEL Help yourself. But be quick.

MERLUCHE Greased lightning, you watch me. Would you like me to do a portrait of you, sir? That's a very mobile face you have, most expensive.

DANIEL No, thank you.

MERLUCHE Ah, go on do! Don't worry about the price. We can come to terms about that.

DANIEL *(pulling a bank-note out of his pocket)* Here. Be off now. Go and drink my health.

MERLUCHE I'll drink to your success. Cheers. *(He looks at the note.)* I think you've made a mistake. You've given me . . .

DANIEL Never mind, keep it.

MERLUCHE Why, you're a Medici! A patron of the arts! Do you know I haven't seen a note like that since the summer, and then I had to share it with a friend. Mind you, it wasn't difficult work. Although it isn't everyone can do it. It means having to show your papers, and being able to write your name on a register. And there's plenty I know can't do that! Well, I won't outstay my welcome. *(He makes a low bow.)* And thank you once again.

- DANIEL *(looking intently at him)* Look at me.
- MERLUCHE *(touching his face nervously)* Anything wrong?
- DANIEL Have you ever worn a beard?
- MERLUCHE That depends on the time of year.
- DANIEL That money you earned in the summer. I suppose you didn't by any chance get it for – no, that's too much to hope for . . . and yet . . . I have a feeling I've seen you before somewhere. Do you remember me at all?
- MERLUCHE Let's see . . . your face, all things considered, isn't unfamiliar to me . . . I seem to—
- DANIEL Think carefully. I don't want to influence you. Sit down.
- MERLUCHE Oh, I couldn't. Not on these nice chairs.
- DANIEL Don't be absurd, man, sit down.
- MERLUCHE *(dusting his trousers)* Mind you. They're clean.
(He sits down.)
- DANIEL *(shaking with suppressed excitement)* If you recognise me, I'll give you something to make it worth your while.
- MERLUCHE Oh, well, that's nice. What?
- DANIEL Anything you like. Now think. Think hard.
- MERLUCHE Anything! I'll recognise you in just one second! Let's see. Yes. Yes, I've seen you before. Where, though? Help me. Give me a clue. Please.
- DANIEL I can't. It's got to come from you. Look at me carefully.
- MERLUCHE Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear . . . where could I have seen you?
- DANIEL You don't live here the whole year round, do you?
- MERLUCHE Bless you, no! The winter I spend in town. In jail, or in lodgings – if possible with a bit of heating. I emerge in spring like a butterfly and head south, to the coast. Then about this time of year I come up to the Alps.

- DANIEL Where did you go this summer?
- MERLUCHE (*very much the man of the world*) Juan les Pins, of course, doesn't everyone?
- DANIEL Could you have seen me there?
- MERLUCHE (*triumphant*) That's it! I remember you now! You're the one who got married in that little church, what was it called? To a tall blonde lady. Yes, I remember you now. Got it!
- DANIEL (*breathlessly*) Quiet! Don't talk so loud. Someone might hear you.
- MERLUCHE (*wisely*) Ah . . . another woman, is there?
- DANIEL The priest might be hiding out there.
- MERLUCHE The priest, eh? Aha, I see, I see, I see. You've set up house with another woman. (*Chuckling.*) There's a devil! Didn't last long, that romance, then! And you looked like a pair of turtle-doves, too. Ah, it's a cow of a life, isn't it?
- DANIEL I can't explain, there isn't time, and anyway you wouldn't believe me – but your evidence is absolutely vital to me. It torpedoes their whole scheme. You're the slip, the vital flaw.
- MERLUCHE A flaw, am I?
- DANIEL Now stay where you are and don't say a word about this to anyone. You're an artist, so you can do my portrait. Go on. Start drawing.
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- (*He snatches paper and pencil off the desk, gives them to MERLUCHE and sits down.*)
- MERLUCHE (*bewildered*) Well, I'm afraid I'm a bit rusty, you know.
- DANIEL Never mind. Just scribble something. Now listen. In a minute a woman will come in here –
- MERLUCHE Your lady friend?
- DANIEL God, no!
- MERLUCHE Your second wife?
- DANIEL No! Well, yes . . . yes, that's right, my second wife.