

EXTRACT

GUILT

an opera without music

JOHN SHAND

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NOTE ON THE SCRIPT

This is an unedited manuscript as provided to us by the playwright. We distribute it in good faith; however it may contain layout inconsistencies or typographic errors.

CHARACTERS

ACTOR 1: Grandier (a priest, 39) and Dumage (a merchant, 41)

ACTOR 2: Jeanne (a hunchbacked prioress, 32) and Madame Bontemps (a jailer, 33)

ACTOR 3: Surin (a Jesuit exorcist, 35) and Bontemps (a jailer, 36)

ACTOR 4: De Brou (a magistrate, 50)

ACTOR 5: Brigitte (De Brou's daughter, 18)

PROLOGUE

[The town square, Loudun. GRANDIER, wearing a hessian smock, stands apart from SURIN, DE BROU, JEANNE and BRIGITTE.]

Grandier:

Dear God, Lord and Judge of all men.

Surin:

He was taken to the place of torture,

De Brou:

And there was strapped down on a bench.

Jeanne:

Priests blessed with holy water all the apparatus,

Brigitte:

So no devils could apply their darkest arts,

Surin:

And somehow mitigate

De Brou:

The unspeakable horror of his torment.

Jeanne:

The bones of his feet,

Brigitte:

His shins,

Surin:

His knees,

De Brou:

Were broken,

Jeanne:

Crushed,

Surin:

And pulverized.

Grandier:
Saviour of the oppressed, help me!

Brigitte:
Between each torment

Surin:
I asked were he ready

De Brou:
To confess.

Jeanne:
But all that issued from his mouth

Brigitte:
Were screams.

Surin & De Brou:
Confess!

Jeanne & Brigitte:
They shouted.

Grandier:
God grant me strength to stand the horrors to which I am condemned.

Surin:
For three-quarters of an hour

De Brou:
They turned his legs

Jeanne:
To bloody jelly.

Brigitte:
Only when he fainted did they fear

Surin:
That he might cheat the fire.

Grandier:

Forgive my sins and receive my soul.

Brigitte:

To his interrogators the facts were plain:

De Brou:

The Devil had made him insensible to pain.

Surin:

We needed his signature to silence the mutterings of doubt, so the mouths of hysterical nuns would again name enemies of Church and State. Complete control lay a few bonfires from our grasp.

De Brou:

But rather than confess

Jeanne:

He prayed.

Grandier:

In your infinite wisdom you must know I am only guilty of much lesser crimes.

Brigitte:

They gave up, and carried him to a cart drawn by six mules.

Jeanne:

He was supposed to pray at the door of St Ursula's,

Brigitte:

But when lowered to his shattered knees,

Surin:

He fell flat upon his face.

De Brou:

The mood of the people had now turned:

Jeanne:

They felt pity for their priest,

Brigitte:
Though six thousand had come to see him burn.

Surin:
They carried him from cart to stake,

Jeanne:
and because he could not stand,

Brigitte:
To an iron chair he was bound.

Grandier:
Forgive all those who would have me burn, and let them pray for their sins.

De Brou:
The captain of the guard vowed to strangle him before the fire was lit.

Jeanne:
Priests blessed the pyre with holy water

Brigitte:
So no devils could apply their darkest arts.

Surin:
And somehow mitigate

De Brou:
The unspeakable horror of his torment.

Grandier:
Holy Mary, Mother of God, hear my prayers.

Jeanne:
The gibes of the crowd enflamed the priests

Brigitte:
Who lit the fire before the hour, so the captain could not keep his vow,
and Grandier was burned alive.

Grandier:
Dear God!

Surin:

He cried the name of our Lord as code.

Grandier:

Dear God! Do not abandon me!

De Brou:

At first he coughed,

Jeanne:

But then his screams

Brigitte:

Froze hearts and blood alike.

ACT ONE

[Scene 1. Grandier's house. GRANDIER is trimming his ostentatious moustaches before a mirror.]

Grandier:

'Tis plain God lingered when first framing thee,
 but why so long, pet, why so long?
 What purpose lay in lavishing such looks
 as might threaten one's humility,
 if not to snare the weaker sex?
 And, after all, by bedding them, do I
 not let them touch the very ladder to our Lord?
 So in a sense my seed anoints:
 a sort of sacrament.
 One does God's work as best one can
 in any way He chooses. But
 to linger on a single lass too long is wrong.
 Even now, as if by right,
 that Christine claws and clutches me:
 three months, she thinks, is all it takes
 to make a poor priest hers;
 to curdle clinging thoughts and suffocation,
 where all I meant was play.
 She even dares to chide me 'bout not caring,
 and snipe at faults she hunts to find –

God's death! But that must be a sin:
 to nitpick God's anointed!
 I need new fields to play upon:
 not another petal-shedding widow
 from th' unpunctual side of thirty
 draughty winters, but a rose
 still yet to bloom; a maid, mid-teened;
 a nymph aglow with life's first flush,
 who'll dare make no demands,
 and whose discretion may
 be gusseted with a little fear.
 De Brou has such a one:
 Her golden hair would make the sun
 droop prematurely in his course across the sky
 for shame of having been outshone.
 Every flash of her dark, demure eyes
 are enticements she doesn't know she sends.
 The tantalizing swelling of her body
 upon her flimsy limbs
 begs for a man's caress.
 To Heaven angels would repair
 and paint their white wings grey
 in penance for losing out to her
 in piety and purity.
 Wives are fine sport, it's true,
 for a rainy afternoon,
 but a virgin!
 She could last the whole week through!
 And it's no more than you deserve,
 you devil, Grandier!

[A knock on the door. Enter DE BROU.]

Grandier:

De Brou! *[They embrace as good friends.]* I was thinking of you
 even then, and here you are!

De Brou:

Only good, I hope!

Grandier:

Surely even a priest thinks ill of the magistrate at his peril. And who dares toy when one noble frame contains both a man of letters and the defender of our laws? Wine?

De Brou:

A man of letters? Hardly. Though the muse does favour me from time to time with a verse or two. Nothing to write home about, but were you to insist, you just might twist my arm to recite some lines but newly hatched. [*He coughs.*]

'Twas on an icebound river I
First saw the King go skating by
His every movement's charm and grace
Bespoke quintessence of his race –

Grandier:

Stop there, de Brou. Very, very good, indeed. But let me hear the whole another time, when writing my sermon is not so pressing.

De Brou:

Of course! Then I shall, if you'll permit, come directly to the point, even though it be construed ill-mannered between friends to leap to business with such speed.

Grandier:

Not at all. I beg you: leap away!

De Brou:

It concerns Brigitte, my daughter.

Grandier:

A good girl. Surely she has little to confess.

De Brou:

It is not her soul that is endangered, Grandier, but her music. I believe it ill becomes a man like me if his daughter cannot sing and play enough to charm his friends and help her snare a perfect match. Besides, she has a bright and eager mind, and I had hoped that you might find the time to take her under your wing: brush up her scales, and perhaps slip in some cogent words on chastity: at her age there cannot be too much of that.



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