

**L'ESCLAVAGE
DES NOIRS,
OU
L'HEUREUX NAUFRAGE,**

PROSE DRAMA IN THREE ACTS.

Performed at the Comédie Française, in December 1789.

By Mme de Gouges, Author of *The Forced Vows*.

IN PARIS,
AT

Widow Duchesne, rue Saint-Jacques,
Widow Bailly, barrière des Sergens,
And at Sellers of New Publications.

MARCH 1792

*Black Slavery, or the Fortunate Shipwreck.*¹

PREFACE

Throughout the centuries of ignorance men have declared war on each other; in the most enlightened century they want to destroy themselves. Where is the science, the regime, the epoch or the age that will allow men to live in peace? The Wise can deaden themselves or lose themselves in metaphysical observations. I, who have only studied the good principles of Nature, can no longer define mankind, and my primitive knowledge has taught me only to make judgements according to my soul. Also my works are only coloured by humanity.

Here, finally, is the Drama that avarice and ambition have banned and that just men approve. What should I believe of these diverse opinions? As Author I am entitled to approve of this philanthropic work; but as a witness hearing the disastrous statements concerning the problems of America, I would abhor my Work, if an invisible hand had not operated that revolution that I participated in only by prophesying it. Meanwhile I am blamed, I am accused despite the ignorance surrounding *l'Esclavage des Noirs*, received in 1783 by the Comédie Française, printed in 1786, and played in December 1789. The Colonists, who spared no cost in satisfying their ambition, won over the Actors, and it is claimed.....that obstructing this Drama did not have a negative effect on the takings. But I neither want to prosecute the Actors nor the Colonists, I wish to prosecute myself.

I denounce myself in public; here I am under arrest: I will defend myself in the august, frivolous...but redoubtable Tribunal. I will allow myself to be tried by a ballot of conscience; I will win or lose by the plurality of votes.

The Author, the friend of truth, the Author who has no other interest than to recall men to the well-intentioned principles of Nature, who nevertheless respects the law, and

¹ This anti-slavery play first published in 1788 under the title *Zamore et Mirza, ou l'Heureux naufrage* was considerably altered and republished in March 1792 as *l'Esclavage des Noirs*. This second version was never performed in the author's lifetime although it has been produced a few times since the 1980s and is the only one of de Gouges's many dramatic works to have gained renown. For more details regarding the genesis of the play see *Zamore et Mirza* available in translation on www.olympedegouges.eu.

social conventions, is always an estimable person, and is to be pitied rather than blamed if her writings do not produce all the good that they promised.

It is therefore important for me that the Public, and the detractors of my Work, be convinced of the purity of my maxims. This production may be lacking in talent but not in morality. Opinion must reassess me in light of this morality.

The Public reading this Drama, conceived at a time when it should have appeared as a Novel inspired by antique enchantment, will recognize that it is the faithful portrayal of the actual situation in America. I present this Drama today, in the fourth year of liberty, as it was approved by the despotism of the press. I offer it to the Public as an authentic work necessary for my justification. Is this production incendiary? No. Does it have a seditious character? No. Why do the Colonists reproach me and why do they speak of me with so little care? But they are unhappy, I pity them, and I will respect their deplorable fate; I will not even allow myself to remind them of their inhumanity: I will only allow myself to cite all that I have written to conserve their property and their most prized interest. This Drama is the proof.

Actually, it is to you, slaves, men of colour, that I will speak; perhaps I have an indisputable right to criticize your ferocity; cruel men, by imitating your tyrants, you justify them. The majority of your Masters were humane and good, and in your blind rage you do not distinguish the innocent victims from your persecutors. Men were not born to be put in chains yet you prove that they are necessary. If force majeure is on your side why exercise all the fury of your blazing lands. Poison, swords, daggers, ingeniously barbaric and utterly appalling tortures cost you nothing, they say. What cruelty! What inhumanity! Ah! How you make those suffer who wished to prepare for you, by more tempered means, a gentler fate, a worthier fate than the illusory advantages with which the authors of the French and American calamities have misled you. Tyranny will dog your footsteps just as crime has attached itself to these perverted men. You will never be able to agree amongst yourselves. Fear my prediction for you know whether or not it is founded on solid truth. I pronounce my oracles based on reason and divine justice. I retract nothing: I abhor your Tyrants; your cruelty horrifies me.

Ah! If my advice reaches you, if you understand its full worth, I dare hope that it will calm your untamed spirits and return you to a concord that is indispensable to the good of the Colony and your own interests. These interests consist of the social order, your rights within the wisdom of the Law; this Law recognizes all men as brothers; this august Law that had been plunged, by cupidity, into chaos has at last come out of the shadows. If savage, ferocious, man disregards it then he is ripe to be put in irons and tamed like the brutes.

Slaves, people of colour, you who live closer to Nature than the Europeans, than your Tyrants, recognize these gentle laws and prove that an enlightened Nation has not acted in error by treating you as human beings and giving you back the rights that you never had in America. To get closer to justice and humanity remember, and always keep in mind, that it is in the bosom of your Homeland that you are condemned to this appalling servitude and that it is your own flesh and blood who bring you to market: that in your dreadful climes, men are hunted in a way that animals are elsewhere. The true Philosophy of enlightened man obliges him to tear his own kind from the bosom of a horrible, primitive, situation where men not only sell each other, but where they still eat each other. A true man only thinks of mankind. These are my principles; they are quite different from those of the so-called defenders of Liberty, of these firebrands, of these incendiary characters who preach equality and liberty with all the authority and ferocity of Despots. America, France, and maybe the Universe, will owe their downfall to a few demons that France has produced, to the decadence of Empires and to the collapse of the arts and sciences. Perhaps this is a deadly truth. Men have aged, they seem to want to be reborn, and according to the principles of M. *Brissot*, an animal life suits man perfectly; I love Nature

better than he does for she has filled my soul with the laws of humanity and wise equality but when I consider this Nature I often see that she is contradictory in her ways and all appears to me to be subordinated. Animals have their Empires, Kings, Chiefs and their reign is peaceable; an invisible kindly hand seems to guide their administration. I am not altogether against the principles of M. *Brissot* but I think they are impracticable among men: I discussed this matter before he did. I dared, following the august Author of the *Social Contract*, offer the *Primitive Happiness of Man*, published in 1789. It is a Novel that I wrote; never will men be pure enough or great enough to return to this primitive happiness that I could only uncover in a pleasing fiction. Ah! If only it were possible that they might reach it then the wise and humane laws that I established in this social contract would render all men brothers, they would invoke the Sun as the true God; but ever at odds, the *Social Contract*, the *Primitive Happiness* and the august Work of M. *Brissot* will always be chimeras and not objects of useful instruction.² The imitations of Jean-Jacques are disfigured in this new regime so what chance is there for those of M^{me} *de Gouges* or those of M. *Brissot*? It is easy for even the most ignorant to instigate revolutions on a few exercise books. But alas! The experience of all Peoples, and those that make up the French, have taught me that the most learned and the most wise do not establish their doctrines without producing ills of all sorts. That is what the history of all countries has to offer.

I am straying for the point of my Preface and time does not allow me to give free rein to philosophical reasoning. I wished to justify *The Enslavement of the Blacks* that the odious Colonists had banned, and presented as an incendiary work. Let the public judge and pronounce, I await its judgement for my justification.

CHARACTERS

ZAMOR, an educated Indian.

MIRZA, a young Indian woman, Zamor's lover.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, Governor of an Indian Island.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, his wife.

VALÈRE, a French Gentleman, married to Sophie.

SOPHIE, M. de Saint-Frémont's natural child.

BETZI, MME de Saint-Frémont's Maid.

CORALINE, a Slave

AN INDIAN, Overseer of M. de Saint-Frémont's Slaves.

AZOR, M. de Saint-Frémont's Valet.

M. DE BELFORT, Garrison Major.

A JUDGE.

A SERVANT of M. de Saint-Frémont's.

AN ELDERLY INDIAN.

SEVERAL LOCAL INDIANS, of both sexes and Slaves.

GRENADIERS AND FRENCH SOLDIERS.

² Jacques Pierre Brissot (1754 – 1793) writer, lawyer and deputy influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the abolitionists he met in England, wrote theoretical works on law, monarchy and slavery. On his return to France, and four years after de Gouges had written her anti-slavery play *Zamore et Mirza* Brissot co-founded the French abolitionist group la Société des Amis des Noirs. If one believes friends such as M^{me} Roland his style of writing and his general outlook on life were not dissimilar to those of de Gouges. Others portrayed him as a self-serving scallywag, ex spy and altogether unsavoury character. He made enemies of Marat and Robespierre by supporting the Girondins and their war plans. Like de Gouges he had nuanced views about how France should deal with its deposed king. He was guillotined along with nineteen other Girondins a few days before de Gouges.

The first Act takes place on a deserted island; the second in a large Indian Town neighbouring the Island, and the third in a Plantation close to the Town.³

ACT ONE⁴

The set represents the shore of a deserted island edged and surrounded by steep rocks through which the distant sea can be glimpsed. At the front of the stage, to one side, is the opening of a hut surrounded by local fruit trees; the other side is filled by the edge of a seemingly impenetrable forest. As the curtain rises a storm is agitating the waves; a ship is seen being wrecked on the shore. The wind drops and the sea gradually becomes calm.

FIRST SCENE

ZAMOR AND MIRZA.

ZAMOR - Calm your fears, my dear Mirza; as far as I can tell that vessel has not been sent by our persecutors, it is French. Alas! It has just broken up on the shore; none of the crew are saved.

MIRZA - My only fear is for you; punishment holds no fear for me, I would bless the fate that allowed us to end our days together.

ZAMOR- Oh my Mirza! How you touch my heart!

MIRZA - Alas! What have you done? My love made you guilty. Without the unfortunate Mirza you would never have fled from the best of all Masters, and you would not have killed his right-hand man.

ZAMOR - The barbarian! He loved you in order to tyrannise you. Love made him ferocious. The tiger dared to accuse me of the crime that he inflicted on you for not responding to his unbridled passion. The education given to me by our Governor added to the sensibility of my primitive manners; it made me even less able to bear the appalling despotism that gave me orders to punish you.

MIRZA - You should have left me to die; you would still be with our Governor who cherishes you like his child. I am responsible for your misfortune, and his.

ZAMOR - Me, leave you to die! Ye Gods! Eh! Why remind me of the virtues and goodness of this respectable Master. I did my duty by him; I repaid his kindness with the tenderness of a son, rather than the devotion of a slave. He thinks I am guilty and that is what makes my torment more appalling. He does not realise the monstrosity of the man he trusted. I

³ In her original *Zamore et Mirza* de Gouges explicitly states that the action takes place in the East Indies. This fictitious setting was in part to appeal to the censors by potentially palliating the play's anti-slavery message. In this new version, given her references to America in the preface and the changing attitudes to slavery, the setting was understood to be the West Indies.

⁴ Zamor and Mirza always use 'tu' when addressing each other, but 'vous' when addressing others; Valère and Sophie address each other as 'tu' as well as Zamor and Mirza, everyone else, unless footnoted, is addressed formally. M. and Mme de Saint-Frémont, use 'vous' when addressing each other in public and, generally, but not always, 'tu' in private. When a character uses 'tu' in other circumstances I have marked it [2ps] to indicate the pattern in that particular scene. Betzi, Azor and Coraline use 'tu' amongst themselves.

The use of 'tu' and 'vous' can be very coded and nuanced, implying degrees of friendship, intimacy or superiority that are unavailable in modern English e.g. when Valère first addresses Zamor he uses 'tu', not because he sees a slave but because he sees a man like himself, who may even be the ruler of the island. That exchange alone, by denying race or class distinctions, reflects de Gouges's attitudes to the accepted norms of social superiority. In the autumn of 1792 'tu' began to represent the egalitarian ideals enshrined in the Rights of Man, its use marking the advent of citizenship in what had been a population of subjects. Generally only used to address children and servants it was a significant change of usage. Later 'tu' was de rigueur – a law being passed to enforce its use in all administrative areas in November 1793 – and 'vous' became a sign of dangerous aristocratic leanings. When Robespierre fell in July 1794 the old patterns of address returned.

saved others like myself from his tyranny. But my dear Mirza let us abandon these too sweet and too destructive recollections: Nature is now our only protector. Generous Mother! You know we are innocent. No, you will never abandon us, and these deserted places will shield us from all eyes.

MIRZA - The little that I know, I owe to you Zamor. But, tell me, why do Europeans and Planters have such advantages over us, poor slaves? They are after all just like us; we are human beings like them: why then such a difference between their kind and ours?

ZAMOR - This difference is a very insignificant thing; it exists only in colour, but the advantages that they have over us are immense. Skill put them above Nature: instruction made Gods of them and we are mere mortals. They use us in these climes as they use animals in theirs. They came to these parts, seized the land, the wealth, the Native Islanders; then these proud pillagers of the property of a peaceable home-loving people, shed all the blood of their noble victims, divided the bloody spoils among themselves and enslaved us in recompense for the riches that they ravished and that we maintain on their behalf. These are the very fields they reap, sown with the corpses of Planters, and the harvest is actually watered with our sweat and our tears. Most of these barbaric masters treat us with a cruelty that would make Nature tremble. Our too unhappy kind has become used to these chastisements. They carefully guard against instructing us. If our eyes were to open we would be horrified by the state to which they have reduced us and we could shake off a yoke that is as cruel as it is shameful. But is it in our power to alter our destiny? A man debased by slavery loses all his energy; the most crushed among us are the least unhappy. I always showed such zeal to my master but I was careful never to let my friends know what I was thinking. God! Deflect the inauspiciousness that still threatens these climes; soften the hearts of our Tyrants and return to man the rights that have been lost in the very bosom of Nature.

MIRZA - How we are to be pitied!

ZAMOR - Perhaps, before too long, our destiny will change. A gentle and consoling principle has rent the veil of error in Europe. Enlightened men view us with compassion; we shall be indebted to them for the return of that precious liberty, the greatest treasure of mankind, that cruel pillagers took from us so long ago.

MIRZA - I would be so happy to be as instructed as you but I only know how to love you.

ZAMOR - Your artlessness charms me; it is the imprint of Nature. I am leaving you for a moment. Go and pick some fruit. I am going to the shoreline to gather up the debris from the wreck. But what do I see? A woman battling the waves! Oh, Mirza! I fly to save her. Must abject misery excuse us from being humane?

He goes down alongside the rock.

SCENE II

MIRZA, *alone* - Zamor will save that unfortunate woman. How could I not love one so tender-hearted, so compassionate? Now that I am unhappy I am more aware how sweet it is to help others in need.

She exits on the forest side.

SCENE III

VALÈRE, *alone, enters from the opposite side from which Mirza exited* – The waves are still crashing, nothing appears, oh my wife, you are lost forever! Can I live without you? No,

I must join you. I gathered my strength to save your life and I alone have escaped the fury of the sea. Breathing fills me with horror; separated from you, every moment becomes doubly painful. In vain I search for you, in vain I call for you. Your voice echoes in my heart but it doesn't sound in my ear. I shall follow you.

He moves with difficulty and collapses at the back of the stage, against a rock.

A thick fog is clouding my eyes, my strength is gone! Almighty God, give me enough vigour to drag myself as far as the sea! I cannot stand.

He is immobilised by exhaustion.

SCENE IV

VALÈRE, MIRZA.

MIRZA, *running up and noticing Valère* – Oh God! Who is this man? Suppose he were coming to take Zamor and separate me from him? Alas! What would become of me? But no, perhaps his intentions are not so bad, he is not one of our persecutors. I suffer...despite my fears I cannot stop myself from helping him. I cannot bear to see him in this state any longer. He looks like a Frenchman. (*To Valère.*) Sir, Sir, Frenchman...He is not responding. What should I do? (*She calls.*) Zamor, Zamor. (*Thinking.*) Let me climb onto the rock to see if he is coming. (*She runs up and comes straight down.*) I cannot see him. (*She comes back to Valère.*) Frenchman, Frenchman, answer me. He does not reply. How can I help him? I have nothing; how unhappy that makes me! (*She takes Valère's arm and taps his palm.*) Poor stranger, he is really ill and Zamor, who is stronger than I am, is not returned. But let me go to our hut to see what I can find to help him recover his senses.

She exits.

SCENE V

VALÈRE, ZAMOR, SOPHIE.

ZAMOR, *entering from beside the rock carries Sophie in his arms who seems to have fainted; she is wearing a levite style dress with a belt, her hair is dishevelled*⁵ – Madame, recover your strength; I am but an Indian slave but I shall help you.

SOPHIE, *in a worn out voice* – Whoever you are, leave me alone. I find your pity more cruel than the waves. I have lost what I held most dear. My life is unbearable. Oh Valère! Oh my husband! What has become of you?

VALÈRE – Whose voice is that? Sophie?

SOPHIE, *spotting him* – What do I see?...It is him!

VALÈRE *gets up and falls at her feet* – Almighty God, you have given me back Sophie! Oh dearest wife. The object of my tears and my affection, I yield to my pain and my joy.

SOPHIE – Divine providence! You saved me! Complete your work and give me back my father.

⁵ This style of dress was made popular by the actresses of the Théâtre Français when acting in plays set in the Orient. The defining elements were a large coloured sash around the waist, long sleeves and often a cut away front revealing an underskirt. The relatively loose fit of this fashionable dress gave rise to a certain amount of criticism.

SCENE VI

VALÈRE, ZAMOR, SOPHIE, MIRZA.

Mirza runs in bringing fruit and water; she stops in surprise at seeing a woman.

ZAMOR – Come closer Mirza, do not be afraid. They are unfortunate people like us; we are duty bound to help them.

VALÈRE – Compassionate being to whom I owe my life and that of my spouse, you are not a Savage! You neither speak like one nor act like one. Are you the master of this Island?

ZAMOR – No, but we have been living alone here for the last few days. You seem to me to be French. If the company of slaves is not beneath you they will gladly share the possession of this Island with you and, if destiny allows, we shall end our days together.

SOPHIE, *to Valère* – I find these words very affecting! (*To the Slaves.*) Generous mortals, I would accept your offer if I were not going further to seek out a father whom I may never find! We have been roaming the seas for two years and have yet to find him.

VALÈRE – Well! Let us stay here; let us accept the hospitality of these Indians for a while, and believe, my dear Sophie, that by dint of perseverance we shall find the author of your days on this Continent.

SOPHIE – Cruel destiny! We have lost everything, how can we continue our search?

VALÈRE – I share your sorrow. (*To the Indians.*) Generous mortals, do not abandon us.

MIRZA – Us, abandon you! Never, no never!

ZAMOR – Yes, my dear Mirza, let us console them in their misfortune. (*To Valère and Sophie.*) Rely on me. I shall search near the rocks; if I find among the ship's debris the things that you have lost I promise to bring them to you. Enter our hut, unhappy Strangers; you need to rest. I shall try to soothe your agitated minds.

SOPHIE – Compassionate mortals, we owe you so much! You have saved our lives, how can I ever repay you?

ZAMOR – You owe us nothing. In saving you I was only obeying my heart's command.

They exit.

SCENE VII

MIRZA, SOPHIE, VALÈRE.

MIRZA, *to Sophie*. – I like you very much even though you are not a slave. Come, I shall look after you. Give me your arm. Ah, what a pretty hand! So different to mine! Let us sit here. (*Gaily.*) I am so happy to be with you! You are as beautiful as our Governor's wife.

SOPHIE – Really? So you have a Governor on this Island?

VALÈRE – I thought you told us that you lived here alone.

MIRZA, *frankly* – Oh, that is quite true and Zamor has not misled you. I meant the Governor of the Colony who does not live with us. (*Aside.*) I must be careful what I say for if they knew that Zamor had killed a white man they would not want to stay with us.

SOPHIE, *to Valère* - Her candidness is enchanting; her gentle features are to her credit.

VALÈRE – I have never seen a prettier Negress.

MIRZA – You are making fun of me, besides I am not the prettiest. But, tell me, are all French women as beautiful as you? They must be for all the French are good, and you are not enslaved.

VALÈRE – No, the French view slavery with horror. One day they will have more freedom and then they will help to alleviate your lot.

MIRZA, *surprised*. – One day they will have more freedom? What, are you not free already?

VALÈRE – We appear to be free but our irons are only the heavier. For several centuries the French have groaned under the despotism of Ministers and Courtiers. The power of a single Master is in the hands of a thousand Tyrants who ride roughshod over his People. This People will one day break its irons and, taking back the rights inscribed in Natural law, it will show these Tyrants what a united people, too long oppressed but enlightened by a sound philosophy, can do.

MIRZA – Oh good God! Evil people exist everywhere!

SCENE VIII

ZAMOR, SOPHIE, VALÈRE, MIRZA.

ZAMOR, *on the rock*. – It is true, unhappy Strangers, there is no hope. A wave has just engulfed the rest of the crew along with all your expectations.

SOPHIE – Alas! What will become of us?

VALÈRE – A vessel may reach this island.

ZAMOR – Unhappy Strangers, you do not know the terrible dangers of this coastline! Only desperate people, like Mirza and me, have dared approach it and overcome all the dangers to live here. Nonetheless we are only two leagues from one of the largest towns in India; a town I shall never see again unless our tyrants come and tear us away from here in order to make us suffer the punishment to which we have been condemned.

SOPHIE – Punishment!

VALÈRE – What crime have you committed, either one of you? Ah! I see, you are too well informed for a slave and, no doubt, the one who educated you paid a high price for the gift he offered you.

ZAMOR – Sir, be not as prejudiced towards me as others of your kind. I had a Master who was dear to me, I would have sacrificed my life to prolong his days. But his Overseer was a monster and I purged the earth of him. He loved Mirza but his love was spurned. He learnt that she preferred me and in his fury he treated me appallingly, but the worst was that he tried to make me the instrument of his vengeance against my dearest Mirza. In horror I rejected such an assignment. Irritated by my disobedience he came at me, sword unsheathed; I avoided the thrust that he aimed at me, disarmed him and he fell dead at my feet. I only had time to take Mirza and flee with her in a sloop.

SOPHIE – How I pity him, the unfortunate man! Although he has committed murder, his crime seems worthy of a pardon.

VALÈRE – Their fate affects me; they brought me back to life, they saved yours: I will defend them to the end of my days. I will go and see his Governor myself. If he is French he must be humane and generous.

ZAMOR – Yes, Sir, he is French, and the best of men.

MIRZA – Ah! If all Colonists were like him we would be less unfortunate.

ZAMOR – I was his from the age of eight; he was pleased to educate me and loved me as though I were his son, for he never had one, or perhaps he was deprived of one. He seems to have regrets. He can be heard sighing at times; he is surely trying to hide a great sorrow. I have frequently caught him shedding a tear. He loves his wife and she returns his affections handsomely. I would be forgiven if it only depended on him but they need an example. There is no hope of a pardon for a slave who has raised a hand against his Commander.⁶

⁶ Throughout the play Overseer and Commander are interchangeable but represent the same deceased character unless directly addressing his replacement.

SOPHIE, *to Valère* – I have no idea why this Governor intrigues me. The account of his sorrows oppresses my heart. He is generous, clement: he can pardon you. I will go and throw myself at his feet. His name? If only we could leave this Island.

ZAMOR – His name is Monsieur de Saint-Frémont.

SOPHIE – Alas! The name means nothing to me. But no matter; he is French; he will listen to me and I hope that I can sway him. (*To Valère.*) If there was a chance that we could reach the port in the sloop that saved them, then there is no danger that I would not confront to defend them.

VALÈRE – My dear Sophie, how I admire you! I approve of your plan: all we need is to make our way to their Governor. (*To the slaves.*) My friends, this measure does little to repay our obligation to you. Happy if our prayers and our tears move your generous Master! Let us go, but what do I see? Slaves who are observing us and coming hurriedly towards us. They bring chains.

SOPHIE – Unlucky ones, you are lost!

ZAMOR, *turning round and seeing the slaves* – Mirza, it is the end! We are discovered.

SCENE IX

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, AN INDIAN, SLAVES.

Several slaves run down from the rock.

INDIAN, *to Zamor* – Villain! Finally I have found you [2ps]; you will not escape your punishment.

MIRZA – Let me be put to death before him!

ZAMOR – Oh my dear Mirza!

INDIAN – Put them in chains!

VALÈRE – Sir, hear our prayers! What will you do with these Slaves?

INDIAN – A terrible example.

SOPHIE – Are you taking them away to put them to death? You will have to kill me first to tear them from my arms.

VALÈRE – What are you doing? Dear Sophie! We must trust in the clemency of the Governor.

INDIAN – Do not flatter yourself. The Governor needs to set the Colony an example. You do not know this accursed race, they would cut our throats without pity if the voice of humanity were to speak in their favour. This is what we must expect from Slaves, even those we have educated! They are born to be savage, to be tamed like animals.

SOPHIE – What a terrible prejudice. Nature did not make Slaves of them; they are human, like you.

INDIAN – What words are those, Madame?

SOPHIE – The same that I shall address to your Governor. It is through gratitude that I am concerned for these unfortunate people; they understand the value of compassion better than you and, no doubt, that atrocious man whose position you now hold.

ZAMOR – Ah! Madame, stop pleading with him, his soul is hardened and he has no humanity. It is his task to show this rigour, every day. He would feel he was lacking in his duty if he did not push it to the edge of cruelty.

INDIAN – How dare you!

ZAMOR – I am not afraid of you [2ps] anymore. I know my fate and shall submit to it.

SOPHIE – They are so affecting in their misfortune! I would do anything to save them!

VALÈRE, *to the Indian* – Take us with them, Sir. You will be facilitating our departure from this place. (*Aside.*) I hope I can sway the Governor.

INDIAN – It will be a pleasure especially as it is less dangerous to leave this island than it is to arrive.

VALÈRE – But Sir, how were you able to land here?

INDIAN – I risked everything for the good of the Colony, so how is it possible to pardon them. We are no longer the Masters of our Slaves. The life of our Governor could be in danger; as soon as these two miserable creatures are punished calm will return to the plantations. (*To the Negroes.*) Negroes, fire the cannon, let the Fort know with the authorised signal that the criminals are taken.

ZAMOR – Come Mirza, let us go and die.

MIRZA – Ah, God! I have caused your death.

ZAMOR – The good deed that we performed for these Strangers will cast delight on our last moments and at least we shall savour the sweetness of dying together.

Zamor and Mirza are taken away; the others follow and all embark. A moment later their vessel can be seen passing by.

End of the first Act.

ACT II

The scene changes to show a Company drawing room furnished in the Indian style.

FIRST SCENE

AZOR, BETZI.

BETZI – So, Azor, what are they saying about Mirza and Zamor? They are being hunted everywhere.

AZOR – There is talk of putting them to death on the plantation rock; I think the preparations for their punishment are under way. I shudder that they may be caught.

BETZI – But the Governor can pardon them. He is in charge.

AZOR – That must be impossible for he loves Zamor and says that he has never found fault with him, but all the Colony demands their death, and he cannot refuse without compromising himself.

BETZI – Our Governor was not made to be a tyrant.

AZOR – He is so good to us! All the French are the same but the Natives of this country are very cruel.

BETZI – I have heard it stated that in the earliest times we were not enslaved.

AZOR – Everything suggests it. There are still climes where Negroes are free.

BETZI – How happy they must be!

AZOR – Ah, we are indeed to be pitied!

BETZI – And no one comes to our defence! We are not even allowed to pray for our own.

AZOR – Alas, the father and mother of the unhappy Mirza will have to witness their daughter's torture!

BETZI – What barbarity!

AZOR – That is how we are treated.

BETZI – But, tell me, Azor, why did Zamor kill the Overseer?

AZOR – I was assured that it was out of jealousy. You know that Zamor was Mirza's lover?

BETZI – Yes, I learnt it from you.

AZOR – The Commander loved her too.

BETZI – But that was no reason for Zamor to kill him.

AZOR – That is true.

BETZI – There were other reasons.

AZOR – That may well be, but I am unaware of them.

BETZI – If we could arrange their escape, I am sure that Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Frémont would not be angry.

AZOR – I am sure that is true but those who would help them would place themselves in great danger.

BETZI – No doubt, but there would be no death penalty.

AZOR – Maybe. Still, I know that I would not run the risk of it.

BETZI – We should at least talk to their friends; they could win over other slaves. They all love Zamor and Mirza.

AZOR – There is talk of arming the regiment.

BETZI – Then all hope is gone.

AZOR – On the contrary, we should exhort obedience for the sake of our companions.

BETZI – You are right: do it if you can for I will never have the strength for it.

SCENE II

AZOR, BETZI, CORALINE.

CORALINE *running in* – Oh my dear companions, I bring you such bad news! There is no doubt, the cannon has been heard announcing the capture of Zamor and Mirza.

AZOR – Come now Coraline, that is not possible!

BETZI – Dear God!

CORALINE – I was at the harbour when they announced this desperate news. Several Colonists were impatiently awaiting a ship that came into view in the distance. It finally reached the harbour. Straightaway all the planters surrounded it and I, trembling all over, ran away. Poor Mirza! Unhappy Zamor! Our tyrants will not pardon them.

AZOR – Oh! I can assure you! They will soon be dead.

BETZI – Without a hearing? Without a trial?

CORALINE – A trial! We are forbidden to be innocent or to justify ourselves.

AZOR – Such generosity! To cap it all, we are sold at market like cattle.

BETZI – A trade in men! Oh Heaven! Humanity is revolted.

AZOR – That is quite true: my father and I were bought on the shores of Guinea.

CORALINE – There, there my poor Azor. Whatever our deplorable fate I have a presentiment that we will not always be in chains, and maybe before too long...

AZOR – Well! What shall we see? Will it be our turn to be masters?

CORALINE – Maybe. But no, we would be too beastly. You see, to be good one must be neither master nor slave.

AZOR – Neither master nor slave! Ha, ha! And what would you like us to be? Do you know, Coraline, that you have no idea what you are saying? Though our friends state that you know more than we do.

CORALINE – Well, well, my poor boy, if you only knew what I know! I read in a certain Book that in order to be happy one had only to be free and to be a good Farmer. We lack only freedom. Let us be given it and you will see that there will be no more masters or slaves.

AZOR – I do not understand you.

BETZI – Nor do I.

CORALINE – My God, you are so good, both of you! Tell me, was Zamor not free? Did that make him want to leave our good Master? We shall all do the same. If the Masters offer freedom, no Slave will abandon the workshops. Imperceptibly the most primitive amongst

us will instruct themselves, they will recognise the laws of humanity and justice and our superiors will find, in our fidelity, in our zeal, the reward for this compassion.

AZOR – You speak like a man! You remind me of the Governor...My, you need a good mind to retain all that others say! But here is Madame.

BETZI – Hush, here is Madame.

CORALINE – We must not tell Madame that we fear that Zamor may be taken. She would be too distressed.

AZOR – Indeed!

SCENE III

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – My friends, I need to be alone. Leave me and only enter when I call for you unless you have some news to give me.

They exit.

SCENE IV

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT *alone* – My spouse has left to manage this unfortunate affair: he has gone to one of the plantations where his presence was required. Since this catastrophe the spirit of revolt has reigned in the minds of our slaves. All maintain that Zamor is innocent and that he only killed the Commander because he had no other option. But the Colonists have united to demand the death of Mirza and Zamor who are being searched for everywhere. My husband would happily pardon Zamor despite the fact that he proclaimed his arrest along with that of poor Mirza who must die beside her lover. Alas! The expectation of their punishment throws me into the deepest sadness. I was not born to be happy! I am adored by my spouse in vain: my love cannot conquer the melancholy that consumes him. He has been suffering for more than ten years and I cannot fathom the cause of his pain. It is the only one of his secrets that he has not shared with me. When he returns I shall have to redouble my efforts to prise it from him. But I hear him.

SCENE V

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Well! My love, did your presence dispel this agitation?

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – All my slaves have returned to their responsibilities but they are asking me to pardon Zamor. This is a very delicate affair. (*Aside.*) And to add to the misery, I have just had news from France that breaks my heart.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – What are you saying, my love? You seem to be reproaching yourself. If your guilt only concerns me then I forgive everything so long as your heart still belongs to me. You cast your eyes down; I see your tears falling. Ah! My love, you no longer trust me; I am vexing you; I shall retire.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – You, vex me! Never, never! Ah! If I had been capable of straying from my duty your kindness alone would have brought me back, at your feet, and your noble virtues would make your charms all the more endearing.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – But you conceal from me a secret trouble. Admit it. Your stifled sighs suggest it. France was dear to you; it is your homeland....Perhaps a love...

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Stop, stop, dear spouse, and do not reopen a wound that had healed while at your side. I fear it will grieve you.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – If I was once dear to you, you must prove it.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – What proof do you demand?

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – That you reveal to me the cause of your affliction.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – That is what you want?

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – I insist upon it; allow this secret that you have hidden from me for so long to be forgiven thanks to this indulgence.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – I obey. I come from a Province where unjust and inhuman laws deprive the younger children of the equality that Nature gives to those born of the same father and the same mother. My parents sent me to Court to ask for employment but how could I have succeeded in a country where virtue is a chimera and where nothing can be achieved without intrigue and baseness. Meanwhile, I met a decent Scottish Gentleman who had come there with the same intentions. He was not rich and had a daughter in a Convent: he took me there. This meeting had disastrous consequences for the two of us. After a few months the father left for the army: he exhorted me to visit his daughter and even said that I could chaperone her when she wished to go out. This decent man, this good father, could not imagine the result of his imprudence. He was killed in battle. His daughter remained alone in the world without family or acquaintances. She saw only me and seemed to wish for my presence alone. Love caused my guilt; spare me the rest. I vowed to be her spouse; there is my crime.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – But, my love, did you decide to abandon her yourself?

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Who, me? To abandon such an affecting woman? Oh, the longest absence would not have made me forget her. I could not marry her without the consent of all my family. She had a daughter. Our liaison was discovered; I was sent away. A Captain's commission was obtained for me in a regiment leaving for India and I was made to embark. Not long after I was given the false information that Clarisse was dead and that only my daughter was left to me. I saw you every day; your presence weakened, with time, the effect of Clarisse's image that remained in my heart. I asked for your hand, you accepted me, and we were united. But thanks to a refined barbarity the cruel parent who had deceived me let me know that Clarisse was still alive.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Alas! I have the honour of being your spouse at such a tragic price! My love, you are unfortunate rather than guilty. Clarisse herself would forgive you if she could see your remorse. The most vigorous searches must be undertaken so that your assets, and mine, can be used to exonerate you with regard to these unfortunate women. I have no family other than yours. I shall make your daughter my successor but your heart is a treasure that it is not in my power to give to another.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Oh! Worthy spouse, I admire your virtues. Alas! I think that only Clarisse could have equalled them. I was thus destined to meet the most virtuous and good-natured of your sex at the two extremities of the world.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – You deserve a companion worthy of you but, my love, remember that in uniting yourself to me you agreed to take the name of my father whose only wish, in giving you his name, was to cede you his place as his adoptive son. You must write to your family, and especially to your most faithful friends. Let them search anew so that they may soon give us news of these unfortunates. I believe, my friend, that I shall have the strength to leave you to seek the one you gave life to. I already feel that I have strong maternal feelings for her; yet at the same time I tremble. Oh my love, my love! If I had to separate myself from you! If Clarisse tore you from my arms!....Her misfortunes, her virtues, her charms....Ah! Forgive, forgive my despair! Forgive me dear spouse, you are not capable of abandoning me, to create two victims instead of one.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Dear wife! Oh, half of myself! Cease breaking this heart that is already too unhappy. Clarisse is no doubt no longer alive since for two years all the funds that I sent to France for her and for my daughter have been returned to me. No one knows what has become of them. But someone is coming; we shall talk again later.

SCENE VI

M. AND MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, A JUDGE.

THE JUDGE - Sir, I have come to inform you that the prisoners are taken.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – What! So soon! Time might have erased their crime.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *overwhelmed* – I am obliged to set such a dreadful example!

THE JUDGE - In this situation, Sir, remember your father-in-law's disgrace. He was obliged to quit his position for he had occupied it with too much kindness.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *aside* - Wretched Zamor, you will perish! Did I nurture you in your infancy only to see you one day dragged to your death. (*Aloud.*) My care has truly harmed him! If I had left him in his natural state maybe he would not have committed this crime. His soul was free from any vicious inclinations. Honesty and virtue distinguished him in the bosom of slavery. Raised to be simple and hard-working he never forgot his upbringing despite the education he received. How pleased I would be to be able to clear him. As a simple planter perhaps I could have mitigated his arrest but, as the Governor, I am forced to deliver him to the rigours of the law.

THE JUDGE - It is vital to arrest them immediately, especially as two Europeans have incited a general revolt among the slaves. They have depicted your Commander as a monster. The slaves listened avidly to these seditious speeches and all have promised to disobey the orders they were given.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - Who are these strangers?

THE JUDGE - They are French and were found on the shore where these criminals had taken refuge. They claim that Zamor saved their lives.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Alas! These unfortunate French people were no doubt shipwrecked and it is only gratitude that has encouraged this indiscreet enthusiasm.

THE JUDGE - As you see, Sir, there is no time to lose if you want to avoid the total ruin of our plantations. It is a desperate situation.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - Sadly, it was not my luck to be born in your climes, but the unfortunate have a strong hold on compassionate souls! It is not your fault if the customs of your country have habituated you to the harsh treatments you remorselessly mete out to men whose only defence is their timidity and whose work, poorly remunerated, augments our wealth while increasing the power we have over them. Tyrants outnumber them by a thousand to one. Sovereigns make their People happy; under a good Master every Citizen is free, yet in this country one must be barbaric despite oneself. Eh! How can I not reflect in this way when the voice of humanity cries out from the bottom of my heart: 'Be compassionate, be sensitive to the cries of those who are wretched'? I know that my opinion must displease you; Europe, meanwhile, is taking the trouble to justify it, and I dare hope that before long there will be no more slaves. Oh Louis! Oh beloved Monarch, would that I could, at this very moment, bring to your attention the plight of these innocent fugitives! By pardoning them you would be freeing men who have for too long gone unrecognised. But so be it: you want an example, it will be done, despite the Blacks insisting that Zamor is innocent

THE JUDGE – Can you believe them?

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – They cannot influence me for I know Zamor's virtues better than they do. Do you want him to die without a hearing? I consent with regret; you will not be able to reproach me for having betrayed the interests of the Colony.

THE JUDGE – It is your duty, Governor, in this affair where, as you can see, we are under threat of a general revolt. Orders must be given to arm the troops.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Follow me; we shall see what is to be done.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – My dear, I see you that you go in sorrow.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – My presence is required to restore order and discipline.

The judge and M. de Saint-Frémont exit.

SCENE VII

MADAME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *alone* – How I pity these wretches! It is done! They will die. What sorrow for my spouse. But a greater sorrow agitates me anew. Anyone bearing the name of a French woman appalls me. If it were Clarisse? Oh, unhappy woman, what would be my fate? I know the virtues of my spouse, but I am his wife. No, no; I must stop tormenting myself! Clarisse, in her misery, has a greater claim to his soul. I must hide my agitation.

SCENE VIII

MADAME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, BETZI.

Betzi runs in.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - What news Betzi?

BETZI, *in a heightened state* - Is the Governor not here?

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - No, he has just left. Speak to me!

BETZI - Ah! Allow me to come to my senses...We were on the terrace glancing sadly, from time to time, towards the plantation. From afar we see Mirza's father arriving with another Slave. Between them was an unknown woman with dishevelled hair and misery etched on her face. Her eyes were fixed on the ground and although she was walking fast her mind seemed to be elsewhere. When she approached us she asked for Madame de Saint-Frémont. She told us that Zamor had saved her from the fury of the sea. She added: 'I shall die at the feet of the Governor if I fail to get Zamor pardoned.' She wishes to implore your help. Here she comes.

SCENE IX

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, SOPHIE *followed by all the slaves.*

SOPHIE, *throwing herself at the knees of Mme de Saint-Frémont* - Madame, I embrace your knees. Take pity on an unhappy stranger who owes everything to Zamor and whose only hope is your goodness.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *aside* - Ah! I breathe again. (*Aloud, helping Sophie to stand.*) Madame, do get up, I promise to do all that is within my power. (*Aside.*) I cannot express how much her youth and her sensibility move my heart. (*To Sophie.*) Touching stranger, I shall do everything I can to bring about the pardon that you ask of my husband. Believe

me, I share your sorrow. I understand the strength of feeling you have for this unhappy couple.

SOPHIE - Without the help of Zamor, who is as brave as he is kind, I would have drowned in the waves. It is to him that I owe the pleasure of seeing you. What he did for me ensures that he belongs in my heart by all the laws of Nature, but these laws do not make me unjust, Madame, and the testimony that they [Zamor and Mirza] give of your qualities makes it clear that they would be incapable of committing a premeditated crime. What humanity! What ardour in saving us! The fate that pursues them should fill them with fear rather than pity but far from hiding himself Zamor braved all dangers. Judge, Madame, if a mortal can be guilty who acts so humanely; his crime was involuntary and justice dictates that he should be absolved and judged innocent.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *to the Slaves* - My friends, we must go and join the Colonists and plead that Zamor and Mirza be pardoned. We have no time to lose. (*To Sophie.*) And you, I yearn to know you better. You are French; perhaps you could....But time flies. Return to the unhappy couple. Slaves follow in her footsteps.

SOPHIE, *thrilled* - Ah, Madame, so much generosity all at once! Alas! If only I could show my gratitude as I would wish. (*She kisses her hands.*) Soon my spouse will come and fulfil his duty towards you. Dear Valère, what good news I have for you!
(*She exits with the Slaves.*)

SCENE X

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, BETZI, CORALINE.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *aside* - The features of this unknown young woman remind me of....What a chimera!... (*Aloud.*) And you, Coraline, summon M. de Saint-Frémont's secretary.

CORALINE – Oh! Madame, you are unaware of events: he has just closed all your gates by order of the Governor. Everything is in danger of going up in flames....Listen, Madame....they are drumming the alarm....and the bells are sounding...
(*Drumming can be heard in the distance.*)

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *going, in fright, to the back of the stage* - What shall become of me, unhappy woman? What is my husband doing?

BETZI - I fear for my friends.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *in a state of agony* - Dear God, my spouse might be in danger! I shall fly to save him....

CORALINE - Take heart, Madame, you have no reason to fear for the Governor. He is at the head of the regiment. But even if he were in the midst of the tumult all the Slaves would respect his days. They are too fond of him for any one to wish to do him harm. The Slaves are only angry with a few planters: they blame them for Zamor and Mirza's punishment; they are convinced that without them they would not have been condemned.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *agitated* - What? Are they going to be put to death?

CORALINE - Alas! Soon my poor friends will be no more.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *with alacrity* - No, my friends, they will not perish. My husband will be touched by my tears, by the despair of this unknown woman who, perhaps better than I, will know how to move him. His heart does not need soliciting for him to do good; he can take it all upon himself. (*Aside.*) What if the French woman were to give him information regarding his daughter! Dear God! He would be totally indebted to these victims that are being dragged to their punishment. (*Aloud.*) Go, Betzi, my husband must be reached, and told....But how, at the time, can this be explained to him? I shall have to see him myself. Where is he at the moment?

CORALINE - I do not know exactly with which regiment he is: the entire army is dispersed. All that is known is that M. de Saint-Frémont is restoring calm and bringing back order wherever he goes. He will be very hard to find right now. We shall just have to go to the plantation if it is not already too late. But all the roads are broken up or cut off. It is impossible to imagine that so much damage could have been done in such a short time.
MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - Never mind. I fear neither danger nor fatigue when it comes to saving the lives of those two unfortunates.

End of the second Act.

ACT III

The scene is set in a wild place showing sharp hills edged with shrubs that stretch as far as the eye can see. There is a steep rock on one side whose summit is a platform and whose base is perpendicular to the edge of the footlights. The rock is accessed from the side of one of the hills so that the Audience can see all the Characters arriving. Here and there are scattered Negro huts; on the back wall a sunset creates a beautiful horizon.

SCENE I

VALÈRE, ZAMOR, MIRZA.

VALÈRE - Here you are, free. I fly to lead your companions. Before long we shall see my spouse arrive. No doubt she will have obtained your pardon from M. de Saint-Frémont. I leave you for an instant but shall keep you in view.

SCENE II

ZAMOR, MIRZA.

ZAMOR - Oh my dear Mirza, our fate is too deplorable! It is getting even worse for I fear that this Frenchman's ardour to save us will endanger him and his spouse. What an appalling idea!

MIRZA - That idea haunts me too: perhaps his worthy spouse will have been able to influence our Governor. Let us not be overcome but await her return.

ZAMOR - I bless my death for it allows me to end my life with you but what cruelty, to die a guilty man! For so I have been judged. Our good master believes it: that is what makes me despair.

MIRZA - I want to see the Governor myself. This last wish must be granted. I will throw myself at his feet; I shall reveal all to him.

ZAMOR - Alas, what will you be able to tell him?

MIRZA - The cruelty and ferocious love of his Commander.

ZAMOR - You are blinded by your tenderness for me; you want to accuse yourself in order to make me innocent. If you value life so little how can you imagine that I would be so mean as to want to stay alive at the price of your days? No, my dear Mirza, there can be no happiness for me on this earth if I am not sharing it with you.

MIRZA - I feel the same, I could not live without seeing you.

ZAMOR - How sweet it would have been for us to live out our days together! This place reminds me of our first meeting. It is here that the tyrant died; it is here that our journey will

end. Nature seems, in these parts, to be at odds with herself. Yesterday she seemed light-hearted: she has lost none of her charms but now shows us both our past happiness and the horrible fate that awaits us, poor victims. Ah, Mirza, how cruel it is to die when one loves!

MIRZA - How you move me! Grieve me no further. I feel my courage weakening. But that kind Frenchman is returning to us; what will he tell us?

SCENE III

ZAMOR, MIRZA, VALÈRE.

VALÈRE - Oh my benefactors! You must run away. Avail yourselves of these precious moments afforded you by your companions. They are blocking the roads, respond to their zeal and courage; they are endangering themselves on your behalf, flee to another clime. It is possible that my spouse may not obtain your pardon. Several companies of soldiers can be seen approaching: you have the time to run away over this hill. Go, live in the forests, your own kind will take you to their bosoms.

MIRZA - This Frenchman is right. Come, follow me. He loves us; let us profit from his advice. Run with me, dear Zamor; do not fear returning to live in the depth of the forest. You can barely remember our laws but soon your dear Mirza will remind you of their pleasing effect.

ZAMOR - Very well, I yield. It is for you only that I hold life dear. (*He embraces Valère.*) Farewell, most generous of men!

MIRZA - Alas! So I must leave you without the pleasure of throwing myself at your wife's feet!

VALÈRE - She will share your regret, do not doubt it; but flee this place that is too treacherous.

SCENE IV

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, SOPHIE, SLAVES.

SOPHIE, *throwing herself into Valère's arms* - Ah! My love! Let us thank Heaven, these victims will not perish. Madame de Saint-Frémont has promised me their pardon.

VALÈRE, *joyfully* - Almighty God, the ultimate joy!

ZAMOR - Ah! I see in these proceedings her good soul. (*To Valère.*) Generous strangers, may Heaven grant your dearest wishes! The Supreme Being never abandons those who seek to be his equal in benevolence.

VALÈRE - Ah, how happy you make our days!

MIRZA - How fortunate we are to have saved these French people! They owe us much, but we owe them even more.

SOPHIE - Madame de Saint-Frémont has assembled her closest friends. I have instructed her of their [Zamor and Mirza] innocence; she is making every effort possible to save them. I had no trouble at all in interesting her on their behalf; her soul is so good, so sensitive to the pain of those who suffer.

ZAMOR - Her estimable spouse is her equal in merit and goodness.

SOPHIE - I have not had the pleasure of meeting him.

ZAMOR, *alarmed* - What do I see? A host of soldiers arriving! Ah, all is over! You have been deceived, generous Frenchman, we are lost.

SOPHIE - Do not take alarm, you must know....

VALÈRE - I will defend them at the risk of my life. Alas! They were about to flee when you came to reassure them. I will find out, from the Officer in command of this detachment, what is their mission.

A Company of Grenadiers and one of French Soldiers lines up at the back of the stage, bayonets fixed. In front of them a troop of Slaves armed with bows and arrows; at their head are the Major, the Judge, the Slaves' Overseer and M. de Saint-Frémont.

SCENE V

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, THE MAJOR, THE JUDGE, THE INDIAN COMMANDER, THE FRENCH SOLDIERS AND SEVERAL SLAVES.

VALÈRE - Sir, may I enquire what brings you here?

THE MAJOR - A cruel task. I have come to carry out the sentence of death pronounced against these unfortunates.

SOPHIE, *troubled* - You are going to put them to death?

THE MAJOR - Yes, Madame.

VALÈRE - No, this appalling sacrifice will not take place.

SOPHIE - Madame de Saint-Frémont promised me they would be pardoned.

THE JUDGE, *harshly* - That is not within her power. The Governor himself could not grant it. Therefore, desist from obstinately trying to save them. You will only exacerbate their punishment. (*To the Major.*) Major, execute the orders that you were given. (*To the Slaves.*) And you, take the criminals to the top of the rock.

THE INDIAN COMMANDER - Draw your bows!

VALÈRE - Stop!

The Slaves pay attention to Valère only.

THE JUDGE - Obey.

The Major signals to the Soldiers; they run, bayonets aimed at the chests of all the Slaves, none of whom move.

ZAMOR, *running in front of them* - What are you doing? I alone deserve to die. What have my poor companions done to you? Why cut their throats? Turn your weapons on me. (*He opens his jacket.*) Here is my breast! Cleanse their disobedience in my blood. The Colony asks only for my death. Is it necessary that so many innocent victims should perish when they are not implicated in my crime?

MIRZA - I am as guilty as Zamor; no not separate me from him: for pity's sake take my life; his destiny directs my days. I want to be the first to die.

VALÈRE, *to the judge* - Sir, I pray, grant a stay of execution. I can assure you that their pardon is being considered.

THE MAJOR - We cannot take this upon ourselves; let us wait for the Governor.

THE JUDGE, *harshly* - I listen to nothing but my duty and the law.

VALÈRE, *furiously* - Barbarian! Your position may harden the heart but you [2ps] degrade it by rendering it even more cruel than the laws dictate.

THE JUDGE - Major, conduct this audacious man to the citadel.

THE MAJOR - He is French: he will answer to the Governor for his behaviour and, in this instance, I am not required to take orders from you.

THE JUDGE - Then execute those that you were given.

SOPHIE, *heroically* - This excessive cruelty gives me courage. (*She runs to place herself between Zamor and Mirza, takes both by the hand, and addresses the Judge.*) Barbarian! Dare [2ps] assassinate me as well; I shall not leave them; nothing can tear them from my arms.

VALÈRE, *emotionally* – Oh! My dear Sophie! This courageous act makes you even dearer to my heart.

THE JUDGE, *to the Major* - Major, take this audacious woman away: you are not doing your duty.

THE MAJOR, *indignantly* - If you insist, but you will be answerable for the consequences. (*To the Soldiers.*) Separate these strangers from those slaves.

Sophie, with a piercing cry, hugs Zamor and Mirza to her bosom.

VALÈRE, *furious, runs up to Sophie* - If any violence is used against my wife I will know no bounds. (*To the Judge.*) And you, barbarian, fear being sacrificed to my righteous fury.

A SLAVE - Were we all to be put to death, we would defend them.

The Slaves line up and form a shield around them. The Soldiers and Grenadiers approach with bayonets fixed.

THE MAJOR, *to the Soldiers* - Soldiers, stop. (*To the Judge.*) I have not been sent here to direct a carnage or to spill blood, but to restore order. The Governor will be here before long and his prudence will be our best guide. (*To the Strangers and the Slaves.*) Be reassured; I shall not exercise any force; if I chose to, your efforts would be pointless. (*To Sophie.*) And you, Madame, you may step aside along with these unfortunates; I await the Governor.

Sophie, Zamor and Mirza exit with a few Slaves.

SCENE VI

VALÈRE, THE MAJOR, THE JUDGE, THE INDIAN, GRENADIERS AND SOLDIERS,
SLAVES.

VALÈRE, *to the Major* - I cannot abandon my spouse in such a state. Try your best to persuade M. de Saint-Frémont. I have no need to recommend clemency to you; it must already reign in your heart. A warrior is always generous.

THE MAJOR - Rely on me; retire and reappear when it is time.

Valère exits.

SCENE VII

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, EXCEPT VALÈRE.

THE MAJOR, *to the Judge* - There, Sir, is the fruit of too much severity.

THE JUDGE - Your moderation is, today, losing us the Colony.

THE MAJOR - Say rather: it may have saved it. You only understand your cruel laws and I, I know the art of war and benevolence. We are not fighting our enemies, but our Slaves or rather, our Farmers. According to you, in order to defeat them, we would have had to put them to the sword but, in such circumstances, imprudence would lead us, without doubt, further than you could imagine.

SCENE VIII

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, VALÈRE, GRENADIERS,
SOLDIERS, SLAVES.

M. de Saint-Frémont enters from one side and Valère from the other. Two Companies of Grenadiers and Soldiers escort several Slaves in chains.

VALÈRE, *to M. de Saint-Frémont* - Ah, Sir! Hear our prayers, you are French, you will be fair.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - I approve of your ardour but in this clime it can become indiscreet. It has done a lot of harm. I have just witnessed an appalling attack against a Magistrate. Against my nature, I had to use violence to put a stop to the cruelty of the slaves. I know how much you owe to these unhappy two but it is not within your right to defend them or to change the laws and customs of a country.

VALÈRE - I have at least the entitlement of gratitude that belongs to all good souls; whatever your feigned severity, my heart calls out to yours.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - Stop appealing to me, it pains me too much to refuse.

VALÈRE - Your worthy spouse allowed us to hope.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - She herself, Sir, understands the absolute impossibility of what you demand.

VALÈRE - If it is a crime to have killed a monster that made nature tremble, this crime, at least, is excusable. Zamor acted in self-defence and that defence is a natural right.

THE JUDGE - You are taking advantage of the Governor's kindness. You have been told this before. They are condemned as murderers; can you change the laws?

VALÈRE - No, but they could be tempered in favour of an involuntary crime.

THE JUDGE - Are you in your right mind? Temper them in favour of a slave! We are not in France here, we need examples.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – It is a fact, the sentence must be executed.

VALÈRE - These words freeze my blood and my oppressed heart...Dear spouse, what will become of you? Ah, Sir! If you only knew her sensibility, her misfortunes, you would be moved by them: she had placed all her hopes in your goodness; she even hoped that you would give her information concerning a parent, her sole support, of whom she was deprived since childhood and who must be settled in some part of this Continent.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - Be assured that I shall do all in my power to serve you but as for the criminals, I can do nothing for them. Unfortunate Stranger, go and console her: although I do not know her she captures my imagination. If need be, deceive her so that she does not witness this appalling punishment: tell her that the unfortunates are needed for questioning and that they must be left alone: that their pardon may depend on this wise precaution.

VALÈRE, *weeping* - How we are to be pitied! I shall not survive their loss.

He exits.

SCENE IX

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, EXCEPT VALÈRE.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - How this Frenchman grieves me! His sorrow on behalf of these unfortunates increases my own. So they must die, despite my leanings towards clemency....(*Reflecting.*) Zamor saved the unknown woman; she is French and, if I am to believe her spouse, she is seeking a parent in these climes. Could he have feared explaining himself? Her pain, her searching, her misery...Unfortunate woman, what if she were....Will nature lead me astray! And why be surprised? This Stranger's adventure is so similar to my daughter's.... that my devastated heart would like to find my child in her. It is

the fate of the unhappy to soothe themselves with hope and to find consolation in the smallest coincidences.

THE JUDGE - Major, advance your Soldiers. (*To the Indian.*) Commander, escort the slaves and line them up as is customary.

The Indian exits with the armed Slaves whilst another troop comes and throws itself at the feet of M. de Saint-Frémont.

SCENE X

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, EXCEPT THE INDIAN.

The armed Slaves are replaced by unarmed Slaves.

A SLAVE, *kneeling* - Sir, we were not among the rebels. May we be permitted to ask for the pardon of our companions! To save their lives let us be subject to the most terrible chastisements. Increase our painful labours, decrease our rations; we will bear this punishment courageously. Sir, you are softening, I can see your tears falling.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - My children, my friends, what are you suggesting! (*To the Judge.*) What do you expect me to reply to this act of heroism? Ah! Heaven! They show such greatness of character, and we dare treat them like the lowest of mankind! Civilised men! You think yourselves superior to slaves! From opprobrium and the vilest state, equity and courage lift them in one instant to the level of the most generous mortals. You have the proof before your eyes.

THE JUDGE - They know your heart well; but you cannot yield to your feelings without compromising your dignity. I know them better than you; they promise all in such moments; besides, these criminals are no longer in your power, they are delivered up to the rigour of the law.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT – Well then! I abandon them to you. Alas, here they are! Where can I hide? How cruel is this duty.

SCENE XI

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, THE INDIAN, ZAMOR, MIRZA, SLAVES.

The Slaves are armed.

ZAMOR - There is no hope left; our benefactors are surrounded by soldiers. Embrace me for the last time, my dearest Mirza!

MIRZA - I bless my fate since the same agony unites us. (*To an old man and an old Slave woman.*) Farewell, dear authors of my days; weep no more for your poor Mirza, she is no longer to be pitied. (*To the Slaves of her sex.*) Farewell, my dear companions.

ZAMOR- Slaves, Colonists, hear me; I have killed a man, I deserve to die; do not despair at my punishment, it is necessary for the good of the Colony. Mirza is innocent, but she cherishes her death. (*To the Slaves, in particular.*) And you, my dear friends, listen to me at my last. I leave this life, I die innocent; fear lest you make yourselves guilty by defending me; be particularly wary of factionalism and never deliver yourselves up to excess in order to escape from slavery; be wary of breaking your irons with too much violence; expect all from time and divine justice; take our place beside the Governor and his respectable spouse. Repay them with your ardour and with your attachment for all that I owe them.

Alas! I cannot fulfil my obligation to them. Cherish this good Master, this good father, with a filial tenderness, as I always have. I would die happy if I could believe that he will miss me! (*He throws himself at his feet.*) Oh! My dear master, am I still permitted to address you thus.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *with deep sorrow* - These words break my heart. Wretched man! What have you [2ps] done? Go, I hold nothing against you, the fatal duty that I have to undertake is pain enough.

ZAMOR, *bows and kisses his feet* – Oh! My dear master! Death has no more fear for me. You still hold me dear, I die happy. (*He holds his hands.*) Let me kiss these hands for the last time!

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *moved* - Leave me, leave me, you are breaking my heart.

ZAMOR, *to the armed Slaves* - My friends, do your duty.

He takes Mirza in his arms, and climbs with her upon the rock, where they kneel down. The Slaves adjust their arrows.

SCENE XII

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, SLAVES, GRENADIERS AND FRENCH SOLDIERS.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - Stop, Slaves, respect your Governor's wife. (*To her husband.*) Mercy, my friend, mercy!

SCENE XIII AND LAST

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, VALÈRE, SOPHIE.

SOPHIE, *to Valère* - You restrain me in vain. I absolutely want to see them. Cruel one! You lied to me! (*To Mme de Saint-Frémont.*) Ah, Madame, my strength abandons me. *She falls into the arms of slaves.*

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *to her husband* - My friend, you can see this French woman's despair; are you not moved by it?

SOPHIE, *coming to and throwing herself at the feet of M. de Saint-Frémont* - Oh, Sir! I shall die of sorrow at your feet if you do not forgive them. It is in your heart to do so and in your power. Ah, if I cannot obtain it, what care I for life! I have lost everything. Deprived of a mother and of my fortune, abandoned by a father since the age of five, my only consolation was to save the two victims who are dear to you...

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *aside in the greatest agitation* - What memories....what features.... her age...(To Sophie.) Ah, Madame! Respond to my entreaty, may I ask you the names of those who brought you into the world?

SOPHIE, *leaning on Valère* – Alas!

VALÈRE – Oh my dear Sophie!

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *more avidly* - Sophie...(Aside.) Her name was Sophie. (*Aloud.*) What name did you utter....Speak, answer me, I beg you Madame, who was your mother?

SOPHIE, *aside* - What trouble agitates him?....The more I observe him....(*Aloud.*) The unfortunate Clarisse de Saint-Fort was my mother?

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - Oh! My daughter, know [2ps] me. Nature has not deceived me. Recognise the voice of a father too long separated from you and your mother.

SOPHIE - Oh! My father! I shall die.

She falls into the arms of the soldiers.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - Oh my daughter! Oh my blood!

SOPHIE - What was that? Yes, yes, it is him....His features have stayed etched on my soul....What joy it is to find myself in your arms again! I cannot tell you all the agitation that I am feeling. But these unfortunates, oh my father, their fate is in your hands. Without their help your daughter would have died. Grant nature the ultimate grace that she demands of you. Planters, Slaves, kneel to the most generous of men; clemency is found at the feet of virtue.

All kneel except the Judge and the Soldiers.

THE SLAVES - Sir!

THE PLANTERS - Governor!

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - What do you demand of me?

ALL - Their pardon.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT, *moved* - My children, my spouse, my friends, I grant it.

ALL - What joy!

Grenadiers and Soldiers bend the knee and stand up smartly.

THE MAJOR - Brave warriors, do not blush at this sensitive gesture; it purifies courage rather than perverting it.

MIRZA - Almighty God! You change our unhappy fate; you make us supremely happy; your justice manifests itself without end.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - My friends, I give you your freedom, and I shall take care of your fortune.

ZAMOR - No, my master; keep your favours. Our dearest heartfelt wish is to be allowed to live with you and all that you hold most dear.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - What! I rediscover my daughter, I hold her in my arms! A cruel fate has finally ceased to pursue me! Oh my dear Sophie, how I fear hearing of your mother's cruel fate!

SOPHIE - Alas! My poor mother is no more! But my father, how sweet it is to see you! (*To Valère.*) Dear Valère!

VALÈRE - I share your happiness.

MME DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - My daughter, see in me only the tenderest of mothers. Your father knows my intentions, as will you by and by. Let us only concern ourselves with the marriage of Zamor and Mirza.

MIRZA - We live so that we may love each other. We shall be forever happy, for ever and ever.

ZAMOR - Yes my dearest Mirza, yes, we shall be forever happy.

M. DE SAINT-FRÉMONT - My friends, I have just granted you your pardon. Would that I could liberate all those of your kind, or at least temper their fate! Slaves, hear me: if ever your destiny changes do not lose from sight a love for the common good which, until now, has been unknown to you. Know that man, in liberty, still needs to be submitted to wise and humane laws and, without finding the need for reprehensible excess, allow yourselves to trust in an enlightened and good Government. My friends, my children, let us celebrate the happy omen of this sweet liberty.

THE END

The Performance ends with a Ballet in keeping with the play. Zamor and Mirza are carried on a palanquin. A procession of Negroes should produce an interesting effect. The Comédie Française perfectly captured American manners and pastoral customs and the Ballet Master fulfilled precisely the Author's intentions. Any Theatre producing this Play should seek to procure the musical score and the Ballet programme. No Theatre, other

than the Opera, could ever have executed this Spectacle better than the Comédie Française. I could not praise the Composer or the Ballet Master highly enough.