

Midi

A Libretto for an Opera after Euripides' *Medea*

Music by Lewis Spratlan

Libretto by Michael Miller

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A town in the French West Indies, ca. 1930.

Cast:

(All characters are descended from the various peoples which have contributed to the population of the Lesser Antilles: Taíno, Arawak, Carib, French, African, and East Indian, except for Jaz, the Governor, and his daughter, Claire, who are American and French.)

Old Man - Very poor, possibly a beggar. Steeped in local traditions and well aware of the amoral, destructive power of the local gods.

Bartender - Europeanized light-skinned mulatto, deals a close deck, gives himself airs a bit, but not too obnoxiously, listens closely when others talk, gossips discreetly and expertly

Waiter - a bit simple, infatuated with Midi

Busboy

Mademoiselle Blandine - very light mulatto, Europeanized in the sense of the Parisian underworld, earthy, even coarse. She has lived—and worked—in Paris, where she "passed" for white. Teasing and ironic towards the old Creole ways, but they are deeply ingrained in her as superstition. She takes keen delight in gossip and the grislier local myths and tales of *quimbois*.

M. Matthieu - a black gentleman in early middle age (ca. 45-50), formal in manner and dress beyond his years, commanding respect as a professional *quimboiseur*. He is a regular client of Mlle. Blandine, who relates to him in a more familiar way than other people. On the other hand, she regards his powers as a *quimboiseur* and his knowledge of local traditions with adoring awe and is constantly after him for supernatural stories and lore.

Midi - a singer and sorceress, partly African in origin, but mostly of Caribbean Indian descent. She is known in the region as a *quimboiseuse*, and feared for her powers. She is also respected for her rumored descent from the kings and priests of the old peoples, even from their sun-god. There is gossip about her having murdered her brother, mutilating his corpse in the ancient way, to help her lover Jaz in his work, which, she refuses to recognize, is the unscrupulous exploitation of the colony. She was born and grew up on Dominica, where she learned English, which she speaks with a Dominican accent.

Jaz - American "businessman" (deals in contraband, supplies guns to discontented and leftist factions, but reports on them to the French and the American authorities) Best kind of Cleveland family, Yale graduate, natty dresser, always in a trim suit, but there's something seedy about him, not only as a severe, sociopathic alcoholic. In living with Midi and having children with her he has "gone native," but he looks down on them all the more. Thinks he will escape from his descent—and, more immediately, the law—by marrying the governor's daughter. He got the name Jaz from the locals. "Il nous est

arrivé de l'Amérique comme le jazz, mais le jazz est mieux." = "He comes from America like jazz, but jazz is better."

Claire, the Governor's daughter - fresh out of a provincial French convent school to join her widowed father at his current posting. Imagines herself as a Parisienne. Elegant dresser: always turned out splendidly. Poised and well-mannered on the surface, but ferocious when she doesn't get what she wants, grabs things, vulgar beneath her pretension and elegance. Her attitude towards the islanders is an immature caricature of her father's professionalized bigotry.

Claire's Nanny - a severe, prematurely aged Frenchwoman from the provinces. She may not have passed fifty, but her manner and her way of dressing make her look at least a decade older. She raised Claire, and the Governor has kept her on, bringing her with them from posting to posting.

Chorus, SATB (bar patrons, attendees at Midi's trial, onlookers at her departure)

A Note on *Quimbois*

Quimbois is the Antillean version of Obeah and Vodou, still practiced today. According to official sources it is a diluted, "civilized" version of these religions and magical practices, confined to healthy herbal baths, etc., but there is quite recent documentation of more dangerous forms of it. People commonly consult *quimboiseurs* in matters of love and success, especially elections, *Bac* results and legal proceedings, as in *Midi*. *Quimboiseurs* in the normal course of their work have to be strong, since they take on the burden of fears and resentments in small communities, and they can't avoid making enemies. There are accounts of the toll the work takes on a *quimboiseur's* mental and physical health.

Synopsis

The action takes place in a town in the French West Indies around 1930, when they were still French colonies.

Midi is the descendant of an ancient priestly family dating back to the indigenous inhabitants of the island and believed to have been founded by the Sun himself. After the French arrived and introduced slaves from Africa, the family intermarried with both, but they remained true to their religious duties to the Sun. Seen as a threat to Christianization, they were eventually sent into exile on Dominica, where Midi grew up. She made her return, overcoming great difficulties with the aid of Jaz, an American expatriate "businessman," who sells arms to dissident groups and reports on them to the French authorities, meanwhile serving American interests in the Caribbean, as in Haiti. The two have lived together as a common-law couple for some years and have two sons.

Midi, a half-goddess because of her ancestry, has inherited powerful skills in *quimbois*, the Antillean version of Obeah or Vodou. She is beloved of many people on the island,

because she has helped them without charging them the customary fees, but she is also feared, because they know her powers can be dangerous. There are rumors that she once destroyed her brother in a most horrific way. She is also a brilliant singer, and locals keenly look forward to her increasingly rare performances at the Ti-Métropole, a hotel, brothel, and bar.

After an introductory dance, when Midi communes with her familiar spirits, the curtain rises on the barroom of the Ti-Métropole. A poor old man lying in the street outside sings about the gods and their ruthless powers over humans. Within, the news is circulating that Midi will appear that night. A waiter, one of the prostitutes, and the bartender speculate about this and gossip about Midi's difficult situation with the abusive and unfaithful Jaz, who has once again disappeared without notice for three weeks. The waiter is a simple fellow, who has been slavishly in love with Midi for many years. The barman adopts a sophisticated air and a tone of confidentiality. He uses these traits—and alcohol—to get intelligence and gossip from his customers. The prostitute, Mlle. Blandine, who has lived in France and plied her trade in Paris, is worldly-wise and an enthusiastic gossip, but also deeply fascinated with local beliefs to the point of superstition. One of her regular clients, M. Matthieu, a professional *quimboiseur*, arrives and talks with her and the bartender. Now in middle-age, he projects impressive professional dignity. Blandine is thrilled by his stories of *quimbois* and Midi, whom he regards with particular reverence, although she can be more familiar with him than anybody else. He sings an important aria about the Sun and Midi's descent from him.

Midi arrives, and she and the musicians take the stage. She sings two songs about herself and local myth which she has made popular among her following. Although she shows her agitation and worry about Jaz's absence from the beginning, she channels special passion into her music, beginning with a sensual song about the rain and how she passes a wet morning when she is alone.

Jaz and his latest girlfriend, Claire, the governor's daughter, arrive in the street outside the Ti-Métropole. They sit in another bar across the alley and argue over Jaz's promise to confront Midi and tell her that he plans to leave her and their children to marry Claire. The audience dance and drink, as Midi tries to cope with her worries. When the musicians return, she sings "Little Tricks," a song about the mysteries she learned from her grandmother.

Outside, Claire loses patience with Jaz, who is dealing with the situation by constant drinking, and she pushes him inside to confront Midi. Jaz, confused and drunk, attempts to minimize the situation and gain Midi's sympathy—with a totally untruthful account of his activities. When Claire sees them kiss, she marches in herself to explain things to Midi. The curtain falls on the devastated Midi, as the Old Man resumes his grim song about the gods, now joined by Midi herself.

Act II

In Act II, which takes place in the sitting room of Midi's ancestral home, with its exotic garden visible through French doors at the back, a totally devastated and disorientated Midi revives herself through prayer and ritual. She has virtually forgotten who she is,

but her communion with her divine relations brings her identity back—one rather different than before. While she performs the ritual behind a curtain, Jaz enters to collect his belongings (as well as some of hers), and their two sons. He is accompanied by Claire's old Nanny from France, who will take the children off to another island to get them out of the way. She expresses her distaste for the situation and is repelled by the little mulattos, when they rush out to greet their father. He goes through an old routine with them to amuse them. Meanwhile, the Nanny gets over her initial reaction and sings them an old French folk song, which they know, because it is sung in the Antilles as well. She takes them back to their bedroom to collect their clothes for their trip. Midi emerges to find Jaz perusing an object which has particular symbolic value for them. At first she approaches him with great strength and determination, berating him for everything he has done to her, but she melts, overcome by her old passion for him. The encounter between them becomes sexual. She seduces him. Infuriated by his inability to resist Midi, Jaz becomes violent. He beats and rapes her, only moments after their romantic lovemaking. Midi, enraged, grabs a large knife (a traditional *coutelas*) and looks around frantically for Jaz to kill or maim him, but he has fled. Unconsciously, like an automaton, she rises and exits into the rooms at the back to find and kill their children. She returns, covered in blood, and carrying the bodies. It looks as if Midi has cut herself open, but in killing her children she has killed her own humanity. Only the divine is left. Claire enters and taunts her, thinking the blood came from a the traditional sacrifice of chickens. In response, Midi uses her magical powers to incinerate her rival. Claire's Nanny emerges from the bedrooms, spattered with blood, devastated, to find Claire's ashes, identifiable only because one of her shoes escaped the blaze. The Nanny groans in horror and staggers out through the garden. Jaz enters again, confronts Midi, and reacts to the sight of Claire's ashes. Midi reveals the corpses of the children, and they close the scene with fierce vituperations, as the house is consumed by fire. Jaz flees in terror at the end.

[sc. 4]

The airstrip by the ocean outside the city. It is early in the morning. A seemingly enormous solar disc, hazy in the morning mist, sits barely above the horizon. The wings and rear fuselage of a passenger biplane, a seaplane moored to a dock, occupy the left part of the middle ground, leaving plenty of room for the expanse at the left and the crowd in front. Midi arrives, in an exceptionally beautiful European-style dress, with some exotic flow to it. The bartender follows, carrying her luggage, and handing them over to the personnel, who load it on to the aeroplane. The regulars from the bar arrive to say goodbye, including the drunk and the old man from the street. As spokeswoman, Mlle. Blandine tries to persuade her to stay, telling her that she is completely safe, now that she has been exonerated. Midi replies that that would all be well for a human like Mlle. Blandine, but Midi has finished her earthly task. Her destiny lies elsewhere.

Midi sings a farewell aria, The Song of Secrets. Grieving silence, then warm applause. She sings of how she knows she must go, leave her homeland forever. She knows it from the forest, the earth, her familiar spirits, and her ancestor, the Sun himself.

The motors are started, creating a strong wind blowing from the right. Hats and scarves fly. Midi walks across the stage to the aircraft. As she enters it, Jaz elbows his way through the crowd with a pistol. He shoots at Midi, but misses. She enters the passenger

cabin. The door is shut, and it disappears from view. Her friends look on, as the biplane, now a projection, reappears, taxiing and taking off toward the sea, into the sun, disappearing into it. Jaz's inert body is dragged off. The crowd disperses. The sounds of nature prevail.

Prelude

A dance with Midi and her familiar spirits on a dark stage. Midi, played by a dancer here, wears the honorific robes of a sorcière (gadé zaffé / quimboiseuse / manbo). The spirits wear dark grey body stockings with dark green and brown cloudlike patterns. The spirits appear one by one, chaotically, and dance in a random, dangerous way. Midi appears from the back center and gradually pulls them into order. Reluctantly, they dance around her, drawn to her by a natural attraction they resist but eventually surrender to, yielding themselves to her power. As the lights slowly rise at the back and their music subsides to give way to silence and the singing of an old man in the street, the scene for Act I is revealed and the familiars perch themselves in inconspicuous places around the barroom, one at the bar by the drunk who is sitting there. Midi strides through the space and goes through the door at the back used by the musicians.

Act I

Dusk. La Ti-Métropole, large barroom/restaurant in the hotel/brothel of a town on a French island in the Caribbean. Much of the stage is filled with tables and a dance floor. Against the back wall, there is a low platform for the entertainment. There is a door in the back wall and a bannistered stairway leading up to the rooms above. A large window faces onto the dingy street. Through the main doorway and the window we can see the street, part of the square it leads into, and the verandah of the hotel. The bar is deserted, except for a drunk slumped at the bar, who doesn't move through the entire act except to order and consume more drinks. There is a dark, isolated table by the bar. An old black man in rough clothes sits on the edge of the verandah, singing.

Old Man

The dead are the dead,
the living along with them.
They wander, eyes wide open,
seeing nothing. All of them deaf,
they only hear the pounding
of their petty desires.
Only the greedy seem wise,
the white men, who gobble up
poor blacks, land, and sea alike.

White or black, we're no more
than stupid horses.
The horsemen are the gods.
They are good riders,
sharp and violent.
They see everything. They hear everything.
They hear the slightest murmurs
of the universe, and their fierce eyes

see beyond
property, negro hands, women,
and booze. In this invisible distance
they see their own goals.

That's where they find the strength
to goad us to destruction.

Later in his song, a Waiter and a Boy appear and arrange the tables for the guests, who will arrive soon. The barman returns to the bar and looks over the bottles and the glasses and pours the drunk another drink in response to an almost unnoticeable wave of his hand. In the process, he leans close to the spirit who hovers by the drunk.

Bartender

She's singing tonight

Waiter

(standing close to a spirit lounging at one of the tables)
Yes, she's here. I can feel it in the air.

Bartender

It's been a long time.

Waiter

Yeah, you bet.
We've been waiting for her all along,
but she hasn't come.

Bartender

Yeah, it's been a long time, a long time.

Boy

A long time...weeks and months

Bartender

When things go wrong at home,
no songs for us.

Waiter

The music stops, the real music at least.
(to the boy)
When you're done,
go tell your buddies.

Bartender

Oh yes, we gotta let the hotels know.
The concierges will send us tourists,
the kind who drink and leave big tips.

Waiter

Big tips, handsome tips.
It'll be a madhouse.
(to the Boy)
If you break plates the way you did the last time...
I'll smash your skull in!

They fall into silence, concentrating on their work. We hear only the Old Man singing. The l'Apprenti sets his last table, and, after a nod to the Garçon, runs out the door, leaping over the Old Man.

Bartender

(abstracted as he polishes glasses, singing to himself)
Week after week, month after month.
when there's no peace at home,
everything's sad and empty.

Waiter

It's been dead quiet here for so long.

One of the girls comes down the stairs and walks expectantly to the bar. The Barman pours her a stiff rum without being asked.

Mlle. Blandine

So we'll have Midi tonight?

Bartender

You guessed it.

Mlle. Blandine

Is she okay? Have you seen her?

Bartender

Of course not! She arrived just like that.
(makes a floating gesture with his hand)

Mlle. Blandine

The last time she had
a big fat bruise on her puss.

Waiter

...and she sang like an angel!

Bartender

But like a devil, too!

Waiter

But I love her all the same. You too!

Bartender

We're all of us ready to follow the devil.

Waiter

You never can get the devil out of your head. The pretty girl, who shows you her thigh, when you're ready to be damned! Then you see her goat's leg!

Mlle. Blandine

(teasing him) I know this all too well, our friend the bartender!

Waiter

You're always carrying them on you, the herbs she gave you. You're ready to forget your wife at home, but never Midi's good stuff.

Bartender

That doesn't stop her from being dangerous.

Mlle. Blandine

(continuing her teasing) She protects us against the night, against all the evils that surround us, but she can break you, burn you, cut you up in little cubes for her pot, the witch!

Waiter

She does everything with a fearful joy.

All together

(in earnest) She is all-powerful.

Mlle. Blandine

But why does she let that Yank push her around when she can simply wipe him off the face of the earth like that! (strikes a match and lights a cigarette)

Waiter

He beats her up. He chases sluts.

Bartender

He's never sober.

Waiter

Never sober.

Mlle. Blandine

(shaking her hand loosely at the wrist)

Never sober

Bartender

Our friend Jaz is always up to something.

Mlle. Blandine

Always busy.

Waiter

On the job with those poor wretches up in the mountains, at the bar, and in the whorehouse.

Mlle. Blandine

Don't bite the hand that feeds you!

The Garçon and Mlle. Blandine dance a few steps of the Charleston together. The drunk turns and eyes them, annoyed. An elderly black man arrives, impeccably dressed in a black suit and white shirt, as more people enter and fill up the tables. The Boy and his friends have done their work well. The Mlle. Blandine beckons him over. He complies slowly, with restrained dignity. The Waiter, finally noticing the growing crowd, departs in haste to serve the tables, nodding respectfully to the old man, as if he were a man of the cloth of some sort. The Barman serves M. Matthieu a glass of rum, again without an order. The other girls begin to descend the stairs, some alone, some in groups of two or three.

Mlle. Blandine

Okay, Mister Matthieu, so you're all spiffed up for Midi the Fair?

M. Matthieu

And why not, Miss Blandine?
I'll always give her honor. She's the most powerful of us all...and no marks tonight, I hope. That's painful to see.

Mlle. Blandine

Jaz vanished two weeks ago.
Nobody's seen him anywhere.
It's terrible how she worries.
And she's not just his girl.
She's the mother of his children.

M. Matthieu

This isn't the first time?
What the hell is he up to now?
Up in the mountains or down in the city,
his "business activities" always do us harm.

Mlle. Blandine

People say he went to Guadeloupe.

The Barman leans over the bar between the two and listens intently.

Mlle. Blandine

But people have also spotted him on Les Saintes...with a girl. And what a girl, they say!

M. Matthieu

What you mean? "What a girl!" A whore, no doubt.

Mlle. Blandine

I'm not saying a word. They swore me to silence...and made me take a good old-fashioned oath. You understand?

M. Matthieu raises his open palms towards Mme. Blandine in frustration and respect for the old ways.

M. Matthieu

He'd better watch out, or he'd end up like Midi's father...

Mlle. Blandine

(wide-eyed, quickly losing her mocking veneer) ...and her brother! She sent a vampire after him! Torn limb from limb, in little gobbets, but no blood, not a drop of it. And people saw them jumping in the dust as if they were on a burning grill, crying out in agony.

Bartender

She does everything with a fearful joy.

M. Matthieu

She'll make him pay for it.
She's still sick in love with him,
but when she gets better,
she'll get hers, and it will be terrible.
You don't insult our holy nobility
with crimes like his.

Do you want me to tell her story?

Mlle. Blandine

(with irony) Oh yes, M'sieu Matthieu, I can never get enough of it!

M. Matthieu

"Song of the Sun"

Our friend the Sun is our neighbor here.
He gives life to mango and banana
and to sugar-cane, our life and servitude,
which wears us out with work
and revives us with drunkenness.

Every evening King Sun goes to bed
with Earth. Look
at the beautiful sunset over the bay
when it's calm — how he folds her in his arms
and penetrates her.

But every now and then he has a whim for a mortal girl.

Of these not many survive
his embraces, so fathers and mothers
began to hide their treasures from his rays.
King Sun had to look everywhere
without finding the girl he wanted.

Finally, seething in rage, he struck our island
with a huge ball of fire,
his fury was so strong,
his blaze landed in the bay.
Its peaceful waves boiled up
most terribly.

A ball of foam drifted
towards the beach, and from its vapors,
the All-Beautiful, the Mother of All,
placed her exquisite foot on the sand.
Her steps led to the house
of the king who ruled back then

over the First People, who have all gone,
but who were the ancestors of the elected
among us, who understand the speech of the gods.
The most rare and brilliant of these are the descendants
of that king and the daughter of the Great Sun.
In our sad times, there is only one — Midi.

The place is now packed. The Waiter is turning people away at the door, especially anyone who looks rustic or scruffy. Some of these have lined up by the windows to see and hear from the street, but the Waiter shoos them away. The guests (a mixture of all the local races, except the very lowest classes, a good measure of European visitors, including a Lesbian couple and a group of prim Americans, who drink only water and leave, offended, after the first song).

Midi is revealed in profile, then, finally, in full light.

The house band follows her unobtrusively to the platform along the wall. Midi wears an elegant, tight-fitting gown, which would not shame any nightclub singer in Paris, but it is covered by a colorful floral smock, which, when wrapped around her, gives her the look of a village woman, although one of some distinction, that is, a hint of her own ceremonial robes. She also produces a head cloth, which completes the village look. The local audience laughs robustly. The foreigners don't get it.

Midi

I'm a child of the sun. I hate the rain.
Even though the rain gets on my nerves, and a grey sky even more,
I've found a way to survive, to turn things upside down.
I stay in bed by myself, until I'm ready
to get started with my little pleasures, and anything else that comes to mind.

(Takes off the smock and headcloth. A mild strip tease accompanies the song.)

After getting up so late, I sit on the edge of the bed and
stretch out my arms to the sky and the north and south.
From my first look out the window
My loneliness has turned to comfort.

The maid knows from the rain's sound she has the day off.
I add a big spoonful of coffee
to my chicory pot, and I drink it
by the door to my garden, the garden of my ancestors.

Now I'm ready to stroll
around my flowers and plants as I like.
My nightgown, luxuriating in its cotton,
picked by black hands from the village,

takes on spot after spot of the sacred water
from the cloudy sky and gentle breezes:
they stick to my body, even suck on it,
like a swarm of incorporeal lovers.

The caresses of the drops make me sleepy.
The folds of my shift, all soaked, grow heavy.
And like an over-excited young gentleman,
they squeeze hard at my kidneys and my breasts,

too hard! I'm suffocating. From this dripping, winding sheet
I must set myself free right away!
The straps go down. The shift slips off my back.
My body is all alone with the Sky and his waters.

I dance in the rain. I embrace it.
It soaks me from head to foot.
That's how the Daughter of the Sun
gets along with the clouds when she gets up.

When my boyfriend comes back home
he asks me in a tone that's not very nice
if I've been faithful to him in every way.

When I say yes, I know I'm lying.

As the final stanza begins, Jaz appears on the street, accompanied by Claire, who is dressed in a bright print dress with strong red and green patterns, but darkish hues which harmonize with the luxuriant avocado silk shawl she wears. At the right edge of the window, unseen and unheard by the people in the bar, they begin to argue.

When the little song is over, Midi breathes out and leans against the piano while she lights up a cigarette. The band launch on a dance number, a trite waltz, while the Waiter and the Boy serve drinks. The smoke in the room grows denser, and a noisy hubbub from the chorus, now joined by the girls from upstairs on the stairway and in the barroom. The audience get up and dance. The familiars weave in and out among them, cutting in now and then with various male and female dancers, who do not realize that their partners have changed.

We now hear Claire and Jaz' conversation in the street, which is inaudible to everyone in the Ti-Métropole.

Jaz (crooning in a high tenor)
My Parisian princess,
slim and straight and fair,
I'll take you on a liner
across the tranquil waves,
through the brisk sea air,

back to my home country—
you know America—
I'll take you home to Cleveland.
We'll live like royals there.

Claire (angry and mocking)
Stop this stupid dreaming!
I don't believe a word.
You've said you can't go back home,
and never told me why.
It's totally *absurde*.

Right now you have to face her
and tell her we're in love.
And tell her we'll soon marry.
Are you man enough for that?

Jaz
There won't be any trouble.
I'll set the record straight.
My uncle is a judge there.
My dad is big in steel.
You shouldn't doubt me. Truly,
Cleveland's Paris on a lake!

Claire

Just face her down and tell her.
Look into her eyes.
If you can hold your gaze there,
Tu casseras ses noeuds, her ties,
the knots she's tied around you.

Jaz

I've got to get it right at first.
Everything's at stake.
I've got to think. I'll have a drink,
and catch her at her break.

Claire

(exasperated)

The dumbest *péqu'naud* on the island
knows plenty more than you!
You believe the stupid songs she chants
around her skulls, her magic books, and bats,
her fires and smoke, and all those stinking black stews
and dead men's parts, snakeskins, evil weeds, and rotting cats!

Jaz sits down at a street table in another bar across the street and orders a big rum, which he drinks, while Midi continues her act. Claire reluctantly sits down with him, refusing a drink from the waiter.

They beckon to Midi, who is finishing her drink, lost in thought. She slowly, heavily returns to her place with them, gradually enlivened by their introductory music. The audience fall silent, and she begins to sing.

Midi

("Little Tricks")

All right, ladies and gentlemen,
you all know me, I'm Midi.

I can sing and dance,
and every now and then I help my friends
in trouble. If you have a pain
somewhere in your body or in the lawcourts,
or, most important of all, in love,
all you have do is to visit me at home,
in the house of my ancestors.

Now I'm going to tell you a story.

Most of you have known me
for some years, since I arrived
with my handsome friend, Mister Jaz.
Some others know that I returned,

for my family who,
as powerful as they were,
were sent into exile in the little islands
by the old landowners and the priests.
I grew up there
like a little savage.

My parents sent me twice a year
to visit my grandmother
who taught me little tricks.
The power in them gave me
so much pleasure!
One night, when I was fourteen,
she told me that I should be grown up
enough to make a big decision,
which, once it was made,
I could never change.

The old woman explained to me
that the ability to know everything
could be within my reach
if I wanted it, but it would cost me dearly.
I could be able to read the thoughts
of everyone, even if they weren't
in my presence. No one could
ever tell me lies.
I asked her to explain it to me,
but she only said to me
that I should go to sleep.

In the morning, everything was clear
even if I couldn't find the words for it.
Enter into the thoughts of everyone—
what a nightmare,
an insomnia only the gods
could stand!
So now, I'm standing here among you
as one of you.
Isn't being human living
with other people and accepting them
as the mysteries that they are?

Silence. Then warm applause, which Midi acknowledges. Some rise and begin to dance in a dreamy, as if under a spell. Others remain at their tables, conversing, ordering more drinks, etc.

Midi

Thank you, thank you, friends.
I wish you a good evening.
Drink. Dance to the music of my sweet colleagues,

Sébastien, Hector, Joseph, et Marcellin.
I'm done in, I have to confess.
I have to take care of my family...

Claire has been waiting impatiently for Jaz to get up and go into La Ti-Métropole, but he continues stubbornly to slouch at the table, pouring himself more drinks. After Midi's song ends with no response from Jaz, she pushes him violently in the shoulder, almost knocking him over on to the pavement. Jaz reluctantly rises, unsteadily, and leaves Claire, looking back at her resentfully, and approaches the entrance to the bar, while she remains, watching him closely. Jaz enters, at first timidly with halting step, as if Claire has thrown him into a lion's cage...then he pulls himself together and strides towards Midi, who is taking bows by the musicians.

He has no idea of what he will do or say, but he projects a blind, alcoholic confidence. Midi sees him and freezes in astonishment, . She stares at Jaz, as he makes his way towards her. The guests dance and converse. The girls return to their places, as the Waiter and the Boy make the rounds. Everyone makes an effort to keep their eyes off the troubled couple. The familiar spirits assume postures in inconspicuous places around the bar, as if ready to jump to Midi's defence.

Jaz stands directly in front of her, smiling vacuously. Midi is overcome with emotion, as much pain as happiness to see him alive. She is unsure whether to berate Jaz or to embrace him. Gradually her shock opens up to conflicting feelings of anger and joy at seeing her lover safely return. She looks at him wide-eyed, expectantly.

Without thinking, Jaz takes the initiative, snapping into an offense. His instincts serve him well.

Jaz

I looked for you at home. You weren't there. The boys were asleep. I found Honorine, and she said you were here—in this house of ill repute! Why have you come here? You know what I think of it!

This infuriates Midi to the core. She grasps Jaz by the arm and roughly leads him across the stage to the dark table at the opposite side of the bar. In his semi-inebriated state he can't resist her. She virtually pushes him into a chair, while she remains standing. The guests try to ignore the scene, while the girls look on slyly but sharply. The waiter, who has seen this before, brings a bottle of rum and two glasses and pours a small amount in Midi's and a large amount in Jaz's, with restrained hostility. He knows the best way to keep the peace is to let Jaz pass out as soon as possible. The table, Midi, and Jaz lit in strong raking light against the shadows.

Midi

You know I live to sing, and this is where I sing. This is my family. How can you—of all people—preach respectability! How can I? Let's leave respectability for the békés!

She pauses in her fury, sits down beside him, drinks, and leans over towards him. She leans over close to his face and says very quietly, but aggressively, with sharply focused anger.

Besides, I needed money. You took every sou in the house. We ran out of food. Your sons ate beans and rice. Then there was nothing. Here they pay me for my work!

Jaz, looking over at the girls:

And them, too! How can you breathe the air in such a place! And you sing here!

He falls into silence and collapses onto his elbows, staring at the bottle. Midi's rage peaks and slowly subsides.

Midi

Are you all right?

Jaz looks at her appealingly in silence.
(*He knows how to play this.*)

Midi

Where have you been? You've been gone for two weeks.

Jaz

It's been hard—up in the mountains with the men. They're not to be trusted. I couldn't write to you. The messenger would have gone to the wrong people...and then it would be all over. I couldn't let a single one of them out of my sight. We lock the shacks at night, with Billy and Joe on guard.

I thought of you in the night,
while, on my pallet, I tossed and turned,
my mind on fire with the worst nightmares...
What those bastards wouldn't do,
if Joe and Billy and I once dropped our guard!
When they cleared the path around the cave,
we let them have machetes.
Before we took them back and locked them away,
this big African monster of a man turned to me,
the machete still in his hand, the hatred in his eyes!
When I try to dream of you, that's what I see.
Billy shot the machete out of his hand.
The bullet smashed his wrist,
as thick as a boa constrictor.
They beat him, whipped him, and locked him
in an oil barrel we have ready for that.
The big man banged and hollered for hours,
then he stopped.

Two days later Billy and Joe pulled out his corpse.
How it reeked! It stank to hell.
We hung it from a branch for the birds to eat
and the men to see, as they worked and fed.
Ahhh! The danger, the constant danger I'm in,
awake and sleeping! That's what I have to do
to keep alive and come back to you.
And then the police, the damned gendarmes...
They'd feed me to those cannibals if they could.

If the world were as it should be,
I wouldn't have to do this; I wouldn't feel the danger;
There'd be no meddling cops.
But in all this misery I've found love, thinking of you.

She is horrified and disgusted by the story, but she has heard it many times before, in many variants. She believes it may have happened once in the past, but she has long since stopped believing Jaz's reports of his absences, partly because she knows he's a liar, and partly because she'd rather not think about how brutal he can be, whether in practice or in his imagination.

Jaz

I love you. I missed you. Just the picture of you keeps me alive!

He finishes his drink in one gulp and fills the glass again from the bottle. Midi, lost in thought, doesn't touch hers. Torn between suspicion, anger, and her happiness that Jaz has come safely back to her, she gives in to love and takes hold of his hand.

Midi (dreamily and with deep sadness)

Why didn't I destroy you before this?
I love you still...I love you...
and I'm afraid of revenge...I'm afraid of evil
I'm afraid of the evil that lies dormant in me,
which I renounced but didn't erase.
Evil can't be erased,
even if I see death in it...
Killing the object of my love
is the obliteration
of my human soul.

DUET

Midi

You look terrible, Jaz, dear, Jaz, poor Jaz.
You haven't slept. You've been drinking.

Jaz

It gets only worse, the work, the men,
those damned French officials...

Midi

Is it worth it, dear? You're suffering so.

Jaz

Money! We want money! We need money!
It's ridiculous what those pimps
pay you for your singing.
Money, we want money.
Then we'll leave this place.

Midi

My home? After growing up in exile
like the grand-daughter of slaves?

Jaz

These people never pay you for your remedies,
or whatever it is you do for them.
That old man over there you call your friend,
he makes a fortune at it.

Midi

I won't take money from people in trouble.
Monsieur Matthieu is a good man.
Let him take money for his *quimbois*.
I have my music. I can sing.

Jaz

So I'll go on working, selling my goods for peanuts
to ignorant savages and...Communists!

Midi

Here on the island, I have enough for us to live on.

Jaz

Enough!
That whore, Blandine, makes more money
with a quickie than you'll make this whole evening!

Midi

Just be content, Jaz.
You can open that bar you talk about.
I'll sing there for you.

Jaz

With what? With what?
The only way to make real money here
is to be an official and get bribes.
Goddammit all! Goddammit to hell!

Midi

Can you remember yourself
when we first met?
You were like a young aristocrat,
standing straight in a fine suit,
a neat handkerchief in your breast pocket
gold cufflinks, gold pin in your silk tie.

You used to talk of the future:
ours and the world's.
You said you'd buy an island
with all that money you'd make—
one of those little ones
they don't know what to do with,
or you'd lead a revolution,
and teach our people how to be free
women and men. Still slaves they are,
most of them. You said you'd teach them
how to live free, without the force of law
and officials, without some faraway
man at a desk sucking the lifeblood from them
to satisfy the greed of an abstraction—
a government,
what is that?
Not people who eat, breathe, and love...
nourished by the gods, our gods,
the Roman God too.
I could bring them all together
as a high priestess,
and end the superstition, fear,
and resentment
that live on poisoned magic.
You said we could do this,
both of us together.

Now you're puffy, disheveled, a mess.
You can wear the clothes, but they don't fit.
They sag from your shoulders,
and your gold, the silk,
have lost their luster.
Don't drink so much.
Quit this awful work of yours.
We can still be happy together.
I love you, Jaz.

Jaz

Money, I need money, money to live!

Midi

Money to die! I can see it.
You'll be dead, and I'll be alone
on this earth, this island
wrapped up as she is each day
by Mother Soleil.
It is beautiful just to see her
in the sky over the water,
every morning, every dusk,

but bitter as sea water when one is alone.

Jaz (aside)

I need money, I need money
to leave this hole for good.
Paris is the place for me.
Jaz's American Bar, Le Jaz Club,
—hamburgers, hot dogs, one-pound steaks,
diamond cufflinks, silk underwear
I'll throw out at the end of every day.
Place Pigalle, a dozen Blandines,
going home to bed at dawn, a tart on each arm!

Midi

You were young, you were brave,
you were straight and handsome.
I was young. I thought I needed help.
You protected me. You stood in their way,
when they wanted to send me back,
back to that beautiful, strange island
where I grew up, a stranger.
Then, my grandmother, my mother, and my father, all dead—
no human being to call my own—
I was ready to go back, and you helped me.
You saved me.
They'd have sent me back—or maybe to Cayenne!

Jaz (lost in his own thoughts)

La Compagnie générale transatlantique,
le paquebot Pellerin de Latouche!
Every time she sails it hurts.
All she leaves me is a trail of smoke.

Midi

And then you became a father.
Together we gave life to our sons.
Don't you love our boys?
Aren't you proud of them?

Jaz (aside)

In Paris,
the boss of the smartest
watering hole in town!
What would people think of me
walking down the Boulevard
with a family like that?

No, I'll walk around with girls.
I'll roll up big bills,

tight like cigars,
and stick them between their tits,
and they'll laugh, they'll giggle
like little monkeys!
I'll stick them in their garters.
They'll love my money!
I'll stick them...
I'll smoke them,
and blow the smoke in their faces.
I'll flick the ashes in the gutter,
and crush the butt under my shoe.

Midi

The pain of being human!
The bitter solitude and loneliness
You've softened its sting, dear Jaz,
my dear, poor Jaz, you've softened the sting
of that unrelenting surf.

A pause.

Jaz

This last time was bad. I may have to leave...the island...you and the boys may have to leave...for safety.

Midi

What do you mean?

Jaz

It's getting harder and harder to control the men...harder and harder to avoid the police.
They'll find me eventually.

Midi

I'm not leaving the island, the house where my ancestors lived. After generations in exile, I came back and took it. I live there not only for myself and for you and my children. I have lived there for all who couldn't.

Jaz

I have a friend on Dominica who will protect you.

Midi

No!

Jaz

No one can find you there. Not unless they were born and raised in the mountains. I'll come to you when I can.

Midi

You will?!

Jaz

I swear!

Midi

Should I believe you?

Jaz

I met a man, an important man, who can help...who can help us. He visited the town from...I can't say. (I serve my country in my way.) Eventually...he can help us.

Midi

Jaz, I don't know whether to believe you or not—no, I don't believe you—but I love you still.

She clenches his arm and pulls him up from his chair. His puts his arm around her, and they embrace.

We have seen Claire watching Jaz closely and pacing nervously outside. When she sees them embrace, she marches furiously into the bar. The Guests, the Bartender, the Musicians, the Waiter, the Boy—everyone but the girls—have done their best to ignore the encounter between Midi and Jaz, can no longer control themselves. They all watch in fascination.

Guests I (overlapping French and English)

Qui est-ce, cette femme? / Who is this woman? Who is she?

Guests II

Une parisienne, bien sûr! / Straight from Paris, fresh off the boat!

Guests III

Quel éclat! / What a knock-out!

Guests I

Une parisienne inconnue parmi nous! / A Parisian woman in town, and we've never laid eyes on her before.

The Bartender (smiling knowingly)

Come off it! It's the Governor's daughter.

Guests II

Oh la la!

Guests III

Quelle fureur! / And she looks mad as hell!

Claire heads over to Midi and Jaz, and forcibly pulls them apart, pushing Midi almost off her feet into the drunk at the bar, although she is a slight young woman, certainly more delicate than Midi, who catches herself on the bar and comes back to a standing position to look on to the scene in amazement and horror. Jaz lands in his chair at the table.

Claire

Laisse-le, pute! Laisse mon mari! / Let go of him, whore! Let go of my husband!

Midi (with icy sarcasm)

And who are you, Mademoiselle? I think I recognize my own husband who I've lived with for ten years.

Explain this, Jaz. Who is this woman?

Claire

You are not married to this man.

Everybody knows that.

Soon he will be my husband.

Tell her, Jaz!

Midi

Yes, tell me, Jaz!

Jaz (crushed, speaking with the utmost difficulty)

Yes, I...love her. I...asked her to...marry me.

Her name is Claire.

Mlle. Blandine (with an exaggerated upperclass British accent)

She's the Governor's daughter, y'know.

Guests (imitating her)

The Governor's daughter, ha ha!

Midi

You're leaving me, Jaz?

Mlle. Blandine (looking contemptuously from Midi over to Jaz)

Milord is too grand for you, ma pauvre!

Midi

You're leaving your sons?

Claire

The sooner the better. Disgusting!

Midi

What?

Claire

A gentleman like Jaz can't marry your kind. You're not married.

That he should be openly known as the father of two bastards!

What did you do, you whore, to seduce him?

What spells did you cast, witch, to confuse him?
What vile dead things did you brew?

Guests, et. al.

Jaz, we all know, makes his own stew!
Stewed to the gills in cheap rum!
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Midi

Where were you really Jaz?
I knew you were lying,
telling the same old stories.

Claire (standing close to Midi and staring her down)

He was with me, almost the whole time.
Of course he spent a few days at his camp—
very dangerous! You don't know what a brave man
you've lost—then he rushed to me!
We sailed for Les Îles des Saintes.
There, on a little bay, the most beautiful little bay,
there is an *auberge*, very simple, but very fine.
I heard my father talking of it. The grands békés
go there with their mistresses—no one around,
no questions asked.
The proprietor was chef in a great restaurant
on the Côte d'Azur, and he retired to this little island
to run the most exclusive sort of place.
His *Bouillabaisse à l'Antillaise* is exquisite, better than in France!
That is where I brought my poor Jaz.

Guests, et. al.

She brought him to the békés' whorehouse,
the Governor's daughter! Ha, ha, ha!

Midi (deeply wounded, in shock)

You lied, you lied. I knew you were lying,
but I wanted to believe you. Ah!

Claire

Poor Jaz! He's so brave and clever,
but he'd never amount to anything with you.

Midi (in extreme pain of the soul)

Aaahh!

Claire

With the likes of you.

Midi (in extreme pain of the spirit)

Aaahh!

Claire

We'll be married in the Cathedral—somewhere...

Guests, et. al.

Not here! Not here!

Claire

He'll be the Governor's son-in-law.

Guests, et. al.

Ha, ha, ha!

Claire

We'll be married in the Cathedral...

Guests, et. al.

in Cayenne, perhaps?

Claire

Then we'll return in triumph to Jaz's native city,
Cleveland, Ohio!

I'll meet his parents—very rich they are—
grande industrie!

Guests, et. al.

Cleveland, Ohio, USA!

After a long, amorous honeymoon...
in Cayenne, perhaps?

Claire (as if coming to after a trance)

But you, Jaz, you haven't said a word.

Aren't you going to tell her how you feel?

Your whore, can't you tell her what you want?

Are you drunk, are you totally drunk,
so totally drunk, that you can't stand up?

Can you stand up to this creature,
this daughter of savages and slaves?

See what you've done to this man, you black slut!

Claire pulls Jaz to his feet. His legs are almost like jelly. She draws a line roughly up his back.

Claire

Do you still have a spine, man?! Can you walk?

We're walking out of here—now!

You've let me down, you know—for the last time!

Claire puts her arm around Jaz's midriff and manages to half-guide, half-carry him across the

barroom out into the street. When they have disappeared, we hear the Old Man again, singing from the street.

Old Man

The dead are the dead,
the living along with them.
They wander, eyes wide open,
seeing nothing.
[...]

White or black, we're no more
than stupid horses.
The horsemen are the gods.
They are good riders,
sharp and violent.
[...]

That's where they find the strength
to goad us to destruction.

Midi begins to sing over him, at first following his tune, but thinking ahead to her "Chanson des Secrets" and the little goddess. As this goes on, she sings more freely, covers him, and is finally left alone.

I, now, have gazed into the waters...
for the first time, forced to look.
I've seen the image of my beloved
break, shatter like a mirror
in a thousand blades of glass
which pierce my heart.
They cover my breasts with lace-like threads of blood.
The little, the forgotten one, the immortal...
death was beyond her reach.
Am I dying? I feel it. I want to die.
Can I die? It could be...
and escape this frightful race to annihilation.

FADE TO BLACK or CURTAIN

Act II

The morning after. The sitting room and garden of Midi's family house on the edge of town where she and Jaz have been living. Large French windows reveal the garden. Dense tropical forest surrounds the house and encroaches on the garden, where orchids and other exotic flowers grow. The growth lets in only mote-laden beams of sunlight. A slow, heavy breeze moves the branches occasionally. Bird and animal sounds. The wildness and danger of nature is in the atmosphere. We seem to be in some ancient, totally alien culture, a place where the ancient powers prevail over modern realities. In the center there is a hearth with a large, altar-like stone built into it. There is a door at the back of the room which leads to the bedrooms — including the children's room. Against the wall an old gramophone with a horn. In the center a large divan, comfortable wicker chairs. Some art objects and paintings, local, African, European, some of them strange. Also a western painting of a sailing ship, old, dirty, and torn in one place. A dark corner is crammed with statues of various divinities worshipped on the island and quimbois paraphernalia, among them an image of Marianman and a skeleton in the blue robes of the Virgin.

[sc. 1]

Midi, wearing a loose, deep purple shift, barefoot, her hair loose, emerges from the bedroom door, walking heavily and slowly, as if in a trance and profoundly depressed, over to the French doors giving out on the garden. She pauses briefly at the door, then turns away abruptly, as if disgusted by the beauty of the plants, the sun, and the smells.

Midi

Have I been asleep for centuries?
Nothingness...nothing...darkness without end...silence.
Am I dead? I don't know myself anymore.
Who am I?

She walks rapidly, as if terrified and looking for something to save her, over to a old, pitted, oval mirror hanging nearby on the wall, she peers into it questioningly and long, as the music from the orchestra grows stranger and stranger, expressing her total disorientation in a limbo between the human and something else, perhaps the divine, perhaps hell, perhaps both together. She touches the old gilt frame tentatively, as if she'd like to take it gently from the wall to bring her face closer to it. Once again, she turns away in confusion and distress.

Midi

I don't recognize myself.
I don't know myself anymore.
I can't remember my name.
I can only see my name in the shadows
of a country far away, so far away
and ancient,
that this name belongs to another woman,
another woman who is unlike me in every way...
the eyes, the skin, the breasts, the hips...

I can't walk the way she does...
and she has been dead for centuries...
when I fell asleep...
I am lost!

Her eyes fall on her corner of statues and objects. She recognizes them not as familiar possessions, but as beings, whom she may know. She walks over towards it tentatively, even fearfully, as if she is not sure if they are friendly or dangerous. As she gets closer, she becomes more confident. She knows the images and approaches them as the only beacon of reality and comfort she knows. She looks over her sacred corner and gradually recognizes it more and more. She notices a pair of ornate hanging lamps on either side of the space. She knows where to find the match to light them, and they fill the space and bathe the objects and herself in a weird shifting red-yellow light. She stands before them, first with reverence, but more and more as a confident equal. After some time, she begins to speak, finding herself as she speaks to her gods, as if she were reciting a credo.

Midi

The Sun, the most powerful of the gods
spawned our race in the infancy of humanity.
Long ago, his descendants guarded his honor
with all the care and veneration due
to a primordial ancestor of such power.
The ancient peoples of this island, all of them,
cherished the Sun and his children,
until the *békés* and the priests arrived.
For generations they couldn't touch
my forebears, but finally one of them,
stepped beyond the limits of his freedom,
and the Governor gave him the choice
of a skiff for him and his family,
to sail to destinations unknown,
or Guyana, the prison colony.
My ancestor sold this house for a pittance
to a friend he trusted, with a promise to return it,
his descendants to ours, when we returned.
I am the one who took back our dwelling
with the original altar to the Sun as its hearth,
built by his own offspring.

[begins to prepare utensils for a sacrifice]

Named Midi in his honor,
I am the one who cherishes his cult
for the loyal native souls of our island.
Bearing this name, I live among them,
I cure them with my *quimbois*—
bodies and hearts—
as the servant of our impoverished people,
who can no longer recognize their great god, the Sun.

Wearing this name, I entertain them
with popular songs,
pathetic reminders of their traditions.
[with growing rage]
All-powerful long ago, our myths
I reduce to wretched nursery rhymes.
Oh, what a liar I am,
what a pretense...a whore!
My little remedies and these rotten ditties!
I am unworthy of you,
my ancestors.

Kill me!
Kill me here and now!
Burn my crimes along with my body!
This humanity disgusts me.

[Silence. She understands that her prayer has not persuaded the gods. Trying to anger them, she continues.]

And the heirs of the Sun, the next generation,
which I have created with this woman's body,
are the sons of humanity's worst,
of a monster of cruelty and lies.
I can't understand this earth's duplicity.
He deceived me.
He assisted my return. He delivered me,
and I took him for our deliverance,
this man, who treats us like slaves,
with all the brutality of the old landowners.
I could have stopped him...
I loved him so much, I could ignore
my first suspicions, and later,
confronted by his infidelities, his insults,
and his violence,
I couldn't even defend myself.
I loved him too much.
The annihilating power
which I invoked only once...
for his sake, against my own blood...
I could not awaken it against him.
I loved him too much.
I gave him sons,
a free father's pride, a citizen's pride.
The other men of the island despise him,
but he can brag of being a father,
even when he vomits on his manhood,
sleeping drunk in the gutter.

[Silence.]

Nothing? Not a breath? Not the faintest sound?
All right, I'll begin the sacrifice.
Of you, my family, my friends, my colleagues,
all I ask is your guidance.
Save me, I beg you!

She pulls a curtain behind her, separating her from the rest of the room. The lamps project eerie red lights through the fabric, later accompanied by the fires at the altar, as the incense is burned. We see her from the side, as she begins the grand ritual. Then the lights dim on that part of the stage, leaving only the strange lights.

[sc. 2]

Jaz, smartly dressed in a light-colored suit, straw hat, and linen-leather brogues, carrying two large duffles, enters to collect his belongings—along with anything of Midi's worth selling. He looks sharp, as if he had not been drunk the night before, but still there is still something seedy about him. Occupied with his own practical concerns, he doesn't pay the slightest attention to the lights. He whistles a jaunty, rag-timish ditty, Cole Porter's "Men of Cleveland." Claire's severely correct white nanny, her own French nanny, who raised her in her father's various postings around the world, accompanies him. Her looks betray her intense disapproval of the whole situation, of Jaz and his casual attitude, his mixed family, and above all of having to look after non-white children, for however short a time. Jaz notices the drawn curtain, understands what it means, and decides to leave Midi alone.

Jaz

Good, she's closeted up with her idols, doing her mumbo-jumbo. Let's hope that keeps her 'til we both make it out of here.

The nanny looks at him blankly and resentfully, barely understanding a word he says.

Jaz

(facing her closely and speaking very deliberately) Take them straight to the boat. You should be in Dominica by the afternoon. There will be a woman waiting there for them, a nigger (colored?) woman. She'll recognize you. You can leave them and take the next boat back. Here's money.

The two boys suddenly run out to greet Jaz with warm affection. He responds in kind, and sings a line from "Boola boola," which delights them no end, and they sing it back to him. He is likewise amused by their performance in an old routine among them. But he has things to do. He gestures to the nanny to take one of the duffle bags and the children back to their room and to gather their belongings. Jaz surveys the objects in the room, looking for his belongings and whatever of Midi's property might have some resale value. As he prowls around, he absent-mindedly sings, mumbles, and hums Cole Porter's tribute to the Cleveland men of Yale.

Jaz

Oh. Cleveland—let's make it Cleveland.

It's such a gay old lown.
 Chock full of real he-men
 Y-A-L-E men,
 The kind who drink it down, way down.
 They're slicker at drinking liquor
 Than any men I know,
 So we won't go beggin'
 When we go bootleggin'
 Out in Cleveland. O-hio.

The boys stare fearfully at the strange white woman, reaching out, and crying for their father. She is not so prejudiced or hard-hearted not to sympathize with them. She kneels down, looks them in the eye, resting her hands on their shoulders briefly, and speaks to them.

<p>Nurse Eh bien, il me fait plaisir de vous connaître, mes petits. Votre père et moi, nous vous conduirons en vacances à une très belle île où vous serez saufs et heureux. Emmenez-moi dans votre chambre, et vous ferai les malles. Voilà j'en ai une grande pour vous deux. Faire une malle, grande comme ça pour des grands garçons comme vous, ça, c'est un travail! Et, vous savez, je suis française de bon aloi, et quand je travaille, je chante. Connaissez-vous cette chanson? Elle est mignonne.</p> <p>"En revenant des noces" ("À la claire fontaine")</p> <p>1. En revenant des noces J'étais bien fatiguée Au bord d'une fontaine Je me suis reposée. L'eau en était si claire Que je m'y suis baignée</p> <p>Vous m'avez tant aimé Et vous m'avez délaissé.</p> <p>2. Sur la plus haute branche Le rossignol chantait Chante, rossignol, chante,</p>	<p>Nanny All right, I'm happy to know you young men. Your father and I will take you on vacation to a very beautiful island where you will be safe and happy. Take me into your room, and I'll pack your bags. Or look, I've got one big one for you both. Packing a suitcase, that's a piece of work! And, you know, I'm a real, genuine Frenchwoman, and when I work I sing. Do you know this song? It's cute.</p> <p>"Coming back from the wedding"</p> <p>1. Coming back from the wedding I was really tired At the side of a fountain I sat down to rest. The water was so clear that I bathed in it.</p> <p>You loved me so much and [now] you've left me.</p> <p>2. On the highest branch the nightingale was singing. Sing, nightingale, sing.</p>
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Tu as beau z'à chanter.
Tu as le cœur en joie,
Moi je l'ai en regret.

Vous m'avez tant aimé
Et vous m'avez délaissé.

3.
Tu as le cœur en joie,
Moi je l'ai en regret,
De mon bel amant
Qui va se marier.
Pour un bouton de rose
Que je lui ai refusé.

Vous m'avez tant aimé
Et vous m'avez délaissé.

4.
Pour un bouton de rose
Que je lui ai refusé
Je voudrais que la rose
Soit encore au rosier.
Je voudrais que l'rosier
Soit encore à planter.

Vous m'avez tant aimé
Et vous m'avez délaissé.

Garçon 1

Mais je la connais, je la connais!

Garçon 2

Moi aussi! Je la connais

Les deux garçons ensemble

Chante rossignol, chant' toi qui as le coeur gai!
Tu as le coeur à rir', moi je l'ai à pleurer!
J'ai perdu mon ami sans l'avoir mérité
Pour un bouquet de roses que je lui refusais!

Nurse

Mais oui, c'est ça, mes petits,
c'est la même comptine
avec son propre rythme antillais.
Vous êtes presque des petits français,
bien que vous soyez indigènes
de cette île exotique.

You have something nice to sing.
Your heart is joyful.
Mine is full of regret.

You loved me so much
and [now] you've left me.

3.
Your heart is joyful.
Mine is full of regret,
for my handsome lover
who is getting married.
All because of a rosebud
that I wouldn't let him have.

You loved me so much
and [now] you've left me.

4.
All because of a rosebud
that I wouldn't let him have.
I wish the rose
were still on the rose bush.
I wish the rose bush
Hadn't even been planted yet.

You loved me so much
and [now] you've left me.

Boy 1

I know that one, I know it!

Boy 2

Me too! I know that song.

The two boys together

Sing, nightingale, sing with your happy
heart!
You have the heart to laugh. Me, mine is
for crying!
I lost my lover, but I didn't deserve it
For a bunch of roses I wouldn't let him
have.

Nanny

Of course, that's it, little friends.
It's the same nursery rhyme
with a little Antillean rhythm of its own.

Allons!	You are almost little Franchmen, even though you're natives on this exotic island. Let's go!
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The boys are charmed. They lead her enthusiastically through the door to the bedrooms.

Jaz continues his song, pulls out a flask from his pocket and drinks vigorously.

He picks up a figurine in an African style, examining it for value. He decides against it and puts it down disparagingly. He moves on to other things, most of which he passes over without paying close attention. He stops at a large, ornate radiator mascot, an elegant French Art Deco example, of a kneeling woman rising and spreading her wings.

This he picks up and looks at it thoughtfully, and not with value in mind. He sings:

Jaz

She never forgets this...even last night...

As he contemplates the radiator mascot, Midi emerges from her corner, striding forth with strength and determination, her consciousness far from her mundane surroundings. She sees Jaz, reacting as if to a violent shock, and approaches him slowly and deliberately, showing confusion only as she gets near him. She looks at the mascot and sings:

Midi

Are you taking that with you?

Jaz

You know I feel sentimental about it."

Midi

You, sentimental? That is the symbol of our love and our dreams. It's worthless now. You may as well sell it and drink the money away.

You have no feeling and no pride.
 You have a wife and family:
 on this island most men take pride in that,
 even if they deceive their wives from time to time,
 but you do nothing but deceive and cheat and whore
 and steal. You steal money, and you steal men.
 You rob them of their freedom for nothing,
 for a few sous, which you spend on rum and women.
 You bend them down for your pleasure with money
 you've stolen from slaves, while your sons eat beans and rice,
 and your wife worries herself to starvation.
 You think you have something in this little tart.
 She'll spend your drinking money before you even see it.

You haven't even seen the beginning of your troubles.
She'll mince you to a pulp with her sharp tongue and her razor heels!

Jaz

I know how naïve you are,
born in these god-forsaken islands,
but don't you understand?
This isn't about love (I love you.);
it's about survival. Claire is a bitch,
but she's the governor's daughter.
I've done him no end of useful services,
but his police have been hounding me to death,
and he's beginning to think of me as expendible.
They were joking about Cayenne last night,
but it's a real possibility. Maybe even Devil's Island.
And the governor, the békés, and the priests
like you even less than they like me.
With your black magic, you're more of a threat
to their order than I am.
Say what you like, we sink or swim together.
I'm marrying Claire for your sake, to protect you.

He puts his arm around her in a protective way, as if to prove his argument, Midi cringes at first, prepares to push him away, then half-acquiesces, with resistance.

Midi

Don't touch me.
I don't believe a word of what you say.
You'll be married to Claire,
and you'll go off to France together
and live in the most fashionable *quartier*,
or on the Riviera...
Don't put your arm around me again.
It feels like old times. It breaks my heart.

Jaz

I love you, Midi.
Midi, Midi, *ma chérie*, Midi.
Claire is a bitch, and everybody knows it,
Every man and woman on the island,
knows it, But from suspicion to office,
that's what she'll do for me,
that's what she'll do for you.
The gendarmes are watching me.
They're watching you.
They'll deport us for sure.
The governor would have me assassinated,
if he could. He'd never want me for a son-in-law,
but at least I'm a white man, at least I'm a white man,

She's a bitch, what a bitch! No decent man will touch her.
I wish I'd never seen her. What a bitch!
No, nobody will marry her,
and he wants her out of his house,
he wants her out of his house,
the bitch. He'll still have to pay
for her dresses and shoes,
her jewels and her trinkets,
her hats and her stockings,
shoes, shoes, and more shoes.
She shops and she shops,
she never stops—
bracelets and rings,
chokers and strings of pearls,
coral and jet, sapphires and diamonds!
She'll have my ring...
but not my heart, never my heart...
and not my money either!
My love belongs to you,
my goddess!

Midi

I don't believe you. I don't believe a word you say.
Nothing you say has any meaning.
I'll never see you again.
You'll have me sent to Cayenne,
with your sons, with your sons,
and your family will rot in Cayenne,
while she takes you to Paris.
You're a liar and a fraud.
I don't believe you.
Nothing you say has any meaning.
For centuries my family has lived in this house,
a sacred life in a sacred house.
We have only done good,
we have served the Sun,
and led a sacred life in a sacred house.
But you are evil, my love,
my husband.
I have brought evil here,
into the house of my ancestors,
priests and gods that they were.
You are evil, my love,
my husband.
I wish I'd never seen you.
I wish I'd never loved you.
Si je ne t'aurais jamais aimé!
Va't en! Go now! Go!
Go, or I'll die.

Midi siezes him by the shoulders, then embraces him.

Midi

Go away, go away, my love!
I wish you were dead!

She kisses him violently. At first he tries to push her away. Then he kisses her back, and puts his arms around her with fiery arousal, resembling passion.

Midi

(Passionately, painfully) Go away, go away!

She continues to kiss him with passion and violence.

Midi

I love a devil! Go away! Away from here! Away!

Midi makes an attempt at pushing him violently away, but she embraces him again. She pulls him down onto the divan, and they make love, passionately.

Slowly they rise. Jaz realizes what he has done — that he has fallen under her sexual power — and he flies into an impotent rage.

Jaz

What have I done? What have you done?
What have you done to me?
Is this what you do at the Ti-Métropole,
you whore?
You witch, you whore!
You drive the customers mad with desire,
every time, every time!
But I'm not your customer,
no more, no more.

He strikes her with all his strength.

Jaz

I could kill you right now with my bare hands.
I could kill you. I could tear you apart!

He strikes her again, and begins to beat her with his fists. One could kill with such force, but he stops, pulls the almost unconscious Midi's legs apart and penetrates her once again, this time with violence and hatred.

He rises, leaving her prostrate, and adjusts his clothes. He is exhausted himself, and forgetting about the children, Claire's nanny, and everything else, leaves.

Midi slowly rises, miserable and defeated, but this turns once again to rage, as she comprehends

how totally powerless she is over the man she has loved — over human love itself. It reaches a peak, and she is taken over by her desire — a physical thirst — to exact the worst kind of revenge on Jaz. She reaches for an ancient coutelas that hangs on the wall, a cherished family heirloom. She looks about fiercely for Jaz, ready to hack him to bits, but he is no longer there. She falls into a destructive trance. The coutelas in her hand gives her comfort and strength.

Her mind seethes with violence, in a union with evil. Now she is ready to do evil, but without her magic. She walks through door into the room where the children are. Violent musical interlude, ending quietly. Silence and partial darkness before the lights slowly rise on same scene.

[sc. 3]

Midi enters, bloodied from the slaying of the children, carrying the corpses of her children over an arm and a shoulder. She throws them brutally down on the hearth altar in the center of the room as a hideous display for the audience. She is spattered above, and the blood has collected over her lower abdomen and groin, creating the impression that she has mutilated herself. Her halting movements suggest for a moment that she is in great physical agony and may be dying. But she goes to one of the tables, gets a cigarette, and lights it. Then she feels the blood on her and looks, sees the bloody knife, then the corpses, and screams.

Midi

Oh! My children are dead!

(pause)

I am a mother no longer.

I slaughtered them with my own hands
and the old machete of my ancestors.

Oh, me! Unhappy, miserable!

Oh me, me! How to annihilate myself?

I am dead like them,
neither mother nor woman,
never again.

How could I have dared to do this thing?

Is this my destiny? I wasn't coinscious.

The necessity that closed in on me
must be vastly powerful: all this the gods
and I, in an evil attack,
planned together.

May this entire house crumble to the ground!

May it burn with the rage of my ancestor, the Sun!

What took hold of me?

Your eyes!

When I came into your room
with the pitiless machete, you looked on me,
smiling. Why? Why?

I can see them now, your eyes sparkling with childlike joy,
your very last smile!

I can see them from the other side
of the impenetrable border of death.
The calm gaze of child-ghosts freezes my marrow,
as you call me to join you, spattered
like you with your innocent blood.

I want to talk to my children, I want to talk to you,
hold you, kiss you.
O sweetest embrace,
sweetest skin, sweetest breath of my children!
I have sent you on your way to nothingness, to absolute peace.
But I, as a mortal mother, I follow the bitterest road,
the road to the height of suffering,
the peak of human experience.
But I am dead, like you, my dear sons,
dead to human life.

Claire enters from the garden, very smartly dressed, too pleased with herself to understand what Midi has done. (She can't see the children.) She is momentarily shocked by the bloody spectacle of Midi she encounters, but she pulls herself together instantly, pulls herself up to her full height in her high heels, and smiles at Midi with bitter contempt.

Claire

What do I see now? An anthropological demonstration?
Did your sacrificial chicken give you trouble?
Did it resist the supreme sacred moment?
I'll tell my father all about this. It amuses him
to study the religions of savage peoples.
Perhaps you can put on your show at the Governor's Palace? I'm sure he'll find it
most entertaining.
And you'll be paid for it. I'm sure you'll need that
after the unfortunate departure of your American gentleman.
By the way, where is he? He came here
to collect his belongings
and the children.

Midi

(turning and pointing to the children's corpses)
He's gone, but without the children.

Pause. Claire's confused gaze follows Midi's gesture. At first she can't comprehend her meaning, then she recognizes the bloody mess.

Claire

You...? You killed your little brats? You?
[Pause, then a horrific peal of laughter.]

But you've made our lives so easy!
I thank you from the bottom of my heart!
Our way to happiness is open,
Jaz's road to his success is clear.
He'll be free.
No more shamed by these tribal urchins,
No more shamed by his black mistress,
who sells herself to negro dockers
in a dreadful, stinking whorehouse.
But you won't get a chance to go back to your own kind.
You've put yourself away:
Your black head will roll around in the basket
of the good headsman of Cayenne.
The gore from your torn neck, from your lips, twisted in terror and agony,
will bloody the wood shavings
in his little basket,
until he pitches it into the dungheap,
the grave you deserve!
[*Claire laughs ferociously.*]
I see our future, and I thank you for it, you miserable whore!
[*Reaches a paroxysm of triumphant laughter.*]

As she carries on with her demeaning insults, Midi's familiar spirits appear in their dusky, form-fitting costumes and dance slowly around the two women, establishing a spiritual fence around them and an elemental connection between them. Claire notices the children and screams in terror. Then, rising up horrifically, Midi mutters some strange words and flicks her cigarette at Claire, magically causing her chic outfit to catch fire. The spirits close round her, then jump back, revealing a column of flames and smoke, as Claire quickly burns in agony to a pile of bones and grease.

The spirits casually walk away and lounge about Midi's salon. They observe Midi attentively throughout, ready to leap to her defence or obey her commands.

As the blood dries on her Midi looks less and less human, resembling more a terrifying red and brown effigy of an even more terrifying deity. Through these terrible acts Midi takes full possession of her divinity. She is transformed. This is her apotheosis.

The Nanny emerges from the bedroom area, spattered with blood and distraught. She may even fall on all fours in her escape from Midi's house. On her way she passes the pile of ashes, all that is left of Claire, with perhaps a shoe or a hat, so that she can recognize the remains, to her further grief and horror. She moans in deep anguish as she exits.

Jaz enters.

Jaz

Enters the garden. Doesn't see her.

Midi! Where are you? Midi? Midi! Speak!

Hesitantly enters the house.

Midi

Glowing, grand like a goddess, hardly looking human. The familiars rise up and circle Jaz at a distance, listening to Midi and ready to destroy him at her bidding. Jaz can't see them.

What? Are you looking for me?
You came in boldly enough before, like
a burglar, picking over things to sell.
Here I am. You can stop looking for me.
You steal. I kill. I can kill you right now.
Any way I like. I can make you burn.
I can tear you apart. I can make the flesh
slide off your bones, a horrible, slow death.

Jaz

Cowering

Where is Claire? Did she leave?

Midi

(Gestures slowly and grandly towards Claire's ashes)

Jaz

What have you done? You killed my Claire, my Claire?!
The governor's Claire! You'll pay dear for this!
You'll have to go hide in the dark of earth,
fly up into heaven's depths to escape
the Governor and his French law. The French
have made a hell here on earth in nature's own
hell. There you'll rot with vermin and disease,
praying for the day they cut your head off
and end it all. The nanny, where is she?
Did she take the boys, as I ordered her?

Midi

Can't you see?

(gestures slowly toward the corpses)

Are you blind? They've gone where they were destined
to go...

Jaz

You're pure hate, the most
odious
woman...to me, to every person
on this earth, to God, if He exists. You...
You stabbed them, cut them with a knife, with that
machete there your ancestors—slaves,

all of them—used to cut their master’s cane?
Maybe your savage gods sent you to me,
a demon, like they say tore up
your brother. A white woman never would
have dared this. And you...?! Because I left you
for a civilized woman of my own kind,
one I could be proud of and rise again
to my rightful place in life, with money
and respect? Now you have nothing to show
for your years with me. You killed them.
You, you are one of those disgusting monsters
you believe in. Go to hell, you devil,
you polluted, rotten murderess!
And I, there’s nothing left for me either:
no sons, no wife, not even you, you filth!

Midi

Save your breath. What’s done is done. There’s no point
in cursing me. I’m gone. I’ve left the earth
and you and all the putrid flesh you call
humanity. To think my ancestor,
the Sun, loved you all, warmed you, fed you,
helped you and taught you!

Jaz

You’re pain itself. You’re partners with evil.

Midi

Understand this. If you’re hurt, it’s all good.

Jaz

My sons, what a bad mother came your way!

Midi

O, my sons, Your father’s vice destroyed you.

Jaz

I never raised my hand against them.

Midi

But yes! Your ambition and your new-built marriage.

Jaz

You killed over territory—my bed.

Midi

You think that’s trivial for a woman?

Jaz

You must have seen it coming: a man...

Midi

Our children are gone. That should pierce your heart.

Jaz

...a man like me doesn't stay with your kind.

Midi

The gods, my gods, know where this all came from.

Jaz

Your gods know enough to spit you out.

Midi

Go ahead, hate me. I hate your bitter tongue.

Jaz

And I hate yours. So easy to spit this back and forth!

Midi

I'm only too happy to go on and on.

Jaz

Why don't you just shut up and bury them?

Midi

Their ancestor, the Sun, will come for them.

Jaz

O, pollution! You filthy child-killer!

Midi

Go sweep up your whore. Say words over the dirt.

Jaz

I'll go. I've lost my share of both children.

Midi

Stop whining. Just wait 'til you get old...

Jaz

I loved them after all...

Midi

Their mother did, not you.

Jaz

...and so you killed them.

Midi

...to cause you grief.

Jaz

How I want to kiss their faces once more!
To hold them in my arms again!

Midi

(Gesturing towards the corpses, with ferocious sarcasm.)
Now's your chance to say hello. Give them a hug.

Jaz

I can feel their tender skin. Let me touch it.

Midi

And you left them for your whore! Wasted words!

Jaz

I'll bury them myself.

Midi

No, you animal, their pyre is prepared.

O, my dear old, eternal Sun, my beloved,
my immortal ancestor, who never dies,
who shall never die, even when this land,
pitiable as it is, will die, dessicated by your fires,
the sparkling, lively strands
that supported life for the the peoples of the earth,
black and white alike...

Once upon a time, thousands of centuries ago,
your wrath boiled up against the worthless,
evil dwellers on this island
You smote them all with your dreadful fires.
Look into my heart...live there!
Let my fury run in your veins.
The people of today don't deserve you
Burn your temple, your forgotten altar—
now!

The walls of Midi's house seem inhabited by fire. They burn, and so does the garden. Midi walks solemnly out into the garden and raises her arms towards the Sun above. Jaz runs away in terror. Rapid fade to black. A scrim falls to cover the scene change. In the pitch darkness vaguely outlined flame-colored patterns appear in animation at house left, suggesting Midi's burning dwelling in the not-too-far distance. Midi enters at house left, her shift augmented with streaming flame-colored veils and streamers attached to her head and shoulders. It remains very dark. Only a spot on her face or light from the sides makes it possible to recognize her and to take

in the colors of costume. She strides across the stage with august dignity, but not slowly, rather rapidly, and it is clear that she is not in flight. Her familiars follow sinuously behind her. They exit at house right.

After a moment the townspeople, in particular Midi's friends from the 'Ti-Métropole (chorus and dancers) run on to the stage, first one or two from house left, then more from house right. Seeing Midi's house ablaze, they are extremely worried. After some agitated running to and fro, they settle down into a loose group, ready at any moment to run away, should the need arise. It remains very dark on stage: minimal lighting.

People from the right exclaim, randomly:

What's going on? It's Midi's house! It's on fire! Where is she? Is she safe? Was she at home? What happened?

The two or three who have entered from the left respond, also randomly:

It is the House of the Sun that's on fire. I didn't see Midi. I only saw some shadows that jumped out of the fire. How horrible it is, how dreadful! It's as if the spirits of everyone who ever lived in that house from the beginning of time, ran away.

The people from the right:

Let's get to it! Let's look for water. Let's find buckets. I hope Midi wasn't in there. And her boys?

The people from the left:

Don't bother! There's nothing left but some charred sticks. Midi?! I didn't see her.

All:

Ah! Aah!

The people from the left:

But the shadows! Those were shades!

All:

Ah! Aah!

Mlle Blandine enters from house left:

This is dreadful. There's almost nothing left. It's like a volcano or the Sun himself.

M. Matthieu enters from house right:

You all can tell your children: "Yes, like our ancestors, I saw the wrath of the Sun."

Mlle. Blandine:

But where is Midi? Is she alive?

For a second I thought I saw her, or maybe not...

She was terrifying. She had the mug of a she-devil!

She drooled blood from her eyes and her mouth.

Shades surrounded her.

They palpitated around her body like a cloud of bats.

Then, all of a sudden, there was nothing.

M. Mathieu:

I saw her, in just the form you saw her.
She has made her transformation.
I think she's leaving us. She's ready.
But wait. If you want to see her, you must wait for dawn
And that will be to bid her farewell.

All:

Adieu? Farwell? No! Never farewell, never!

M. Matthieu:

Meet me at daybreak
by the old slave cemetery.
I'll be your guide.
You'll have time to sleep a bit.
And don't forget
to dress up properly,
as if going to a wake...
or a festival.

Mlle. Blandine:

Do you want me to come with you?

M. Matthieu:

Yes, dear. I'll explain everything I can—as well as I can.

All exit the stage, separately and in pairs, some to the left, some to the right. Fade to black, except for the glowing fire.

[sc. 4]

The lights go up on the set, revealing a bay, a beach, and vegetation. The sun is just beginning to rise through the haze at house left, just where the fire from Midi's house appeared. (It continues to rise—very slowly—throughout the scene, and the light rises accordingly, bathing the set in sensuous warm early morning light. In the mid-to-foreground a dock extends out into the water. A biplane fitted with pontoons, one of the sort that accommodates a few passengers in an interior cabin, is moored to it. A workman lounges on its lower wing. It is very early and very quiet.

M. Matthieu and Mlle. Blandine almost stealthily lead in the crowd of townspeople, including everyone from the 'Ti-Métropole, even the drunk at the bar and the old man in the street. The leaders urge the people to remain quiet and to wait for Midi.

Midi arrives. A long, flowing hooded robe of many colors covers whatever she is wearing beneath. Her ferocity has subsided, but her alien quality, accented by her exotic costume, persists. The pilot of the seaplane accompanies her, carrying her suitcase in one hand and his own belongings in a duffle slung over his other shoulder. They are heading towards the seaplane, not expecting any company.

The people see her and get excited, but once again, M. Matthieu and Mlle. Blandine calm them down. They both turn towards Midi with a grave, respectful air. M. Mathieu has an intuitive understanding of what happened at Midi's house, if not of all the details, and, as he promised before the curtain rose, he has explained the general course of Midi's situation to Mlle. Blandine. She understands that Midi, thanks to Jaz, has given up on human society and must leave in order to fulfill the next stage of her existence. Midi has finished her earthly task. Her destiny lies elsewhere. She could be a ghost.

Midi notices the people, first as if they were an insignificant distraction; then she stops at a rise in the ground, and turns towards them with growing recognition. The pilot continues on to his seaplane and hands the luggage to the workman, who opens the door to the passenger cabin, stows the luggage, and resumes his place on the wing. The pilot turns to see what has happened to his passenger, then stands with his hand on the fuselage, watching the proceedings.

Midi recognizes her friends and the crowd and becomes reanimated by her feelings for them, especially Mlle. Blandine and M. Matthieu, then the Waiter, the Bartender, and the other girls from the 'Ti-Métropole. But she says nothing.

M. Matthieu steps forward.

M. Matthieu

We've come to bid you farewell, I think.

The Waiter

(stricken, realizing for the first time that Midi is leaving for good)
Where are you going?

The Bartender

You're going to sing in Paris, of course. I can see you in a top chic club. You'll spellbind all the gentlemen and infuriate the ladies. They'll hate you!

M. Mathieu ignores them. Mlle. Blandine rushes over to them to sush them. As the Bartender speaks, she gives him a box on the ear. Midi laughs...and enters back into the world of the 'Ti-Métropole, which is what she enjoyed most in life on the island.

Mlle. Blandine, pushing the Bartender roughly away, turns to Midi and gestures, drawing her extended arms apart at waist level in interrogation and appeal, anticipating what she is about to say. Midi responds by pulling back her hood and smiling at her. There is perhaps a faint hint of music and dance in her gesture.

Mlle. Blandine begins to speak. M. Matthieu moves to restrain her, but she gently pushes him aside.

Mlle. Blandine

Why are you leaving us? You're loved here.
We're your family. You'll forget Mister Jaz.
I've forgotten a whole bunch of guys

Midi smiles even more warmly at Mlle. Blandine, but remains distant.

Mlle. Blandine

I know you're not going to Paris.
But where are you going?
Why not stay with us?
We'll chase Mister Jaz away.
He set fire to your house, didn't he?
Time for him to go to jail, finally!
No one can protect him now,
not the Governor, not his daughter...

Midi

(with a chilling smile)
There's nothing left of Mlle. Claire but ashes.
She was at my house.
(She begins to drift back into her distant, ghostly mode.)

Mlle. Blandine

Well, good riddance to her!
Don't leave us.
We'll be wretched without you,
without your music!

Midi

The music is over.

Mlle. Blandine

Oh, no, dear!
How are we going to live without your music?!

Midi

Make it yourselves. You can, you know.

Mlle. Blandine

Sing, sing for us one last time!

Crowd

Midi's last song!

With a twisting motion, Midi throws off the robe, revealing a smartly cut European-style dress with a bright exotic floral pattern, but not without some exotic flow to it, a colorful hat, and a small sash around her waist.

Midi

Maybe I still have more song in store for you—my very last song.

I'm going to sing "The Song of Secrets."

In a secluded corner of the jungle
a pure, cool spring feeds a quiet pool.
That is where girls
take their lovers to find out
if they will be faithful or not.
If they see a perfect reflection
of their beloved, they know
that he is good. But if the face breaks
into a thousand strips that tremble on the water,
they are false—more or less—
like average people.
Do you know how rare those
clear images are?

This magic is the subtle craft
of a little goddess
—her name is long forgotten—
who wanted to give up her godhead
for the love of a mortal.
She failed, alas.
An immortal cannot die.
She opened her veins under an old mango tree.
She vanished from the earth, but her blood
still flows from the earth's heart
as clear, pure water.
She is still alive,
sparkling on the tight, smooth surface like a will-o'-the-wisp,
stubbornly searching for her lover,
who died centuries ago.
She won't find him ever—only
the light in the hearts of true lovers.

For you and for me
people are a great mystery,
but the greatest mystery of all
is love. Love
can change your life,
but it can leave you in an instant.
No one can tame it,
not you nor I.

I'm at a loss. Knowing
has run away from me, but I think
it's love himself
—not the lover or the beloved—
who decides if he will stay with you until death

or if he runs away overnight,
vanishing like the ghost
of a forgotten poet or a famous courtesan.
The man you love can vanish, die
of a minor illness
or a wrong step.
A person who seemed solid, real
yesterday is no more, no more. All that remains
is the bitter hope of memory.

Heartfelt reflective silence. The men and women in the crowd look at each other sadly.

Crowd

Midi! You are wonderful! Stay! Stay!

Mlle. Blandine

How sad it is, that song! No one sings our ancient stories like you. In your mouth they are true. They are truth itself. They are our reality.

M. Matthieu

They are indeed our reality.

(to Midi)

I understand you have to go. You've emptied your glass. There's nothing left for you on this earth.

Crowd

Midi! You are wonderful! Stay! Stay with us!

Mlle. Blandine

Midi! How are we going to live without your music? How are we going to live without your magic!

Midi

(shaking her head)

Now it's time to go.

Our good aviator is getting impatient...and my ancestor the Sun.,

Farewell, all of you. You are good. Farewell, dear island of my ancestors. Farewell to the bays, the ponds, the jungle...I'll keep you with me.

Midi turns and walks towards the aeroplane. The pilot climbs into the exterior cockpit, aided by the workman.

Jaz appears in the crowd, noticeably intoxicated. He elbows his way to the front, where he has an unobstructed view of Midi. He pulls out a revolver and takes aim at her, as she approaches the door of the passenger cabin. He shoots, but misses. People from the crowd rush him and

overpower him.

Jaz

Don't stop me. Stop her!
She's a murderess. She killed my sons...
She killed Claire. The Governor's daughter.
She killed Claire and burnt her body.

The men who hold him shake him violently, then close around him. Midi turns away indifferently and enters the cabin. The workman closes the door.

Chorus

What did he say, the bastard?
He shot at Midi!
What did he say? I don't understand.
He said that Midi killed his children
and the governor's daughter.

Mlle. Blandine

Yeah, that's what he said.

Chorus

No! He's lying! He's the murderer! It's him!
The gendarmes! Call the gendarmes!
Crush him now. Crush him now. Wring his neck!

M. Matthieu

No, no! Wait for justice to take its course.
He's earned the bloodless guillotine,
the living death of Cayenne.

They'll need at least three generations to find their truth.

The crowd drops Jaz on the ground and step back. He lies there, unconscious. The aeroplane motor starts up. The plane taxis out of view. It gains and takes off out of view. It reappears farther back, as it flies towards the sun. Its silhouette crosses the solar disc, disperses, and vanishes. A few men from the crowd drag Jaz from the scene. The townspeople disperse, occasionally looking up towards the sun in wonder.

The sounds of nature prevail.