BIRDSONG

by Sebastian Faulks

adapted by Rachel Wagstaff

SAMUEL FRENCH

Copyright © 2016 by Rachel Wagstaff and Sebastian Faulks
Revised 2025
All Rights Reserved

BIRDSONG is fully protected under the copyright laws of the British Commonwealth, including Canada, the United States of America, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television, online/digital production, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-11205-8

concordtheatricals.co.uk
concordtheatricals.com

FOR AMATEUR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

United Kingdom and World
excluding North America
licensing@concordtheatricals.co.uk
020-7054-7298

Each title is subject to availability from Concord Theatricals, depending upon country of performance.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *BIRDSONG* is subject to a licensing fee. The purchase, renting, lending or use of this book does not constitute a licence to perform this title(s), which licence must be obtained from the appropriate agent prior to any performance. Performance of this title(s) without a licence is a violation of copyright law and may subject the producer and/or presenter of such performances to penalties. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to the appropriate agent before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

This work is published by Samuel French, an imprint of Concord Theatricals Ltd.

The Professional Rights in this play are controlled by United Agents LLP, 12-26 Lexington Street, London, W1F OLE.

No one shall make any changes in this title for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, scanned, uploaded, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, digital, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior

written permission of the publisher. No one shall share this title, or part of this title, to any social media or file hosting websites.

The moral right of Rachel Wagstaff and Sebastian Faulks to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

USE OF COPYRIGHTED MUSIC

A licence issued by Concord Theatricals to perform this play does not include permission to use the incidental music specified in this publication. In the United Kingdom: Where the place of performance is already licensed by the PERFORMING RIGHT SOCIETY (PRS) a return of the music used must be made to them. If the place of performance is not so licensed then application should be made to PRS for Music (www.prsformusic.com). A separate and additional licence from PHONOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE LTD (www.ppluk.com) may be needed whenever commercial recordings are used. Outside the United Kingdom: Please contact the appropriate music licensing authority in your territory for the rights to any incidental music.

USE OF COPYRIGHTED THIRD-PARTY MATERIALS

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted third-party materials (e.g., artworks, logos) in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original materials that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for clearances of all third-party copyrighted materials, and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play(s) and their licensing agent, Concord Theatricals Ltd., against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of such copyrighted third-party materials by licensees.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

If you have obtained performance rights to this title, please refer to your licensing agreement for important billing and credit requirements.

English translated lyrics for *Ned of the Hill* taken from *Song of the Irish* by Donal O'Sullivan, 1960. Reprinted by permission from Mercier Press.

BIRDSONG was first produced at the Comedy Theatre, London on 18 September 2010 by Creative Management and Productions (CMP), Becky Barber Productions and Act Productions. *BIRDSONG* was then produced by Original Theatre and Birdsong Productions, in a version which toured the UK four times from 2013-2018. This revised version was written for a 2024-2025 UK tour, which opened at Wiltshire Creative on 5th September 2024. It was produced by Original Theatre and JAS Theatricals, in association with Joshua Beaumont & Huw Allen, Tiny Giant Entertainment and Birdsong Productions. The director was Alastair Whatley, design by Richard Kent, lighting design by Jason Taylor, sound design by Dominic Bilkey. Music direction and music design by James Findlay, original music design and direction by Tim Van Eyken, composer Sophie Cotton, casting director Ellie Collyer-Bristow CDG, associate director Bethany West, military advisor Tony Green, props supervisor Katie Balmforth. The producers were Tom Hackney and Alastair Whatley, production manager Tammy Rose, production coordinator Lisa Friedrich, company stage manager Alyssa Elliott, deputy stage manager Kanoko Shimizu, technical stage manager and relighter Ana Snook, assistant stage manager Elle Roberts and sound No. 1 Simon McCorry. The wardrobe and wig master was David Morgan and wardrobe and wig assistant was Amy Jones. In 2025, Felix Dunning joined as company stage manager, Eleanor Walton as deputy stage manager, Zoe Doy as assistant stage manager and book cover, and Scott Bryson as sound No. 2 and tech swing. The production carpenters were Andy Furey and Gilles Pink. The cast was as follows:

JOSEPH EVANS / LEVI ..... Joseph Benjamin Baker
JACK FIREBRACE / GARDENER.....Max Bowden
MICHAEL TIPPER / ..... Raif Clarke
STEPHEN WRAYSFORD .....James Esler
TOM BRENNAN .....James Findlay
TURNER / MILITARY POLICEMAN / MODERN DAY BARMAN
..... Dave Fishley
LISETTE AZAIRE / PROSTITUTE ..... Gracie Follows
MARGUÉRITE .....Sulin Hasso
LUCIEN LEBRUN / ARTHUR SHAW / JOHN WRAYSFORD.....
Tama Phethean
JEANNE FOURMENTIER / NURSE MARY ....Natalie Radmall-Quirke
BÉRARD / COLONEL BARCLAY .....Roger Ringrose
ISABELLE AZAIRE..... Charlie Russell
RENÉ AZAIRE / CAPTAIN GRAY.....Sargon Yelda

CHARACTERS

(including suggested doubling)

STEPHEN WRAYSFORD – 20s (English) Passionate, idealistic, lonely. He has a modern outlook and a sense of adventure. From Act Two, Stephen is an officer in the British army. He becomes increasingly jaded and broken, but wanting to survive so that he can understand what this war is for. He becomes desperate to find, or to make, some meaning from all the suffering he has endured and seen around him.

JACK FIREBRACE – 30s (English) A sapper who is part of those digging tunnels during the First World War. He cares for all around him, always digging deep (metaphorically), and relying on his sense of humour and warmth to pull others through. He is warm, kind, deeply loyal and loving. He works hard and believes in God – or he tries to cling to this belief in the face of all he experiences. Paternal but one of the lads, Jack is the man you would most want fighting alongside you.

ISABELLE AZAIRE – Late 20s/early 30s (French) Isabelle is a repressed and oppressed young woman, who has been passed from one dominant male (her father) to another (René Azaire). She knows in her heart that she has a far richer inner life than she can ever share in society or her marriage. Isabelle comes across as in control, the dignified Madame Azaire, but really is still passionate and idealistic, doing whatever she can to help those in need, even behind her husband's back, despite her fears of the repercussions. She loves her step-daughter, Lisette, but has never known or felt real passion until Stephen challenges the carefully-built walls around her heart.

RENÉ AZAIRE – 40s/50s (French) Factory owner, self-important, a bully. He believes himself to be an important, respected man and strives to assert his authority whenever he can. He can be sycophantic, knowing he needs a man like Bérard on his side, while despising that he needs this help. Azaire is blind to the inner life of his wife and daughter, so focused is he on his work and his reputation. He is fearful of losing control in any way; deeply repressed, he stamps out any challenge to him. He is a cruel, neglectful and abusive husband but at heart, he is deeply unhappy. A man who has lost his way and cannot see how to pull himself back.

BÉRARD – 50s (French) A Town Councillor, with an over inflated sense of self-worth. Pompous and patriotic, he prides himself on his importance and believes himself to be universally admired and respected. He is a traditionalist, who looks down on those 'beneath' him in society. He is distrustful of foreigners or of anything that threatens his great country, his great town.

LUCIEN LEBRUN – 20s/early 30s (French) Self-appointed head of the workers at the factory, Lucien is idealistic, principled, passionate, likeable, and determined to protect those around him.

JOHN – (English). Stephen's great-grandson. Present day. A good man, determined to honour those who have sacrificed so much for his generation.

COLONEL BARCLAY 50s (English) A hardened professional soldier and leader. A truly dignified man. This man has heart, guts and passion, for his country, for his men.

ARTHUR SHAW –30s (English) A miner from Sheffield, now a tunneller in the war, Arthur is a brave, stoic, taciturn working-class man, who is kind, fair and big hearted. Deeply loyal, he is prepared to endure to the end. He is Jack's closest friend. Neither man ever asks himself if their bond is more than friendship but they become everything to each other as the war progresses.

CAPTAIN GRAY – late 40s/50s (Scottish) From Edinburgh, Stephen's commanding officer, Gray is a deeply intelligent man. A doctor in his 'real' life, compassionate, insightful, caring but also determined to do or be whatever it takes to finish the war. Gray is strong, paternal but also steely, with a keen sense of irony.

LISETTE AZAIRE – 15/16 (French) Daughter to René Azaire, flirtatious, yearning to be a woman and to be wanted. Vulnerable, conflicted, loving, a little lost, Lisette is still grieving her real mother but she was open-hearted enough to have bonded quickly with Isabelle. Lizette is desperate for an adventure but just wants to be loved.

PROSTITUTE – late teens/early 20s (French) A tough exterior but inside, a young woman who is terrified and despises that, since her father died in the war, she has to sell her body to British soldiers just to survive. She hates war and what it has reduced her and the men to.

JEANNE FOURMENTIER – 30s (French) Isabelle's older sister. An intelligent, warm, insightful woman with a ready wit. She is brave, loyal, kind, and would fight to the death to protect her younger sister. Jeanne is somehow more grounded than Isabelle. A survivor, determined to make the best of any situation, Jeanne is like a ball of light, with real depths and heart.

NURSE MARY – 30s (French) Mary is practically minded with a stern exterior but inside, she has deep compassion for those around her.

MICHAEL TIPPER – 15 (English) Tipper is a new recruit. He had only just signed up and lied about his age, buying into the propaganda: thinking that war would be an adventure and that he'd prove himself a hero. He is horrified by what he encounters when he gets there. He quickly unravels and reveals himself to be a frightened child; in a moment of terror and despair, he takes his own life.

BARMAN – (French) Worn down by what he has witnessed and endured in the war, the barman is much older than his years but stoic in his own way.

JOSEPH EVANS – 20s (Welsh). A Tunneller. Desperate to be liked and to fit in, he uses humour to get people to warm to him. A little immature, outwardly cocky, warm and fun to be around, but beneath all his bravado, he is actually very innocent and naïve. A farm boy at heart, who would be much happier at home. He never fully recovers from the death of his brother on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

LEVI – (German) A soldier who has endured years of fighting and recently lost his beloved brother in the war but is still full of enough humanity and compassion to embrace Stephen as a brother-in-arms when he discovers him alone in the tunnel. Levi is Jewish, a strong, principled man of faith and compassion.

TURNER – (English) a British miner, now a sapper, terrified of all he has endured and all to come. Turner is already shellshocked when we meet him.

GARDENER – (English). Present day. The gardener cares deeply for his work, preserving the war graves. Big-hearted with a dry sense of humour. A modern day Jack Firebrace.

MARGUÉRITE – (French) The maid to the Azaire household, she watches everything and distrusts everyone. She dislikes any change to her routine or anything that threatens to disrupt the status quo. She is not afraid to show her disapproval and is particularly distrusting of foreign men, i.e. Stephen!

TOM BRENNAN – (Irish) A warm, loyal and good-hearted man, with a ready wit. He has endured much in the war but maintained his sense of humour, for the sake of others. He tries to lighten the moment when needed but is full of heart and yearning for his homeland. Brennan is the musical heart of the play, playing and singing to pull both others and himself through.

ORDERLY – (English) weary, compassionate, broken by the war.

CHAPLAIN – (English) compassionate, grave, warm. Sings.

BAR WOMAN – (French) tries to put on a brave face for the customers but has recently lost her husband, at Verdun.

MODERN DAY BARMAN – (French) a man bored by his work but maintains a sense of humour for his customers, for himself.

All other parts to be played by members of the company.

SETTING

The play takes place in Northern France.

TIME

The prologue is set in the modern day.
The main action of the play takes place between 1910 and 1918.

NOTES ON PLAY

... means a trailing off; either a character cannot or will not speak / finish their thought.

– means an interruption, or a continuation of a thought.

[ ] square brackets indicate that this is what the speaker would have gone on to say, had they not been interrupted.

Ages and nationality specified where helpful but it is up to each production whether or not to go with French accents for the Amiens sections.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I first approached Sebastian Faulks almost twenty years ago, to ask him if I could adapt his bestselling-novel for the stage, but my love for the novel predated even that by some years. A school friend gave me a copy of *Birdsong* for my seventeenth birthday. I found the book extraordinarily moving and it touched me more deeply than any book I had ever read before (or since). We'd learned about the First World War in school but it was only when reading *Birdsong* that I finally began to understand what it might have been like for an individual involved in the Great War. Sebastian also wrote very beautifully about grief, something with which my family had been living, so the book really struck a chord with me. Even back then, I wondered about the possibility of adapting it; I found myself imagining moments on stage, particularly the scenes in the tunnels, which have a real claustrophobic intensity to them. I resolved to wait until I had written more and, though I found my thoughts often returned to the book, it seemed nothing more than a daydream. It was only once I had written my first play, *The Soldier*, about Rupert Brooke, that I felt brave enough to approach Sebastian. He read my play and agreed to meet and so, somewhat nervously, I went to meet the man whose work I had long admired.

Sebastian was incredibly gracious, if initially slightly reluctant to agree to a stage adaptation, explaining that a feature film had been in development for years but still no film had appeared (this remains the case many years on). We discussed my ideas for dramatizing his novel and the challenges I would face and, after some consideration, Sebastian and his agent agreed that I should write a script and that we would take it from there. This I did, funded by The Old Vic Theatre and, six months on, I sent Sebastian my first draft. His response was very kind, saying that I had captured the heart of his novel and the voices and rhythms of his characters. We then went through the script together, Sebastian being generous with both his time and thoughts, as he has been ever since.

The Old Vic then set up a reading, Tom Hiddleston playing the role of Stephen Wraysford. The play was picked up by Nick Frankfort, for CMP, with independent producer, Becky Barber. Various stages of development followed, including a two-week workshop, directed by Sir Trevor Nunn, where Dan Stevens played the role of Stephen, Sienna Miller played the role of Isabelle, and Eddie Marsan was Jack Firebrace. The play, which unfolded in a linear fashion, with extracts from Stephen Wraysford's diary providing a narrative element, was then programmed by the producers. Trevor directed the show, which opened in the West End in 2010.

Then, in 2012, I was approached by Alastair Whatley of Original Theatre, asking if he might take the play on a tour of the UK. I asked Alastair if he was interested in reading an earlier draft, which was free of narration. This draft started in 1916, rather than 1910, and the first act moved backwards and forwards between 1916 and 1910, the love story between Stephen and Isabelle being conjured through memories. Original Theatre and Birdsong Productions went on to produce four UK tours of this version, between 2013 and 2018, to receptive audiences and reviews. The script continued to evolve each year, with responses increasingly favourable. Sebastian even performed a cameo role on a couple of special occasions. His 'Cartwright' will live long in the memory. I declined the role of 'prostitute two'!

During Covid, I wanted to offer my support to OTC, so I suggested that they do a digital reading of the script to raise money for their company. I reworked the script quickly for a filmed version, adding in some linking voiceovers, which Sebastian himself performed for us. I could not possibly have envisaged just what a masterpiece OTC would create. It was beautiful and brilliant although, alas, because the screen rights lay elsewhere, was only available for forty-eight hours. OTC went on to make many extraordinary digital shows during lockdown and I felt glad to have been a small part of that.

Then, in 2023, Alastair approached me again – to ask if we should think about putting *Birdsong* on the stage for a final UK tour (although that is what he had said last time!). Over the years, I have written various other shows, growing in experience both in life and in writing, and so I was keen to get back to the script, with everything I had learned since first adapting my favourite novel. I re-read the novel and was relieved to find that I still loved it as much as ever. Alastair, Sebastian and I met and we discussed the different possible directions in which I could take the script. We ended up coming back to the three-act structure, so that the love story between Stephen and Isabelle would have time and space to breathe. That was always the biggest challenge: how to dramatize a love story that in the novel is so internalised, so iconic. I decided to start again with the Act One. I delivered a rewrite, received some excellent and helpful comments from both Sebastian and Alastair, polished away, and then we invited a few actors round to Sebastian's house to read the revised first act. It felt different immediately. Of course you never really know how something will land but I felt hopeful, almost certain, that this was it. Almost. But there was still something missing. Something to give the new Act One context and a deeper emotional punch. Context. That was the word I was reaching for. And from that came the idea of a modern frame. I tried various versions but finally alighted upon the gardener, once I discovered that those looking after the war graves (the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) still discover unburied bodies even now, all these years later.

Sebastian, Alastair and I attended the opening preview in Salisbury in 2024. The production was incredibly stylish, beautifully directed (by Alastair), designed (by Richard Kent) and acted (James Esler as Stephen, Max Bowden as Jack Firebrace and Charlie Russell as Isabelle). The music, designed, directed (and even largely performed) in this production by James Findlay (based on original design and direction by Tim Van Eyken) gave the show a real aliveness and power. The audience response was heartfelt, as was mine. Finally, the show was everything I had always hoped it might be.

To each and every person involved, both in this production, but also in every reading, workshop and performance that has led up to this version: thank you. Too many of you to list here but please know that I am grateful to you all. With a novel written about such an important subject, encompassing so many characters, events and feelings, it has been an incredible challenge, dramatizing it for the stage. My aim always was to create a play that lived and breathed in its own right, while also creating a piece for the stage which honoured the heart of Sebastian's beautiful book. I could not have done this without the support and friendship of both Alastair Whatley and Sebastian Faulks. I am eternally grateful to you both.

I am also incredibly grateful to my agent, Dan Usztan. Thank you, Dan, for everything. There are many others who have supported me with this play over the years, including Sebastian's agents, Lesley Thorne and Gillon Aiken (Gillon is sadly no longer with us and much missed); Veronica Faulks; Kate Pakenham, Meg Davis, Tim Morrell and Rose Cobbe, who believed in this during its infancy. Anne-Marie and Jon Woodley. Charlotte Peters. Nick Frankfort, Tobias Round, Becky Barber and Sir Trevor Nunn. Bob Benton. Tom Hackney and everyone at Original Theatre. My beloved writer friends, particularly Mike Bartlett and Sam Adamson. Emma Anacootee and the team at Concord. And, of course, my friends and family. When I started writing this play, it was for my little brother, who died when he was a boy. Since then, I have had two boys of my own, so this play is for my brothers, my sons. To the next generation, above all, I wish you peace.

Rachel Wagstaff, 2025

BIRDSONG SUGGESTED SONG LIST

"Hold Your Hand Out You Naughty Boy" – Florrie Forde
"One Day the Young Men Came Back From the War" – Rachel Wagstaff & Sebastian Faulks
"That's The Wrong Way to Tickle Mary" – words unattributed. It is sung to the tune of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary", by Jack Judge and Harry Williams
"In the Old French Trench" – tune and words unattributed
"There is a Green Hill Far Away" – Cecil Frances Alexander
"Ned of the Hill" – Traditional Sean-nós Irish, translated by Donal O' Sullivan
"Two Little Girls in Blue" – Paul Lannin, Vincent Youmans and Ira Gershwin

For Thomas,

Wilfred and Arthur

ACT ONE

Prologue

(A **GARDENER***, with a spade, by a pristine military grave.)*

*(***JOHN** *appears. Looking at a map. Lost.)*

GARDENER. You all right?

JOHN. I'm looking for someone. A grave.

GARDENER. Well, you're in the right place! Can't move for them, here!

D'you know which cemetery?

JOHN. *(Shakes head.)* Is there a main one?

GARDENER. There's about four hundred 'round here, for the British alone.

JOHN. Four hundred?

*(***JOHN** *looks around. Overwhelmed.)*

They're all so…clean.

Who looks after them all?

GARDENER. Well, there's about a thousand gardeners! Then there's the stone masons, and the engravers, for the new graves –

JOHN. New graves?

GARDENERS. They still turn up about forty bodies a year, in these parts.

JOHN. What, even *now*?

GARDENERS. …

(Beat.)

GARDENER. You've not been before, have you?

JOHN. No.

My nan just died. We were clearing out her house and, in her attic, I found all these sketchpads, notebooks, letters. They belonged to her father. My great – grandfather.

GARDENER. And he served near here?

JOHN. Yes. He also lived in France before the war. In Amiens, in 1910.

*(***STEPHEN** *appears. Sketching. Lost in time.)*

I think part of him never left.

*(***STEPHEN** *and* **JOHN** *look at each other.)*

GARDENER. So, you thought you'd just rock up, find his grave.

You didn't think to have a little Google first?

(A shared smile. Then:)

JOHN. Actually, it's not him I'm looking for.

GARDENER. Right.

Well. We'd better start at the beginning. Maybe I can help you.

What's your name?

JOHN. John. John Wraysford.

Scene One

(Amiens, 1910. A late summer evening. The sound of blackbirds. **RENÉ AZAIRE**, **BÉRARD**, **ISABELLE AZAIRE** *and* **LISETTE AZAIRE** *seated.* **MARGUÉRITE** *stands aside,* **STEPHEN** *a little apart.)*

MARGUÉRITE. Monsieur Wraysford is here. From England.

*(***RENÉ AZAIRE** *rises, a little confused. The others follow suit.)*

AZAIRE. Wraysford? I was expecting Clarke.

STEPHEN. Monsieur Clarke was unable to come. He did send a telegram…

AZAIRE. I am yet to receive it.

So, you work for him?

STEPHEN. With him, yes. He's my guardian. He has asked me to write a report on your factory.

AZAIRE. Well. We are pleased to have you here in any case, Monsieur.

(But he's not.)

LISETTE. Why d'you have a guardian?

AZAIRE. Lisette.

STEPHEN. Monsieur Clarke had no children and was in need of an apprentice.

LISETTE. Why did he choose you?

AZAIRE. *(Coughs.)* I apologise. My daughter is yet to learn manners.

STEPHEN. It's all right. My parents died when I was a boy. I lived with my grandfather for a few years but then he was… gone, and… Monsieur Clarke stepped in.

ISABELLE. *(Gently.)* What happened to your grandfather?

*(***STEPHEN** *turns to* **ISABELLE**. *A moment. Almost a jolt.)*

BÉRARD. Well, I'm sure we all have our stories! Now, René, how about some introductions?

AZAIRE. Forgive me. René Azaire. My daughter, Lisette. My friend, and *(Proud.)* Town Councillor, Monsieur Bérard… Oh, and my wife.

*(***STEPHEN** *looks at* **ISABELLE**. *Bewildered. How can this woman be* **AZAIRE***'s wife?)*

*(***AZAIRE** *gestures that* **STEPHEN** *should sit. He does.)*

Something to drink, Monsieur?

STEPHEN. Thank you.

*(***AZAIRE** *pours* **STEPHEN** *a drink.)*

BÉRARD. How did you come here?

STEPHEN. By train.

BÉRARD. Ah, the trains! What a system. We're a great junction here. Trains to Lille, to Paris, to Boulogne. Tell me, do you have trains in England?

STEPHEN. Yes.

BÉRARD. Since when?

STEPHEN. For about seventy years, I think.

BÉRARD. But you have problems in England?

STEPHEN. I wasn't aware of any.

BÉRARD. Well, isn't that splendid? They have trains in England now too!

*(***LISETTE** *giggles.)*

AZAIRE. Bedtime, Lisette.

LISETTE. I'm not tired.

AZAIRE. Bed. Now.

(Beat. **LISETTE** *goes to* **ISABELLE**. *They clasp hands; affectionate.)*

LISETTE. Goodnight, Maman.

Monsieur Bérard. *(Smiles flirtatiously at* **STEPHEN**.*)* Monsieur Wraysford.

*(***LISETTE** *turns to go.)*

AZAIRE. Lisette…

*(***LISETTE** *kisses his cheek reluctantly. Leaves.)*

BÉRARD. What a charming girl.

(Beat.)

AZAIRE. *(To* **STEPHEN**.*)* I'm afraid we've had dinner but Marguérite can fetch you something.

STEPHEN. I have already eaten. Thank you.

(Silence.)

BÉRARD. You were about to ask me something, René? Before our English guest appeared.

AZAIRE. Another time, perhaps.

BÉRARD. My friend, if you need my assistance as a Town Councillor, you only have to ask!

(Beat. **AZAIRE** *really not wanting to say in front of* **STEPHEN**.*)*

AZAIRE. …There have been… mild rumblings at the factory. Workers concerned that they will be replaced by machines *(Smiles, dismissively).*

BÉRARD. We are living in exciting times, are we not? Do you know, they're developing guns in America that fire all by themselves! Now, that is something I'd like to see.

(Beat. The sound of a rumble, in the distance. Something ominous to come.)

AZAIRE. But once the machines are running smoothly, we should be able to reduce our workforce by forty percent.

BÉRARD. Well, that is remarkable!

*(***ISABELLE** *puts her drink down, horrified.* **BÉRARD** *misreads her expression.)*

My dear, please don't concern yourself. If there is any... unrest, among the workforce, your husband can count on my support.

ISABELLE. *(Quietly.)* What will happen to the workers who lose their jobs?

BÉRARD. I'm sure they will soon find other ways to occupy themselves.

(The rumble builds. Until:)

And how have you passed this lovely summer day, dear Madame?

ISABELLE. I went for a walk by the river... I heard piano music coming from a house. It was so beautiful... I wanted to stop and ask whoever was playing what it was called.

BÉRARD. What was the tune you heard?

ISABELLE. I don't know.

BÉRARD. Well, was it Debussy? Chopin?

ISABELLE. I'd never heard it before.

BÉRARD. I hope it wasn't one of those awful German tunes.

STEPHEN. But surely German music can be beautiful –

BÉRARD. Now, I'm going to do something in which I risk playing the fool. I am going to sing. No, no, there's no point trying to dissuade me.

*(***BÉRARD** *sits uncomfortably close to* **ISABELLE**. *He sings directly to her.)*

(Sings.)

ONE DAY THE YOUNG MEN CAME BACK FROM THE WAR
THE CORN WAS HIGH AND OUR SWEETHEARTS WAITED
WITH OUR MOTHERS AND SONS UPON THE SEASHORE
OUR BOAT BROUGHT US HOME AS THE TIDE ABATED.

*(***STEPHEN** *claps.* **ISABELLE** *rises.* **BÉRARD** *takes a deep breath, carries on singing.)*

BUT WE YEARNED FOR DEAR DAYS LONG PAST, LONG PAST;
WE YEARNED FOR DAYS LONG PAST.

(Uncomfortable silence.)

Well, Madame. Does that not stir the heart?

ISABELLE. It is getting rather late.

BÉRARD. What intrigues me, Madame, is what you were doing wandering about town on your own?

ISABELLE. *(Lightly.)* Surely you don't expect me to sit at home all day, Monsieur?

BÉRARD. I imagine that you have many *friends* to visit.

(Awkward silence.)

AZAIRE. Are you all right, my dear? You look a little flushed.

BÉRARD. A circulation problem, no doubt. A common ailment among the fairer sex.

AZAIRE. My wife is of a nervous temperament. She suffers from headaches.

(To **ISABELLE**, *pointedly.)* You should go to bed, Isabelle. I will look in on you later.

(Beat.)

ISABELLE. Goodnight, gentlemen.

*(***ISABELLE** *leaves.)*

AZAIRE. I apologise for my wife.

BÉRARD. Women, such mercurial creatures. In my experience, they all need a firm hand.

STEPHEN. Are *you* married, Monsieur?

BÉRARD. ...Well, I had better get myself home but rest assured, René: if you need to call on the town council, I shall not fail you.

AZAIRE. Thank you. Goodnight, my friend.

*(***BÉRARD** *nods to* **STEPHEN**. **BÉRARD** *leaves.)*

Look. I'm not going to hide it from you, Monsieur Wraysford. You have come at a difficult time but I trust that while you are here, you will see that I am not afraid to stamp out trouble.

We will start with a tour of the factory tomorrow.

Scene Two

(The next day. The sound of the factory. Men, women, workers at machines. It's very hot.)

*(***RENÉ AZAIRE** *appears,* **STEPHEN** *in tow.* **STEPHEN** *struggling, though hiding it well.)*

AZAIRE. And these machines operate at twice the pace of the ones they have replaced.

STEPHEN. Why are you making greatcoats?

AZAIRE. Peace is always fragile, is it not?

STEPHEN. But surely, there's no appetite for another war –

AZAIRE. There is always another war, Monsieur Wraysford. And in France there are those who feel we need to prove ourselves again. It is wise to be prepared.

*(***LUCIEN LEBRUN** *rushes up.)*

LEBRUN. Is it true?

AZAIRE. Lebrun. This is Monsieur Wraysford, from England.

LEBRUN. The English spy?

AZAIRE. A potential partner.

(Beat.)

LEBRUN. There are rumours of another assault on our wages.

AZAIRE. We are in difficult times.

LEBRUN. We?

AZAIRE. Employees will have to take a small pay cut.

LEBRUN. How small?

AZAIRE. It is not yet decided.

LEBRUN. Look. Look at them! You are pushing us too far.

*(**STEPHEN** looks at the workers around him. Men, women, all exhausted, on the edge.)*

AZAIRE. I don't have a choice.

LEBRUN. There's always a choice.

(Beat. **LEBRUN** *goes.)*

AZAIRE. Lucien Lebrun. A born troublemaker, who seems to have elected himself head of the workers. No backbone, of course, but –

Are you all right, Monsieur?

STEPHEN. It's very hot in here.

AZAIRE. Should I fetch the doctor?

STEPHEN. No. I'm all right. I just need a little air.

AZAIRE. ...I'll be in my office. I'll show you the dyeing process, when you are...recovered.

*(**AZAIRE** smiles smoothly; masking all dislike.* **STEPHEN** *breaks away from the factory.)*