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THE PASSION OF LOVE OR THE LOVE OF PASSION IN A-MINOR

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Master of Arts

at the

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for the Department of English

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THE PASSION OF LOVE OR THE LOVE OF PASSION IN A-MINOR

BRENDAN D. WHITT

ABSTRACT

...*A-Minor* is an one-act play that examines the relationship between a Black artist and the predominantly white society and industry he must assimilate into in order to be considered a success. The main character Jacque Bonnet is used as a vessel to interpret the life and career of Joseph Bologne Chevalier de St. George. Despite Bonnet and Bologne being from different eras (Bologne mid to late 1700's, Bonnet Mid 1800's) I used Bonnet as a device to investigate the lesser explored life of Bologne. By creating a meta-gothic world for Jacque Bonnet to exist in, the crowd can watch his mental decay in real time. This play relies heavily on pace and aesthetic. A minimalist set with several props and original music will assist in the telling of the story. This play is heavily influenced by Suzan Lori-Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* and Picasso's *Harlequin with a Violin* and has to be told through a gothic lens with Victorian tendencies. These are the fears of the Black artist learning to assimilate.

This is a problem that spreads beyond the history of America. There have long been Complaints of the field of medieval studies being too white and failing to pay attention to the African Diaspora that populated much of Europe between the year 500 and 1500. Joseph Bologne has been long forgotten in the annals of European history. The romanticized version of a continent that is rarely challenged. ...*A-Monor* serves as a revisioning of one, Joseph Bologne's life using a fictional character. The white world that surrounds Jacque represents the smothering of a black artist in a white dominated market.

In the end this play serves as a loose interpretation of how history, specifically of the African Diaspora can be consumed and forgotten about by a mass white elite. The aristocracy controls Jacque's work just as much as the majority white corporate hands control today's art and entertainment market. Keeping to the tradition of the downtrodden black artist, the historical setting of mid 1800's France offers a historical point of reference for the story. What happens today has already happened yesterday.

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Introduction

The Passion of Love or the Love of Passion in A-Minor originally was conceived as a short story titled *Jacque Bonnet and the Sonata with a Pulse*. The first act opened with Jacque sitting at his kitchen reading his town's daily and enjoying some tea when there is an unexpected knock at the door. A servant from the Dumont estate has arrived to inquire about Jacque's services as a pianist. The bulk of the play comes from the second and third acts of the original short story.

A-Minor builds on ideas presented by African-American playwright Suzanne Lori-Parks. The history of post-colonial African-Diasporic people is one that is not largely learned about outside the vacuum of Black Studies. After arriving in America through the North Atlantic Slave Trade slaves were systematically stripped of their tribal identities and culture. The monolithic identity that would pursue these people became the long withstanding narrative of people who descended from Africa. Not knowing your specific tribe or the geographical area of your ancestors plagues most African-Americans. This creates a huge problem for contemporary African-American art. The primary basis for historical black settings, particularly narrative fiction in print, on screen or stage is almost always set in post-colonial America whether it's James McBride's *Good Lord Bird*, August Wilson's *Fences*, or even Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing*. This creates a vacuum for any African-American by severely skewing the peripheral of our history.

In her article scholar Laura Dawkins argues that "most critics agree" that in her Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Topdog/Underdog*, Suzanne Lori-Parks "uses the figure of the Black Lincoln impersonator to draw attention to - and correct - the elision of an African-American presence in mainstream American history" (Dawkins 83). Parks' play revolves around two Black brothers named Lincoln and Booth. Various critics argue what the true function of Park's Lincoln is but it

is no secret that Parks uses Lincoln as a way to rewrite popular American history. Building on that idea introduced me to the idea of fiction uncovering history. While the concept isn't new the time period that a piece of historical fiction covers or examines can say just as much if not more than the piece itself.

Joseph Bologne was a French-born Guadeloupean composer, violinist, conductor, and fencer. He is best known as the first classical composer of African descent dubbing him the title of "Black Mozart". Bologne was the lead conductor of the leading symphony orchestra in Paris. Much of his music career spanned from the 1760's through the 1770's. He had done time in prison during the French Revolution when he was falsely imprisoned due to his ties to the aristocracy although he was in support of the revolution. Upon his release from prison he died poor in 1799.

Bologne subsequently went mostly forgotten throughout history. A mulatto slave born out of wedlock to a 16 year-old slave and her owner had ascended to the highest level of French society in the mid-18th century as a champion fencer and composer/conductor and still had largely been forgotten to history. Mozart who had also died young and penniless and had no political dealings, certainly not to the extent of Bologne if any has been famously attached to what is known as classical music.

In a New York Times interview that focused on Parks and her play, the playwright stated "To me Lincoln is the closest thing we have to a mythic figure." She continues with "Shakespeare had kings and queens that he fashioned into his stories. Lincoln to me is one of those." Parks takes a concrete historical figure in Lincoln and turns him into a mythic figure equal to Zeus of Mount Olympus. This represents the vessel that Joseph Bologne is for Jacque Bonnet, highlighting something that was either largely forgotten or never fully explored. The

constant switching between Lincoln and Booth as the top dog and underdog in the story echoes the perception of Lincoln as a reluctant emancipator. Jacques' self-inflicted wounds as a reaction to those around him illustrates Bologne's struggle of living in France's Aristocratic society.

Jacque was created as a loose interpretation of Bologne. He is a French pianist of very little fame although he does have some type of a reputation. Jacque only makes mention of his race once. He refers to himself as a "nègre." Jacque's true one plot goal is to successfully perform his one act piano sonata which will pave the way for him to ascend into French aristocratic society in some capacity. The biggest difference between the two is the fact that Bologne lived during the 1700's while Jacque's story takes place during the 1850's.

A-minor's stage directions also assist in telling the story of forgotten history. The stage directions took time to develop eventually taking on a fast paced movement inspired by Irish designer Es Devlin's set for the Barbican's 2016 production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* starring Benedict Cumberbatch. The way Devlin and the production's director Robin Lough used the set's design and props to tell the story of Hamlet influenced the way A-Minor will make use of its props like the piano and the positioning of the chairs. The fast pace should feel as though some detail is being glossed over much like history has done Bologne, Lincoln's reluctance as an emancipator, and the African-American's struggle with his own history.

In the short story when Jacque would sit down at his piano to compose his sonata the mood and feel of the scene determined the picture Jacque's music would paint. Rolling fields and gentle streams of water illustrated when Jacque was happy and barren desert or frozen arctic tundra when Jacque was feeling down. This element of the original will be replaced with projected graphic illustrations shown in the background as Jacque works on his piece in three scenes.

A-Minor also uses a few devices of traditional theater in a number of convenient ways. The characters use of contemporary American English gives the play a bit of a playful tone versus trying to mimic the seriousness of Victorian dramaturgy. When Jacque refers to himself of not being “very right-brained” he’s using a contemporary American phrase in the mid 1850’s. The second device the play uses is the romance plot particularly the rake character. Normally in most Victorian romance plots a man prays upon an often young and vulnerable woman. This leads to our heroine either ending up pregnant with a child being born out of wedlock or the woman and the man marry causing the woman to become severely depressed and unhappy due to physical and psychological abuse from her rake husband.

Arthur Huntingdon of Anne Bronte’s *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is the perfect illustration of what a rake is. He marries a young Helen and not long into the marriage he begins to show his true nature as a childish drunkard who belittles his wife, peruses infidelities, and even begins to envy the attention his wife gives the couple’s infant son Arthur Jr. In A-Minor Isabelle flips the role of the rake on Jacque. Although it is he who approaches Isabelle first, Isabelle actually seduces Jacque first as a thought, then as an apparition, and finally in the flesh. A-Minor is an exploratory rewriting of *Black History*.

Characters

Jacque Bonnet: A young black French pianist commissioned to write a piece for Monsieur Dumont, a member of the French aristocracy.

Monsieur Dumont: A member of the French aristocracy who hires Jacque to write and perform a short one act sonata for his daughter's wedding rehearsal dinner. Dumont is a tall and stocky old man. His hair is balding with a full graying beard.

Isabelle Dumont: Monsieur Dumont's daughter and Jacque's love interest. She is reluctant to marry the man her father has chosen. Isabelle is the stereotypical image of European beauty at the time. Pale skin, long brown hair and slender.

Servant: The servant is wearing the clothes of a typical butler. He is an older white male in his 70's.

Setting

The play primarily takes place at the Dumont Family estate in northern France.

SCENE 1

[Curtains up]

There is a spotlight shining down on a stand holding sheet music as dancers circle around it. We begin to hear a heartbeat accompanied by the sound of a person breathing heavily.

[Lights out]

The breathing begins to slowly fade, eventually stopping.

[Exit music stand and piano. Enter tall chair and short chair. The Servant should be in the taller chair.]

***Beat**

***Beat**

We hear the sound of a horse drawn carriage.

[Lights up]

Jacque and The Servant are on en route to the Dumont family estate.

Jacque: How long have you worked for the Dumonts?

Servant: Since I was just a boy. My father served Monsieur Dumont's father and grandfather. I was born on the estate and decided to give my life serving his nobility.

Jacque: Does he pay you handsomely?

Servant: Just being able to serve the Dumont family is enough for me.

Jacque: How many of you are there, servants I mean.

Servant: Oh I'd say, at least a hundred.

Jacque: Why does one man need so many servants? He isn't a king.

Servant: Does the king need a hundred servants even though he is the king?

Jacque: When you put it that way I'm inclined to answer no.

Servant: A rich man will always take more than he needs even though he doesn't need to. It is just human nature to do so. I don't question Monsieur Dumont, I only do as I am told and so do the others. And if you'd like to be guaranteed your 5,000 francs then I'd suggest you do the same.

Jacque: Duly noted.

There is a brief moment of silence between the two men as we continue to hear the sound of the horse drawn carriage making its way down the road.

Servant: I don't mean to be crass or rude Monsieur Bonnet. I just want you to be prepared for what this life entails. After this performance you will probably be in higher demand than a Rossini.

Jacque: Yes, if only I wrote for the opera.

The two share a laugh over Jacque's comment. The sound of the horse drawn carriage slowly fades out.

[Lights out]

SCENE 2

[Enter Piano and stool. Reposition chairs for conversation]

[Lights up]

The servant leads Jacque to a room just off one of the main corridors. Jacque walks around the room and instantly admires how beautifully decorated the walls are. The furniture is masterfully carved with gold accents and upholstered with the finest imported materials.

Servant: Please, have a seat sir. I will return with Monsieur Dumont shortly.

Jacque hesitates before taking a seat in one of the chairs.

The servant leaves the room then returns with Monsieur Dumont.

Servant: Please stand for Monsieur Dumont!

Jacque stands up and straightens his clothes. Monsieur Dumont sits down across from Jacque and smiles. He shoos the servant away who, before leaving takes a bow and closes the doors behind him.

Monsieur Dumont: Ahh... Jacque Bonnet. What a pleasure it is to meet you.

Jacque: No monsieur, the pleasure is all mine. I am amazed at the size of your home.

Who are the men in the paintings that lines the halls if you don't mind me asking?

Monsieur Dumont: My family lineage and members of the nobility.

Jacque: Have you lived here on the estate your entire life?

Monsieur: A great deal of it, yes. Except for the summers I spent in Vienna and French Algeria before I was married. But I have spent most of my life here.

Jacque: I have never been outside of France. My mother was a servant brought over from Cote d'Ivoire so France is all that I know.

Monsieur: That's surprising. How did you become so proficient at piano having never studied abroad?

Jacque: I've had some instruction but I am mostly self taught.

Monsieur Dumont: I always wanted to learn how to play an instrument proficiently. I never really had the patience. How often do you play?

Jacque: As often as I can. I have to do farmhand work to support myself during the days. That gets in the way sometimes.

Monsieur Dumont: You need not fret here. I assume you have been informed of why you have been summoned.

Jacque nods his head yes.

Monsieur Dumont: Good. I have been told by various people in your town that you are a rather prolific pianist.

Jacque: I believe my skills to be fairly sufficient.

Monsieur Dumont: A man of humble nature. You are winning me over more and more Jacques Bonnet. Anyway I would like you to compose a short sonata for my daughter's engagement party.

Jacque: How soon do you need it?

Monsieur Dumont: In about a week's time. All I ask is that you allow me to hear the final incarnation before you perform it.

Jacque: I need to get home as soon as possible to begin writing-

Monsieur Dumont: No need. You will be residing here at the estate until you have finished the commission.

Monsieur Dumont claps his hands as the servant re-enters the room.

Monsieur Dumont: Please take our honored guest to his quarters.

Servant: Right this way Monsieur Bonnet.

Jacque gets up to follow the servant to his quarters.

[Lights out]

SCENE 3

[Exit tall chair. Enter bed and small cabinet]

[Lights up]

The bedroom has a large and luxurious bed and a window that looks out over the west end of the estate.

Jacque: This room is larger than my entire home.

Servant: If there is anything that you may need just ring for me.

Jacque gives the servant a head nod as The servant closes the door. Jacque notices the piano over in the corner with a book full of blank sheet music. Next to it is a small liquor cabinet. Jacque pours himself a glass of cognac and drinks it. He pours himself another as he searches for the first note of his sonata.

Jacque: No, no, no. That isn't it.

Jacque tries another note but he is once again displeased with himself. He gets up from the piano and begins to pace around the room.

***Beat**

The lights go severely dim as a shadowy figure comes from behind Jacque. The figure remains virtually unseen as they lays their hands upon Jacque's chest.

***Beat**

Voiceover: You will be the prized jewel of French music, Jacque Bonnet. The brilliance of your compositions will be so profound that even the Americans will recognize how exceptional of a nègre you are. This is an opportunity you mustn't squander Jacque. Unless you wish to scoop manure and feed livestock for the rest of your years. This is going to be the most trying time of your young life. Either shine bright or crash and burn.

The figure disappears as Jacque clinches at his chest as he winces. Jacque walks over to the piano and presses a key. The sound appeases him. He presses another. Jacque sits down at the piano and begins to work on his piece.

[Lights out]

SCENE 4

[Lights up]

Later on that same day Jacque hears a knock on his bedroom door. Before approving entry the Servant barges into the room. Jacque lets out a slight chuckle.

Servant: Have I amused you?

Jacque: No, well yes. Usually when someone knocks they wait for approval before entry

Servant: I'm sorry for having inconvenienced you sir.

Jacque: No, no it's alright. No quarrel here.

Servant: I do have a request for you from monsieur Dumont. It may or may not please
you.

Jacque: Oh?

Jacque stands and walks over to the servant.

Servant: It appears that Monsieur Dumont's excitement has made him overly eager to
hear your work in person.

Jacque: What does that mean?

Servant: Monsieur Dumont would like to hear what you have so far.

Jacque sits back down at the piano appearing distraught.

Jacque: How soon does he need it?

Servant: Before he retires to his quarters for the evening.

Jacque: As in tonight?

Servant: Correct. Is there a problem Monsieur Bonnet?

Jacque: No. I just wasn't expecting to have to present something so soon.

The servant walks over to Jacque. He picks up the sheet music and looks it over

Jacque: Do you read music?

Servant: No, but it seems as though you have something to present to Monsieur Dumont.

It doesn't have to be completed tonight.

Jacque: While that is reassuring I don't even know if this is what I want to perform. This was just a warm up.

Servant: Well my advice is to just present anything.

Jacque: You can see I have something to present, it just isn't very good.

The servant heads for the door

Servant: Take Monsieur Dumont's praise or criticism with a grain of salt. If you know that you can do better than what you have then take pride in that and do it.

As the servant leaves the room he turns back around and looks at Jacque

Servant: And one more thing Monsieur Bonnet, would you like to eat your dinner in the hall or here in your room tonight?

Jacque: Here is just fine. Thank you.

Servant: I shall return with your dinner tonight. I bid thee adieu.

The servant exit's the room leaving behind a disheveled Jacque.

[Lights out]

SCENE 5

[Exit bed and small cabinet. Enter tall chair.]

[Lights up]

In the estate's ballroom Monsieur Dumont has just finished dinner. He picks something out of his teeth before taking a drink from a chalice. Jacque looks nervous as he awaits Monsieur Dumont's critique of what has finished playing.

Monsieur Dumont: I must say Monsieur Bonnet, I am a bit disappointed in what you have presented this evening.

Jacque: My apologies sir. I had no idea that you would want to hear something so soon. This is really just me figuring out what I want the actual sonata to sound like. I wasn't even sure that this was what I wanted to play.

Monsieur Dumont: It isn't the quality. I just assumed that you would have more of it completed.

Jacque has a look confusion written across his face.

Monsieur Dumont: But I guess my deadline was rather sudden.

Jacque: If you like what I have so far I can keep going with it-

Monsieur Dumont: No. Start something new. If you don't you don't like what you have so far then why should I?

Jacque: Point taken Monsieur.

Jacque gets up from the piano and heads towards the door. Before he can exit the room...

Monsieur Dumont: Monsieur Bonnet, one more thing.

Jacque: Yes sir?

Monsieur Dumont: Trust your head, not your heart.

Jacque: I understand. Thank you sir.

Jacque exits the room

[Lights out]

SCENE 6

[Exit tall chair. Enter bed and small cabinet]

[Lights up]

The audience can hear papers being thrown and furniture being violently moved around. The lights come back up revealing Jacque has thrown a tantrum. He picks up his chair and grabs his bottle of cognac he has been drinking. His clothes are messy and he appears to be exhausted.

***Beat**

Suddenly there is a knock at the door. Jacque attempts to fix himself up before answering.

Jacque: Yes, come in.

The servant looks around at Jacque's destruction.

Servant: How was your meeting with Monsieur Dumont?

Jacque: One small criticism and now I'm second guessing myself. Am I not who I was before I walked through that door? Sure Monsieur Dumont seemed satisfied when I showed him what I had but my own disdain got in the way. Then when I knew what I had was shit I still tried to pedal it off as if it were a cheap whore.

Servant: You have to pull yourself together Monsieur Bonnet. This is not the end of the world.

Jacque: I suppose that you are right. I have to get ready for bed. I'll start anew in the morning.

Servant: And I will have this room tidy and organized for you as soon as you'd like.

Jacque: No need. I can do it myself. See you in the morning sir.

The Servant leaves as Jacque picks up the knocked over chair. He closes the curtains before taking a seat on the bed. The shadowy figure appears across the room unbeknownst to Jacque.

Voiceover: Who are you Jacque Bonnet? Who are you today and who will you be tomorrow? Answer me dammit!? Take your hand and pledge, no swear to me, yourself, as well as I that no matter what transpires, you will walk out of those doors the same man you were as when you walked in. Swear it to me and I shall swear it to you.

Jacque pours a drink before chuckling to himself. He finishes his glass before pouring himself another. Jacque stands as he drunkenly stumbles around the room. He makes his way over to the piano running his fingers along the keys. As Jacque finishes his drink he sits down at the piano to start a new.

[Lights out]

[Performance Piece #1]

[Lights out]

SCENE 7

[Lights Up]

Jacque is sitting at the piano having just finished the beginning of his sonata. He has lost track of the time since closing the curtains in his room. He closes the piano and gets up noticing the silhouette of a young woman in the door way. The area of the stage where she is standing is dimly lit to conceal her face.

Isabelle: That was very beautiful

Jacque: Thank you.

Isabelle: What is it called?

Jacque: It doesn't have a name yet.

Isabelle: Something that beautiful should have a name.

Jacque: It should shouldn't it? Any suggestions?

Isabelle: Sorry, I've never been very right brained. Is that all of it?

Jacque: All of what?

Isabelle: Is that all of the piece? Is it finished?

Jacque: Not even in the slightest. Why don't you come closer so I-

Isabelle: I am no harlot sir.

Jacque: I just like to see the face of the person I'm in conversation with.

Isabelle: I would think that if your piece was unfinished, that would be your priority.

Jacque: While this is true it was you who disturbed me madam.

Jacque looks down for a brief moment and when he looks back up the woman is gone.

Jacque: Madam?

Jacque gets up and walks over to the doorway where he peeks his head through to see if the woman is in the hall. She is gone.

Jacque: Where could she have gone that fast? I didn't even get to catch her name.

Jacque lets out a bellowing yawn.

Jacque: I should be getting to sleep now. If I can keep up this level of diligence then I should finish the sonata well before Monsieur Dumont's deadline.

He drunkenly stumbles over to his bed before falling face down into it.

[Lights out]

SCENE 8

[Lights up]

The next morning when Jacque wakes up the servant is standing over him with a cart full of food behind him. The servant opens the curtains illuminating the room.

Servant: Breakfast Monsieur?

Jacque: I see that you've let yourself in again? Your shoes are untied.

Servant: On the contrary Monsieur. The door was left open. By the smell of your breath you may or may not even remember last night. And I've managed to remain upright so I'm sure that I will be fine.

The servant inspects Jacque's glass from the previous night.

Servant: This is the culprit, no?

Jacque: I was working all night until I finished the first movement.

The servant walks over to the piano and looks at Jacque's sheet music and turns a few of the pages.

Servant: You're much further along than you were last night. Well, before dinner anyway.

Jacque: That's just the first movement.

Jacque sits up and begins to eat food from off of the cart.

Servant: Monsieur Dumont would be extremely pleased that you worked tirelessly through the night.

Jacque: It was his criticism that spurned me.

Beat*

Jacque: Once I had finished working I dreamt that a woman came by last night. She was telling me how beautiful my piece was and that it needed a name.

Servant: What did the young lady look like Monsieur?

Jacque: She left before I could get a clear view. Next thing I know you were standing over me with this cart of food.

Servant: All I can tell you is that perhaps it is a sign of Monsieur Dumont's future pleasure in whatever you present to him.

Jacque: I hope that you are right in your assumptions. A dream that vivid has to mean something.

The servant begins packing up the cart

Jacque: I can remember her silhouette and her voice though. Nothing more than that.

Jacque rubs his chest in discomfort.

Servant: Future love interest perhaps?

Jacque: If I were only that lucky.

Servant: Well Monsieur, I must be getting back. Good luck with the rest of your sonata.

Jacque: Thank you sir.

[Lights out]

SCENE 9

[Exit bed, small cabinet, piano, and stool. Enter tall chair. The chairs should be pushed together to simulate a bench. Isabelle in the taller chair.]

[Lights up]

That afternoon Jacque decides to take a break from his composition to take in the scenery around the estate. He stops when he sees a beautiful young woman sitting on a bench looking out at a small lake.

Jacque: Is this seat taken madam?

Isabelle: No.

Jacque: Do you mind if I join you?

The woman nods signaling Jacque it's ok for him to take a seat.

Jacque: This is a beautiful residence. My name is Jacque Bonnet . Pleasure to meet you.

Jacque puts his hand out for a handshake. The woman refuses.

Isabelle: I know who you are. Everyone has been talking you up around the estate.

Jacque: Who is everyone?

Isabelle: The servants and maids mostly.

Jacque: Are you a maid?

Isabelle: Why is that any of your concern?

Jacque: Well pardon my intrusion.

***Beat**

Jacque: The geese look so peaceful here. I've never seen anything like this place before.

Isabelle: It is rather marvelous isn't it?

Jacque: I wish I could stay here forever. I'll just have to enjoy it while I'm here.

Isabelle: You do that. I have to get going.

Isabelle stands as does Jacque.

Jacque: I didn't catch your name.

Isabelle: It isn't important.

Jacque: Will I ever see you again. Maybe you'd like to join me in my quarters for a drink.

Isabelle: It was a pleasure meeting you Jacque.

The Woman leaves as Jacque sits down on the bench alone. Jacque stays on the bench a little while longer before getting up and leaving.

[Lights out]

SCENE 10

[Exit tall chair. Enter Bed, small cabinet, and piano]

[Lights up]

Having returned from his walk Jacque is sitting at the piano, drink in one hand and pen in the other. He is visibly frustrated.

Jacque: No, no, no. That doesn't sound right either.

***Beat**

Jacque: Where do I want to take the audience? What is going to drive their emotion? I

wouldn't be in such a fog had it not been for that beautiful woman at the lake.

Jacque begins to pace around the room. He downs his glass of cognac before pouring himself another.

[Lights out]

***Beat**

[Lights up]

Isabelle is sitting on top of the piano in a white gown. Jacque is unaware of her presence as this scene is dreamlike.

Isabelle: You mustn't dwell so long on things you cannot control.

Jacque: I wish I could erase her from my head.

Isabelle: No Jacque. Feed off of your conscious. It wants to be recognized.

Jacque: I can use her image as a muse.

Jacque leans in closer to the glowing sheet music as Isabelle leans in closer to Jacque, almost as if she is going to kiss him.

Jacque: This is really beginning to shape up. I think this is the best piece I've ever written.

Isabelle: Feed off of my inspiration Jacque. Allow it to guide your hand.

Isabelle places her hands over Jacque's as he begins to play the new lines he has written.

The music is beautiful.

[Snippet of music]

Jacque: I am really beginning to fall in love with this piece.

Isabelle: Yes you are.

The lights dim.

***Beat.**

When the lights return Isabelle is gone. As Jacque continues to compose there is a knock at the door.

Jacque: Yes. Come in.

The servant enters the room, Jacque notices that he is missing a glove.

Servant: Good afternoon Monsieur.

Jacque: Good morning. I noticed that you're missing a glove.

The Servant chuckles.

Servant: I must've left it in the kitchen.

Jacque: So, how are you this afternoon?

Servant: I'm doing fine. You seem to be in rather jovial spirits since this morning.

Jacque: I've begun work on the second movement of the sonata. It's really beginning to come into it's own.

Servant: I'm glad to hear that.

Jacque: You must have a message or news to pass along seeing as how you don't have a cart behind you.

Servant: I do actually. Monsieur Dumont would like to see your progress this evening.

Jacque: I thought that I had another day before my next check in.

Servant: Your progression checks are at the discretion of Monsieur Dumont. He is paying you after all.

Jacque: Well I am fairly prepared this time. And yesterday I wasn't so sure of myself. I can at the very least walk into his hall with confidence.

Servant: Monsieur Dumont would also like to know if you would care to join him for dinner the night before the party. His wife and the happy couple to be are hoping to meet you.

Jacque: If he enjoys my piece I will happily join them for dinner.

Servant: You won't be joining him if he doesn't?

Jacque: I'll be in here toiling away at a new piece.

Servant: Then I'll tell Monsieur Dumont that you won't be joining them for dinner.

Jacque: You can give him a fair-weather yes.

Servant: Monsieur Dumont likes definite answers, no maybes.

Jacque: Very well then. I will be in attendance.

The servant cracks a rare smile

Servant: Glad to hear that you will be present for dinner. I hope that you like duck.

Jacque: I love duck.

Servant: I'll pass this information along to Monsieur Dumont.

The Servant exits as Jacque gets back to work.

[Lights out]

SCENE 11

Later that night Jacque hears a knock at his door as he continues to work on his sonata. He stops working and turns around on his stool expecting the servant to come in.

Jacque: Yes. Come in please.

The door opens and it is Isabelle. Jacque stands up to greet her.

Jacque: Hello Madame. I wasn't expecting to see you.

Isabelle: I wasn't expecting to be here.

Isabelle appears to be disheveled. She never makes eye contact with Jacque.

Jacque: How may I help you?

Isabelle: I have been forced into an arrangement that I have no desire of being apart of. I am expected to adhere to and abide by this agreement but I have no say in the matter.

Jacque: Are you seeking advice from me madam because I have no experience in the handling of business affairs.

Isabelle: You can help me but we must be discreet.

Jacque: What exactly is it that you are asking of me?

Isabelle closes the door behind her. Jacque grows anxious as Isabelle slowly walks over and kisses Jacque on the lips. It's short but passionate. She places his hand in her shirt as he cups her breast. She whispers into his ear...

Isabelle: Please Monsieur, I must be freed.

Jacque: Freed from what?

Isabelle: If you want to help me then you mustn't ask so many questions. Please Monsieur, help me.

Isabelle presses herself upon Jacque aggressively before the two share a long passionate kiss.

[Lights out.]

***Beat**

[Lights up]

It is morning and Jacque is alone in bed. He hears a knock at the door.

Jacque: Yes, come in.

The servant enters.

Servant: Monsieur Dumont would like to see you in his hall immediately.

Jacque: Did he say what for?

Servant: No he did not. If I were to give my most educated guess it would be that he would like to hear what you have completed so far.

Jacque: I have a good deal completed.

Servant: Well sir, Monsieur Dumont is waiting.

Jacque leaps out of bed to get dressed.

Jacque: You can tell him that I'll be down shortly.

Servant: I will relay your message to him.

The servant leaves as Jacque frantically gets dressed

[Lights out]

SCENE 12

[Exit bed and small cabinet. Enter Tall chair.]

[Lights up]

Monsieur Dumont is sitting in his chair. His hands are clasped together resting on his stomach as he dons a look of judgment.

Jacque: Good morning Monsieur. I hope that I have not kept you waiting for too long.

Monsieur Dumont: I am more concerned with what you have accomplished since our last meeting.

Jacque: And I am more than happy to share it with you.

Pointing to the piano

Jacque: If I may?

Monsieur Dumont gestures Jacque to begin.

[Performance Piece #2]

When Jacque finishes what he has of the sonata so far Monsieur Dumont stands and applauds Jacque's efforts.

Monsieur Dumont: That was simply marvelous Monsieur Bonnet.

Jacque: Why thank you sir.

Monsieur Dumont: I can see why you were as happy as you were this morning.

Jacque: That and the fact that a brown haired maiden keeps visiting me in my dreams.

My appointed servant says she may be a symbol of good luck and fortune.

Monsieur Dumont gets out of his chair and takes Jacque by the hands.

Monsieur Dumont: No my good sir. These are the bringers of your good luck and fortune. In all of my years Monsieur Bonnet I have never seen someone work as diligently as you have. I can not wait to hear the

finished product. You may very well be the most sought after pianist in Europe after this.

Jacque: Thank you sir. I've never received such praise before.

Monsieur Dumont: And it isn't unwarranted.

Jacque: I am pleased that you find my work so enjoyable.

Monsieur Dumont: This is Schubert type work if you ask me.

Jacque: Please sir, I am no Schubert.

Monsieur Dumont: This is true. You are Jacque Bonnet, France's hidden jewel. Tell me Monsieur Bonnet, where did you learn to play like that? I took lessons as a boy up until I couldn't find the time but, you make it look so effortless.

Jacque: When I was a boy there was an old man who lived down the road from me and my mother. One day when I was playing I went a little further than I should have. I could hear this beautiful sound in the distance, so I decided to follow it. When I found the source of the music I peeked inside of the old man's window and watched him play. He had to have known that I was watching him because without turning around he asked "Would you care to learn?" So the old man took me on as a pupil until he died a few years later. I was gifted his piano and I've been consumed by music ever since.

Monsieur Dumont: That is a great story. You'll have to share it at dinner.

Jacque: It's really a boring story sir. Your guests-

Monsieur Dumont: My guests are my wife, daughter, and my son in law to be. No one special really. I'm surprised you haven't run into any of them yet.

Jacque: I've suspended myself to my quarters until I've finished the piece except for the walk I took yesterday.

Monsieur Dumont: Don't rush yourself. Rest is just as important as work.

Jacque: Duly noted sir.

Monsieur Dumont walks to the door.

Monsieur Dumont: I will be seeing you Monsieur Bonnet.

Jacque: As will I you sir.

Monsieur Dumont exits

[Lights out]

[Exit tall chair. Enter Bed and small cabinet]

SCENE 13

[Lights up]

The Servant stands in the doorway, shirt un-tucked. Jacque pays it no mind as he stares intensely at his sheet music with a drink in hand. The servant politely knocks on the frame of the door to garner Jacque's attention.

***Beat**

Jacque finishes his drink before answering to the knock.

Jacque: Yes, yes, come in.

The servant enters the room

Servant: Good afternoon Monsieur. How was your meeting?

Jacque: It went rather well. Monsieur Dumont was very pleased with what I have so far.

He said my piece to be marvelous and my talent exceptional.

Servant: Quite the endorsement from such a powerful and influential man.

Jacque: Yes but I've seem to have finally hit a snag in my process.

Servant: How So?

Jacque: I'm nearing the end of my piece but I have no idea of how I want to finish it.

Servant: You have time sir. Don't rush it.

Jacque: True but I have to be ready to perform the piece on the final day. I'm beginning to doubt my own skill and proficiencies. I've never questioned my own abilities before.

The servant sits down besides Jacque on the stool.

Servant: Sometimes we have to have our limits tested to see just how far we can go before we peek over the edge and take a step back. But if we never take that leap, then we never realize just how far we can go. With you Monsieur-

Jacque: Please, call me Jacque.

Servant: With you Jacque, it isn't a question of if you can, it's more an issue of will you.

I believe that you will Monsieur, I mean Jacque.

The servant gets up and walks towards the door

Jacque: Thank you sir.

Servant: Anytime.

The servant leaves the room.

Jacque: If he believes in me then I should certainly believe in myself. It was no mere accident that I've been selected for this task. I am capable.

Jacque pours himself another drink and continues to compose his sonata

[Lights out]

SCENE 14

[Lights up]

Jacque is working on the sonata when there is a knock at the door. The servant walks in as Jacque continues working on the sonata.

Jacque: Good afternoon sir.

Servant: Good afternoon to you monsieur Bonnet. How is the sonata coming along?

Jacque: I'm making progress but I still have quite a ways to go.

Jacque turns around to face the servant

Jacque: So what is today's correspondence?

Servant: Well monsieur Dumont has a request he would like to make.

Jacque: Oh?

Servant: He has decided that he would like to name the sonata if you wouldn't mind.

Jacque: No, I don't mind. What is the proposed name?

Servant: Isabelle, after his daughter that is to be married off.

Jacque: Isabelle. What a beautiful name. Have I met Isabelle?

Servant: Perhaps you have seen her wandering around the estate.

Jacque: Other than the women who work here I've only run into one other woman.

Servant: Long brown hair, petite frame?

Jacque: Yes... that sounds like her...

Servant: You sound uneasy monsieur. Is something troubling you?

Jacque: I'm afraid that I've made a grave error. How am I just now beginning to realize this?

Servant: It's a bit late to make any drastic changes to your music now isn't it?

Jacque: I need to see Monsieur Dumont right away.

Servant: What seems to be troubling you Monsieur Bonnet.

Jacque gets up and hastily pours himself a drink. He swallows it down before pouring himself another.

Jacque: During my short time here I have come to think of you as a friend. I also understand that serving the Dumont Family is an honor as well as your life's work.

The servant sits down beside Jacque

Jacque: I have laid down with Isabelle not knowing who she was. All of this time I believed she an apparition or subject of my dreams.

***Beat**

Jacque: Had I known at the time I wouldn't have done it. Every time I saw her I inquired about her name but she refused to tell me. This is why I must tell Monsieur-

Servant: No! While this is a rather large mishap, informing Monsieur Dumont would be an even graver one.

Jacque: Then what shall I do? If Monsieur Dumont finds out he could ruin my reputation or worse. I could be jailed or killed.

Servant: This is why we must keep this between us.

Jacque: What about your allegiance to the Dumonts?

Servant: Do you think that this is the first secret to be kept within the walls of this estate my dear boy?

Jacque: I have to leave sir, right now. Finishing this piece is my top priority and I can't complete that task while here.

The servant's demeanor drops.

Servant: And what do you expect running away to solve? It won't undo your excursion with Lady Dumont and it certainly won't look well to her father. If his pianist suddenly packed and left in the middle of the night it would seem a little odd don't you think?

Jacque: Then what am I to do?

Servant: I will think of an excuse for you not being able to attend dinner tonight. Continue your work and I'll confer with you later.

The servant smiles at Jacque before exiting the room. Jacque frantically paces around the room with a drink in his hand. He sits at the piano clinching at his chest as he drinks his cognac.

[Lights out]

SCENE 15

[Exit bed, small cabinet, piano & stool. Enter Tall chair.]

[Lights up]

Isabelle and Monsieur Dumont are in a room located on the estate. The both of them look upset with each other.

Isabelle: I don't want to marry that man father.

Monsieur Dumont: This isn't about what you want.

Isabelle: Why isn't it if it's my life that's going to be effected?

Monsieur Dumont: My dear, this man was chosen so that our families can come together and-

Isabelle: I don't care about the politics of this arrangement. I want to at least marry someone of my own choosing.

Monsieur Dumont: That isn't how this works Isabelle.

Isabelle: And why not? Because of some imaginary doctrine? Some tradition that should have died long ago? Or is it because of your own greed?

Monsieur Dumont raises his voice at Isabelle.

Monsieur Dumont: You watch you mouth when you speak to me! I am your father and will be treated as such.

Isabelle: And I am your daughter and should be treated as such. Not like some asset.

Monsieur Dumont: Me and your mother were arranged.

Isabelle: And neither of you have ever looked happy when in the same room together. When I wake up in the morning and the sun shines through my window, I want to be able to look my spouse in the eye and be happy. Happy that I chose someone who loves me.

Monsieur Dumont: Are you in love with who I have chosen?

Isabelle: Not even in the slightest. He is pompous, rude, and entitled.

Monsieur Dumont: As he should be.

Isabelle: Why? Because his family is rich?

Monsieur Dumont: And what are you? Your life isn't the picture perfect image of
modesty. Have you not grown up the same as he?

Isabelle: I have but I have not allowed it to define me as a person.

*Monsieur Dumont walks over to Isabelle in an attempt to calm her down. He lays his
hand upon her shoulder. Isabelle snatches away.*

Monsieur Dumont: No matter who you may believe you are my dear daughter, you are
still a member of the French aristocracy. You may never hold a post
or an official title but you are still a member of high society.

Gesturing to their surroundings.

Monsieur Dumont: This is all that people will ever see in you.

Isabelle: I don't care what people will see and neither should you.

Monsieur Dumont: This matter is not up for discussion. This marriage holds more
importance than you being happy. This is the joining of two
prestigious families.

Isabelle: Do you not care how I feel about the matter?

Monsieur Dumont: This marriage will effect more than just you.

Isabelle: And it will effect me more than you care to acknowledge.

Isabelle gets up and storms out of the room.

***Beat**

The servant enters the room.

Monsieur Dumont: Yes, yes what is it?

Servant: Monsieur Bonnet won't be able to join you for dinner tonight. He sends his
most sincerest apologies.

Monsieur Dumont: Does he have a reason?

Servant: Something about the creative process sir.

Monsieur Dumont: Ugh. Artists and their quirks. Very well then.

Monsieur Dumont waves the servant away. Unbeknownst to the servant and Monsieur Dumont Isabelle was listening in on their conversation. She reemerge appearing to be concerned.

[Lights out]

SCENE 16

[Exit tall chair. Enter bed, piano & stool, small cabinet.]

[Lights up]

Jacque is in his room with the curtains closed making the room dark. He is sitting at the piano writing. His hair is un-kept, clothes are sloppy, and he looks to be physically ill. On top of his piano is an almost empty bottle of cognac. As Jacque puts the finishing touches on Monsieur Dumont's speech piece there is a knock at the door. He stops working and turns around waiting for someone to enter. Jacque mumbles.

Jacque: Come in. COME IN!

The door opens as Isabelle walks in, she and Jacque lock eyes.

***Beat**

Jacque stands up to greet Isabelle.

Jacque: Good evening Madame. What brings you here this time of night at such convenient timing?

Isabelle: Jacque, we need to talk.

Jacque: I believe that we should.

Isabelle: So you must have figured it out by now.

Jacque: That you are Monsieur Dumont's daughter? Yes I know.

Isabelle: Listen Jacque, I'm sorry.

Jacque: Are you aware of the danger that you have put me let alone my career in?

Isabelle: Those were never my intentions.

Jacque: Then why would you do such a thing to me?

***Beat**

Isabelle remains silent.

Jacque: Answer me damnit!

Isabelle: Because-

Isabelle begins to weep

Isabelle: You are my only way out of this arrangement.

Jacque: What arrangement?

Isabelle: My husband and I were arranged to be married and I have no desire for that man.

Jacque: But you have feeling for me?

Isabelle takes Jacque's hand in hers.

Isabelle: I am falling in love with you Jacque Bonnet.

Jacque: But you are to be married in a few days and I'm not even a member of the aristocracy. Besides our love isn't one that would be openly embraced.

Isabelle: I know. Which is why you should run away with me Jacque. We can runaway to Northern Africa and live there. Far from this society and its-

Jacque withdraws his hands from Isabelle's.

Jacque: No, we can't.

Isabelle: Yes we can. Right after your performance we'll sneak out and steal a carriage. By the time anyone notices that I'm gone we'll be on our way to start our new lives.

Jacque: What about my earnings?

Isabelle: I already have money for us to begin anew.

Jacque: Are you really prepared to leave all of this behind?

Isabelle: I'd do anything to escape the life that awaits me.

***Beat**

Jacque: I am sorry Isabelle, but I won't allow myself to be used as a pawn in your spat with your father.

Isabelle: Jacque I-

Jacque: Please Madame, I would like to get back to finishing your father's sonata.

Isabelle heads towards the door. She turns to Jacque, a look of hopelessness and heartbreak paints her face.

Isabelle: Is it true that my father requested that the piece be named after me?

Jacque: Yes.

Isabelle: Is that how you found out I was his daughter?

Jacque: Yes.

Isabelle: Will you at least reconsider?

Jacque is silent. He makes his way back to the piano to continue working. Isabelle leaves the room closing the door behind her.

[Lights out]

SCENE 17

[Exit bed, small cabinet, and short chair.]

[Lights up]

Jacque emerges shortly before it is time for him to play his short sonata. He is well dressed but looks rather sickly. Jacque is happily greeted by the servant upon his arrival against a backdrop of a chatter track.

Servant: Monsieur Bonnet! It is so nice to see you. Are you feeling alright? You don't look so well.

Jacque: Yes, yes I'm fine.

Servant: Would you like a glass of water Monsieur? I can go and make you a cup of tea if you'd like.

Jacque: No. And my name is Jacque. You don't have to be so formal with me.

Servant: My apologies Mons- I mean Jacque.

Monsieur Dumont walks over to Jacque and the servant.

Monsieur Dumont: Monsieur Bonnet! I am so glad that you are here. This day is almost as important to you as it is to me and my family. This is your big debut as is the soon to be newlyweds. Servant, make sure that Monsieur Bonnet's every need is met. He is still your responsibility.

Servant: Yes sir.

Monsieur Dumont: I'll see you shortly Monsieur Bonnet.

Jacque nods Monsieur Dumont goodbye. Jacque coughs and stumbles before he is caught by the servant.

Servant: You should have a seat Jacque.

Jacque: I told you, I'm fine.

Servant: Very well. Were you able to speak to Madame Isabelle?

Jacque: Our conversation despite not ending well gave me a sense of peace.

Jacque coughs again.

Jacque: Well I have to get ready to go play. See you afterwards?

The servant smiles and nods.

Monsieur Dumont is standing beside Jacque and the piano. He has a glass in his hand as he prepares to introduce Jacque.

Monsieur Dumont: May I have your attention please? I am pleased to present to you

Jacque Bonnet and his newly composed short sonata *Isabelle*.

An applause track should play as Jacque makes his way up to the piano.

[Performance Piece #3]

Jacque plays his piece and when he finishes his performance is met with a thunderous applause. When Jacque stands up to take his bow he grabs at his chest in pain before collapsing to the floor. Isabelle and the servant rush over to Jacque's lifeless body simultaneously calling out to him.

Isabelle: Jacque! Jacque!...

Servant: Monsieur Dumont! Monsieur Dumont!...

[Lights out]

[Exit Piano and stool. Enter Music stand now with a rose placed upon it]

[Lights up]

END

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