march erect and abstracted like animated window models, but chattering incessantly.)

IRMA. (*Offstage.*) But ladies, please—you have no business here—you are not expected —— (*To* COUNTESS.) There are some strange ladies here!

COUNTESS. I think we might let them come in, please, Irma. (*Music cue No. 14.* IRMA *goes. The* WOMEN *come in, without taking the slightest interest in their surroundings. As they pass* COUNTESS.) Who are you?

1ST LADY. Madame, we are the most powerful pressure group in the world!

2D LADY. The ultimate dynamic.

3D LADY. The mainspring of all combinations.

1ST LADY. Nothing succeeds without our assistance. Is that the well, Madame?

COUNTESS. That is the well! (1ST WOMAN *starts down.*)

2D LADY. Put out your cigarettes, girls. We don't want any explosion. Not with my brand new eyelashes. (*Music cue No. 15. They go down, still chattering.* COUNTESS *rushes to* R. *wall and presses stone.*)

COUNTESS. My gold brick! Why, they've stolen my gold brick! (*She moves towards trap. It is now closed. Music cue No. 16.*) Well—let them take their god with them. (IRMA *enters and sees with astonishment that the stage is empty of all but* COUNTESS. *Little by little, the scene is suffused with light, faint at first but increasing as if the very walls were glowing with quiet radiance of universal joy. Only around closed trap a shadow lingers.*)

IRMA. What's happened? Where have they gone?

COUNTESS. They've evaporated, Irma. They were wicked and wickedness evaporates. (PIERRE *enters. He is followed by the* VAGABONDS, *all of them. The new radiance of the world is now very perceptible. It glows from their faces. Music cue No. 17.*)

PIERRE. Oh, Countess ——!

WAITER. Countess, everything's changed. Now you can breathe again. Now you can see.

PIERRE. The air is pure, the sky is clear ——

IRMA. Life is beautiful again.

RAGPICKER. (*Rushes in.*) Countess—the pigeons! The pigeons are flying!

FLOWER GIRL. They don't have to walk any more?

IRMA

RAGPICKER. They're flying! Countess! The air is like crystal. And young grass is sprouting on the pavements.

COUNTESS. Is it possible?

IRMA. (*Interpreting for* DEAF-MUTE.) Now you can throw your fireballs up as high as you please—they won't go out.

FLOWER GIRL. And everywhere shopkeepers are smiling ——

SERGEANT. And on the street, utter strangers are shaking hands, they don't know why, and offering each other almond bars —— (*Music cue No. 18.*)

WAITER. Countess, we thank you! (*The lights dim. An unearthly voice is heard.*)

1ST VOICE. (*Off* R.) Countess!

2D VOICE. (*Off* L.) Countess!

3D VOICE. (*Off* U. R.) Countess!

1ST VOICE. Countess, we thank you. We are the friends of people.

2D VOICE. We are the friends of animals.

3D VOICE. We are the friends of friendship.

1ST VOICE. You have freed us.

2D VOICE. From now on there will be no hungry cats.

3D VOICE. And we shall tell the Duchess her dog's right name.

1ST VOICE. Countess, we thank you. We are the friends of flowers.

2D VOICE. From now on every plant in Paris will be watered.

3D VOICE. And the sewers will be fragrant with jasmine. (DEAF-MUTE *joins* COUNTESS D. C. *and speaks. Music cue No. 19.*)

DEAF-MUTE. Sadness flies on the wings of the morning—and out of the heart of darkness comes the light —— (*Music cue No. 20. The* ADOLPHE BERTAUTS *appear up* R., *move to* COUNTESS C.)

1ST ADOLPHE BERTAUT. Countess, we thank you. We are the Adolphe Bertauts of the world. We are no longer timid. We are no longer weak. Henceforth, for your sake, we shall hold fast to what we love—we shall be handsome—and our cuffs shall be forever immaculate and new.—Countess, we bring you this melon and with it our hearts —— (*They all kneel.*) Will you do us the honor to be our wife?

Begin

COUNTESS. (*Cries out.*) Too late! Too late! Too late! Too late! (*They take up their melons sadly, and go away.* VOICES *of* VAGABONDS *fade up meanwhile, all except that of the* DEAF-MUTE, *who once again becomes speechless.*)

PIERRE. Too late, Countess?

IRMA. Too late for what?

COUNTESS. I say that it's too late for them. On the 24th of May, 1881, the most beautiful Easter in the memory of man, it was not too late. And the day they caught the trout and broiled it on the open fire by the brook at Villeneuve, it was not too late. And it was even not too late for them the day the Czar visited Paris with his imperial guard. But they did nothing and they said nothing, and now—you two will kiss each other this instant!

IRMA. But, Countess ——

COUNTESS. It's three hours since you've met each other, known each other, and loved each other. Kiss each other quickly. (PIERRE *moves.*) Look at him. He hesitates. His happiness frightens him. How like a man! Oh, Irma, kiss him, kiss him. If you let a single instant wedge itself between you and him—it will become a month, a year, a century. Make them kiss each other, all of you, before it is too late, for in a moment his hair will be white, and there will be another madwoman in Paris, and before that moment comes —— (PIERRE *takes* IRMA *in his arms.*) Bravo! Oh, if you'd only had the courage to do that thirty years ago—how different I would be today! Dear Deaf-Mute, be still—your words dazzle our eyes. And Irma is too busy to translate for you —— (*They kiss again.*) Well, there we are. And you see how simple it all was? Nothing is ever so wrong in this world that a sensible woman can't set it right in the course of an afternoon. Only, the next time, don't wait until things begin to look black. The minute you notice anything, tell me at once.

RAGPICKER. We will, Countess.

COUNTESS. (*Her tone becomes businesslike.*) Irma. My bones. My gizzard.

IRMA. I have them ready, Countess.

COUNTESS. Good. (*She puts bones into her basket and starts for stairs.*) Four o'clock. My poor cats must be starved. What a bore for them if humanity had to be saved every afternoon. They don't think much of it, as it is.

END

CURTAIN

PROPERTY LIST

Act I

Water and wine glasses—liquor
Newspaper
Cigar and matches
Violets—bunches
1 French banknote
Decanter and glass
Small basket
Dinner bell
3 scarves
Pocket mirror
Lipstick
Notebook and pencil
Glass of beer
Brass button
Parasol
Small bottle (with muddy liquid)
Pencil, envelope, sheet of paper
Ermine collar
Daisy
Juggler's implements

Act II

Mending materials
Bird cages and various accumulations of odds and ends
Boots (sewer man)
Tea things, cake, honey
Hand bell
Feather boa
Decanter of water and glasses
Several long cigars
Legal papers—several
Fountain pen
Gold brick
Cigarettes and matches
Melons
Chicken bones