

## LIBRETTO

## NO EXIT

*an Opera in One Act*

*based on the play Huis Clos  
by Jean-Paul Sartre*

*music & libretto by*  
ZACHARY M. WATKINS



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Estelle Rigault ..... a socialite  
Inès Serrano ..... a civil servant  
Valet..... a demon  
Joseph Garcin..... an academic

## SETTING

*Hell, in the form of a living room decorated in the Mid-Century Modern style. There are three couches separated by two end tables. A lamp rests on one table, a letter opener shaped like a dagger on the other. One wall contains a fireplace with mantle, on top of which sits a large, heavy statue. There are no mirrors or windows. A single door with a bell ringer provides the only access in or out of the room.*

## (OVERTURE)

## SCENE I

*The VALET escorts a nervous GARCIN into the living room. Garcin is having trouble adjusting to his new situation. He questions the Valet, who tolerates these inquiries with indifference.*

- 5 GARCIN: So, here we are?  
VALET: Yes, Mister Garcin.  
GARCIN: And this is what it looks like?  
VALET: Yes.  
10 GARCIN: Are all the other rooms like this one?  
VALET: Why would they be? We cater to all sorts.  
GARCIN: Still, I just, well I didn't expect this. Where are the instruments of torture?  
15 VALET: *(laughs)*  
GARCIN: There's no need to be rude, I understand my position.  
VALET: I'm sorry, sir, but all our guests ask me the same silly questions. *(mockingly)* "Where is the torture chamber?" Everyone always asks.  
20 *(laughs again)*  
GARCIN: No doors, no windows. And no bed either. I'll never sleep again, I suppose.  
VALET: Indeed.  
25 GARCIN: What's outside?  
VALET: Outside?  
GARCIN: Damn it, beyond that door!  
VALET: There's a hallway, and more doors, then more rooms.  
30 GARCIN: Is that all?  
VALET: That's all.  
GARCIN: ...

VALET: Very well, sir, if you don't need me anymore, I'll be off. *(starts to leave)*

35 GARCIN: What? You're going? But, what's that? *(points at the doorbell button)* A bell? And if I ring, you'll come back?

VALET: Well, yes, if it's working. You can never be sure about that bell.

40 GARCIN: Wait! *(picks up the letter opener)* What's this?!

VALET: Can't you see—it's just a letter opener.

GARCIN: Oh! We get mail here??

VALET: Of course not. *(Exits)*

45 GARCIN: Then, what's the point of it?

## SCENE 2

*Garcin paces the room. He tries to open the door, but it is locked. He rings the bell, but there is*

50 *no sound. He tries to move the statue above the fireplace and can't. Finally, he sits down. The Valet enters with ESTELLE and INÈS. Estelle sees Garcin seated on one of the couches and shrieks in fear. The three begin getting to know each other and are uncomfortable with their circumstances.*

55 ESTELLE: No! Don't look up! I know your face is gore!

GARCIN: *(looks at Estelle)*

ESTELLE: What?! But, I don't know you?

60 GARCIN: I'm not your torturer, madam.

INÈS: Where's Florence?

ESTELLE: Who?

INÈS: Florence, where is she?

VALET: Nobody else is coming, madam.

65 GARCIN: You mean it's just the three of us?

VALET: *(nods)*

ESTELLE: I guess that we should introduce ourselves. My name's Rigault—Estelle Rigault.

INÈS: I'm no madam; I'm not married. Inès Serrano.

70 GARCIN: I'm Joseph Garcin, an academic.

ESTELLE: My, how distinguished! And very honorable.

INÈS: *(to Valet)* I assume there's no entertainment? Not even a mirror to watch ourselves in!

VALET: You can watch the Earth, so long as they're thinking of you.

*(Estelle, Inès, and Garcin all look to where the Valet is pointing.)*

80 ESTELLE & GARCIN: And what about the heat?

VALET: *(dismissive)* What about it? *(Exits)*

ESTELLE: So...I suppose you two are also...  
85 you know?

INÈS: Yes, last Thursday. How about you?

ESTELLE: I'm very recent—just yesterday. And you, Mister Garcin?

GARCIN: I'd say about a month.

90 ESTELLE: Do you have anyone left behind? Anyone left on Earth who still thinks of you?

GARCIN: Yes, my wife.

ESTELLE: Oh, she must miss you very much.

GARCIN: *(becoming irritated)* Not exactly.

95 INÈS: *(to Estelle)* Did you suffer much? How did it happen?

ESTELLE: Not too badly for pneumonia. You?

INÈS: The gas stove sprang a leak while I was asleep.

100 ESTELLE: And you, Mister Garcin?

GARCIN: Twelve bullets in my chest.

ESTELLE: Oh my!

GARCIN: I'm sorry. Look, I want to take some time to think about my life and what I've done that's brought me here.

105 ESTELLE: Brought you here? Just where do you think we are?

## SCENE 3

110 *Estelle, Inès, and Garcin argue about why they've been put in the same room together and whether they should even be in Hell at all. Estelle is in denial, Garcin less so, but Inès is cruel and forceful with her realism. (TRIO)*

115 ESTELLE: Really now, I can't imagine why they'd put us all together; it doesn't make sense.

INÈS: What do you mean?

ESTELLE: I'm looking at us all and thinking we're going to live together? It's so absurd.

120 GARCIN: It's pure luck, I'd guess, some fluke of random chance.

INÈS: Oh really? A mere fluke? By chance? And it's by chance that the room is furnished as we see it? That statue on the mantle? What

125 about the heat? It's all down to the last detail!

ESTELLE: You think it's all arranged beforehand?

INÈS: They've put us together deliberately.

ESTELLE: You think it's not mere chance you and you, personally, are sitting opposite me?

130 INÈS: They've put us together deliberately, forever.

ESTELLE: I never could stand the idea of anyone expecting something from me. It always  
 135 makes me want to do just the opposite—I always do the opposite.

INÈS: Well, do it! Do it if you can. You don't even know what they expect, but do it if you can.

140 GARCIN: Now look, why are we all here? You seem to know something we don't. You'd better tell us right now!

INÈS: But I know nothing, absolutely nothing! I'm as much in the dark as you are.

145 ESTELLE: Well I shouldn't be here at all! My husband was old enough to be my grandfather, but for six years I was a faithful wife. Then one day I fell in love with another man. He wanted us to elope, but I told him, "no." Then I caught  
 150 pneumonia, and now I'm here. That can't be enough to damn me for eternity.

GARCIN: Exactly! I edited a pacifist newspaper. I'm a man of principle. And when war broke out, I refused to fight. The government came  
 155 after me when I ran. They caught me at the border and executed me by firing squad!

ESTELLE: *(to Inès)* You see? They've made a mistake!

160 INÈS: Now look, we are criminals, murderers, all three of us—we're in Hell!

ESTELLE: Stop, for heaven's sake! Be silent, I demand that you stop saying all these lies!

INÈS: In Hell, damned souls, that's us! In Hell, damned souls, that's us, all three!

165 GARCIN: Keep your goddamned mouth shut, woman! I mean it! Stop right now, don't you utter one more word!

INÈS: Wait! Now I understand. Each of us will be the torturer of the other two!!

170 GARCIN: No. I will never be your torturer. It's very simple: *(points to each couch in turn)* you sit there, you sit there, I'll sit here, and we won't say a word.

ESTELLE: Must I be quiet too?

175 GARCIN: What did I just say?! Are we agreed?  
 ESTELLE & INÈS: Agreed.

GARCIN: In that case, goodbye.

#### SCENE 4

180 *The three settle into their sofas. Garcin does his best to ignore the women. Estelle fidgets; she puts on lipstick then searches her purse for a mirror*

*which she doesn't find. Inès takes the opportunity to try and get closer to her. (DUET)*

185 ESTELLE: Do you have a mirror? Any little thing will do.

INÈS: Don't worry, I have one here in my bag. *(looks for it)* It's gone! They must have taken it from me somehow.

190 ESTELLE: *(upset)* That figures.

INÈS: What's the matter?

ESTELLE: When I can't see myself, sometimes I wonder if I really exist.

195 INÈS: Come, sit over here. I can be your mirror, and I'll be just as true. Come closer, look into my eyes.

ESTELLE: Oh, I'm there! But I'm so tiny; I can't see myself.

200 INÈS: But I can—every inch. So ask me questions, I'll be as honest as any mirror would.

ESTELLE: How are my lips?

INÈS: They're a little bit smudgy.

ESTELLE: I'll try again. *(fixes her lipstick)*

INÈS: That's very good.

205 ESTELLE: You're sure, Ms. Serrano?

INÈS: Oh, please call me Inès!

ESTELLE: Do I look alright?

INÈS: Estelle, you're beautiful!

210 ESTELLE: I don't make friends with women easily, but you...

INÈS: I think we may be friends. I can't look away from you. And I'll be nice to you, ever so nice. And you be nice to me, too.

ESTELLE: Ever so nice.

215

#### SCENE 5

*Inès is rebuffed by Estelle. Embarrassed, she turns her ire full force on Garcin, who then realizes their only hope is bare their souls to each other.*

220 ESTELLE: *(realizes Inès' true intentions)* Are you really attracted to me?

INÈS: Very much.

ESTELLE: How disgusting!

INÈS: You wouldn't be disgusted if it were him.

225 *(points at Garcin)*

ESTELLE: At least that would be proper.

INÈS: *(at Garcin, furious)* Look at her, damn it! I know you haven't missed a word we've said.

230 GARCIN: Leave me alone, I'm not interested in the two of you.

INÈS: Maybe not in me, but what about our poor Estelle?

GARCIN: (*at Estelle*) I told you not to speak!

ESTELLE: It's not my fault! She kept pushing  
235 me, insisted that I let her be my... my mirror.  
Ridiculous!

GARCIN: Let's all just sit down and ignore  
each other.

INÈS: How utterly absurd! I feel you in my  
240 every pore. Your silence thunders in my ears.  
You can nail your mouth shut, cut your tongue  
out, but you can't change the fact you're here.

Can you stop your thoughts? I hear them  
ticking away like a clock—tick-tock, tick-

245 tock—I'll bet you hear mine, too. You can sit  
and sulk there on your couch, but you're still  
everywhere I go in this room. Everything I

hear, every sound, comes to me soiled. With  
no mirrors, it's like you've stolen my face—just

250 like you've stolen Estelle from me, merely by  
existing. NO! Get your hands away from your  
face. I won't leave you in peace; I won't stand

for that. I prefer to choose my Hell. I prefer to  
look you right in the eyes and fight it out, face

255 to face!

GARCIN: Have it your own way. I suppose it  
was always going to come down to this. Estelle,

it's time to fess up, little girl.

ESTELLE: Oh, leave me alone.

260 GARCIN: I warned you, I asked for peace and  
quiet. Now, come clean—why are you really  
here?

ESTELLE: I already told why.

GARCIN: You've told us nothing, nothing that  
265 counts. Didn't they say something to you on  
your way in?

ESTELLE: They didn't tell me a thing.

GARCIN: They didn't tell me either, but I've  
got a pretty good idea.

270

#### SCENE 6

*Determined to avert unending conflict, Garcin  
and Inès confess the real reasons they are in Hell.  
(SHARED ARIA)*

275 GARCIN: I'm here because I treated my wife  
abominably. That's it. And I did it for years.

Now that I'm dead, she suffers even more  
because she couldn't not love me. (*views the*

280 *Earth*) There she is: they've given her back my  
things, the coat with the twelve bullet holes. It's  
scarred with history. Now, won't you shed a tear,

my love? Surely you'll squeeze one out? Surely

just one, for me? No? You won't, even now?  
Night after night, I came home blind drunk,

285 stinking of wine and women. She'd waited up  
for me, of course, and she never cried, never  
uttered one single word of complaint. I often

teased her; I really was just merciless. But from  
her? Never one tear, not one protest! I even

290 brought one of my call girls home to live in our  
house. I made my wife sleep upstairs where I'm  
sure she heard everything. And as I and the girl

stayed in bed late, I made my wife serve us our  
morning coffee.

INÈS: You brute!

295 GARCIN: Yes, a brute, it's true, but a well-  
beloved brute. Yes, a brute! And that's why I'm  
here.

INÈS: Well, plenty of people on Earth called  
me a 'damned bitch' just for being gay but I'd be

300 surprised if that's why I'm here. I had an affair  
with Florence. It's a dead man's tale with three  
bodies. Me, and she, and he was her husband—

my cousin. They'd taken me in. I crept inside

305 her skin, she saw the world through my eyes.  
When she wanted to leave, he wouldn't let her  
go. So I tricked him and trapped him on the

tracks of the train. I reminded her every day,  
"we killed him between us!" Then one night,

310 while I lay sleeping, she turned the stove on  
and crept back into bed.

GARCIN: Well, well—a damned bitch.

INÈS: Well, well—a beloved brute.

INÈS & GARCIN: It's not a pretty story. Now

315 we know!

#### SCENE 7

*Garcin and Inès confront Estelle. They demand to  
know the real reason she is in Hell. Estelle refuses*

320 *to tell them. When they begin to guess the truth,  
Estelle tries to flee the room, but the door is locked.*

GARCIN: (*to Estelle*) Now, it's your turn.  
ESTELLE: ...

GARCIN: Oh, so now you're quiet?  
285 ESTELLE: ...

INÈS: She won't tell us; we'll have to guess. Do  
you remember when she first got here, she was

terrified of you.  
GARCIN: Yes! She wouldn't even look at my

330 face. Who do you think she was afraid of?  
INÈS: I bet it was her lover.

GARCIN: Could be. But why would his face be a mess of gore like that?

335 INÈS: (thinks) He must have loved her for some reason. Then he couldn't handle it when she wouldn't leave her husband.

GARCIN: Ah, that must be it! (to Estelle) He wasn't good enough for you, was he? And why not? Why wouldn't you run away with him? Was he not handsome enough?

340 INÈS: It's worse than that. I bet it was because he was poor!

GARCIN: Of course! And you wouldn't leave your husband. So he shot himself.

INÈS: He's dead because of you!

GARCIN: Because of you!

INÈS & GARCIN: Because of you!

ESTELLE: (shrieks, runs to the door, and tries to leave, but it is locked) You're so hateful—both of you.

#### SCENE 8

355 *Cornered, Estelle reveals the truth of her damnation. (ARIA)*

ESTELLE: My lover wasn't poor. He didn't say, "let's run away." He said he was in love. I laughed, though I knew I shouldn't. My lover wanted a child. I sure as hell didn't. That didn't

360 stop one from coming, so we left the country for a few months. At my husband's summer home, I had the baby. It was a girl; my lover was there when she was born. He was so pleased. I sure as hell wasn't. I found rope. I found the biggest

365 rock. I took the baby and went to the balcony overlooking the lake. (she mimes throwing the child) My lover shouted, tried to make me stop, but he couldn't. He sure as hell couldn't. We came back home. No one suspected a thing. Not even my husband, though I knew he wouldn't. My lover wasn't the same; he never recovered. He just wandered around in a daze 'til he found his revolver and put it to his head. I knew he'd do it. It was so absurd! He wasn't

375 strong enough. He sure as hell wasn't. Sure as Hell.

#### SCENE 9

380 *Estelle seeks comfort in Garcin's arms. He initially rejects her, but she convinces him to change his mind. Enraged by this development, Inès intervenes to prevent their embrace.*

INÈS: Well, Garcin, now what? We've bared our souls, exposed the dark truths of our lives and deaths. Isn't that what you wanted? So what's next?

GARCIN: Next? (thinks before answering) I guess we're supposed to help each other. Maybe we're here together to save each other's souls.

390 INÈS: (scoffs) I don't need help from you. Either of you.

ESTELLE: Please, Garcin, You can help me.

GARCIN: You? After what you've told me, why would I even want to try? What could I possibly do?

ESTELLE: Take me in your arms, forgive me for what I've done. Hold me, love me. Or at least try to. And in return I'll love you.

GARCIN: What? Why would I want that from you?

ESTELLE: You do. You need me, I know you do. I see in your eyes how afraid you are. In life, you were afraid to fight. That's the real reason why you ran. With your wife, you were afraid to love. That's why you treated her like that. So let me love you, and you love me. Together, we'll be each others' saviors. I don't judge you, you're not a coward to me. Take me in your arms, kiss my lips. Forgive what I've done, and absolve yourself through me.

405 Garcin moves to embrace Estelle, but Inès interrupts them before they can kiss.

INÈS: (outraged) No! I don't think so!

#### SCENE 10

415 *Inès drives Estelle and Garcin apart. Garcin comes to understand that Estelle is not actually interested in him as a person and loses interest in her affections.*

420 GARCIN: I should have known you'd object. Your jealousy is so obvious.

INÈS: What are the two of you going to do, really? Strip down and make love in front of me?

425 ESTELLE: Why not? I used to undress in front of my maid all the time.

INÈS: (grabs Garcin) There's no way a coward like you could seriously do this. Not with me here, watching both of you every moment.

430 GARCIN: (shoves Inès away harshly) Get off! Don't make me hit you. You're really asking for it, you know.

INÈS: But it's all an act! She'll say anything to feed your ego and make you want her.

435 ESTELLE: How dare you!

INÈS: An act, an act! Nothing but lies!

ESTELLE: Hateful bitch!

INÈS: She can't love you, Garcin, couldn't possibly. She doesn't care that you're a coward—  
440 nothing at all about who you are. You're nothing but a prop to her, a thing to make desire her.

ESTELLE: No!

INÈS: She needs your lust like she needs a mirror. She has no idea who she is unless a man is wanting her. And any man will do.

445 Estelle charges at Inès. They struggle, then break apart, neither having gotten the upper hand.

GARCIN: *(to Estelle)* It's true, isn't it? You don't  
450 want me, only my attention.

ESTELLE: It's not true. I love you. I need you. Why won't you trust that?

INÈS: Oh, you can trust that she needs a man. She'd tell you you were God himself if she  
455 thought it would bring you under her spell.

GARCIN: *(to Estelle)* Is it true?

ESTELLE: ...

GARCIN: *(looks back and forth from Inès to Estelle)* You disgust me—both of you.  
460

#### SCENE 11

*Unable to endure any more torment, Garcin decides to leave. Estelle begs him not to go. Garcin wrestles with the locked door until it opens. But, instead of exiting, he decides instead to stay, wanting to convince Inès that he is not a coward. She laughs at his folly.*

GARCIN: *(approaches the door)*

ESTELLE: What are you doing?

470 GARCIN: I'm leaving.

INÈS: The door's locked.

GARCIN: *(bellows)* I'll make them open it! *(begins wrestling with the door)*

ESTELLE: No, please don't go!

475 GARCIN: *(rings the doorbell, but it does not sound)*

ESTELLE: Don't leave me here alone with her.

INÈS: Would that be so bad? Just the two of us with this room to ourselves?

480 GARCIN: *(bangs on the door)* Open up!

ESTELLE: If you leave, I'm going too.

INÈS: What?!

GARCIN: *(continues banging on the door)*  
Open! Open, damn you!

485 Suddenly, the door opens! Shocked beyond words, the three confront in silence the open door and dark hallway beyond it.

INÈS: Well, Garcin? Now's your chance. Walk out of here, face the unknown. Take charge of  
490 your destiny.

GARCIN: No.

INÈS: *(laughs at Garcin)* And what about you, Estelle? You're free to go.

ESTELLE: *(at Garcin)* But why? Why not go?  
495 Why do you stay? Because of me?

GARCIN: No, because of her. *(closes the door and turns to Inès)* Do you think I'm a coward?

INÈS: There is no doubt in my mind that you are.

500 GARCIN: Then I'll prove to you I'm not. And that is how I will get my absolution.

INÈS: *(laughs at Garcin again)* You imbecile. You have literally just proven otherwise! You made such a big show of wanting to leave. Yet

505 when the moment came, you couldn't find the courage to go. You'd rather stay here with us, the devils you know, for all eternity than face the unknown of that bland hallway. You're so afraid of it that you'd rather put yourself at my  
510 mercy!

#### SCENE 12

*Estelle again offers herself to Garcin. He declines and becomes philosophical. Estelle attempts to murder Inès who laughs at her. The three resign themselves to the inevitable conclusion: they will spend eternity torturing each other.*

GARCIN: I can't get away from you, can I?

520 INÈS: None of us can; none of us will ever be without the other two.

GARCIN: If only I could sleep, then I'd have some peace.

INÈS: You never will; night will never come.

ESTELLE: Garcin, ignore her. Come, be with  
525 me, let her be consumed by jealousy.

GARCIN: I can't. I can't touch you with her staring at us the whole time.

ESTELLE: She's nothing, nothing but mirror-eyes reflecting our love. Forget her.

530 GARCIN: Mirrors?

INÈS: *(to Garcin)* You can't leave, you can't make love, you can only be here under my

gaze. And I see who you really are: a coward—  
coward, coward, coward!

535 GARCIN: At last I understand! At long last, I  
see. With no mirrors, I can't see myself. There is  
no me, only the me that's seen by other people.  
Hell is other people!

ESTELLE: Darling, please! I'm here, for you to  
540 do with as you wish.

GARCIN: No, not with her watching.

ESTELLE: Then I'll just have to stop her from  
watching. *(she picks up the letter opener and stabs*  
*Inès)*

545 INÈS: *(laughs)* Are you crazy? We're already  
dead.

ESTELLE: Dead?

INÈS: Dead, dead dead! It's over, it's all already  
done.

550 ESTELLE: *(laughs weakly)* So here we are.  
Together.

INÈS: Together forever.

ESTELLE: Forever.

GARCIN: Forever and ever and ever.

555 *The three lower themselves slowly to their respective*  
*sofas.*

GARCIN: Well then, let's get on with it.  
*Cut to black.*