

PART ONE
The Interview

1 /

Quite close to the audience and to its left, Helena R. sits in an armchair, outlined by a beam of light. Beside her, a reporter holds a 60's style microphone.

REPORTER: Look at the camera (*points to the audience*) not at me. (*Helena nods*) It's hard to answer questions without looking at the interviewer, but believe me, Madame Rubinstein, it looks much better afterward. The interview will be written and filmed. I'll take notes, but you look there. All right? (*Helena nods, but rather uncertainly*) Is everything okay, Madame? (*Helena then looks at the audience*) Shall we begin?

HELENA R: Are my conditions clear?

REPORTER: Perfectly.

HELENA R: Could you go over them once more?

REPORTER: I can't ask anything about Miss...

HELENA R: Ah!

REPORTER: Excuse me. Nothing about "the other one."

HELENA R: Very good. As for the rest, ask whatever you please.

REPORTER: Shall we begin?

(Helena nods)

REPORTER: Madame Rubinstein: What is your greatest fear?

(Helena answers very nervously, looking at a fixed point among the spectators)

HELENA R: My fear? What a silly question. (*The reporter encourages her to answer*) Well, if you insist. I lived in a large house, near the Rynek Plaza, in Krakow. We had a farm there, animals, vegetable gardens, we were five sisters and we all had such shabby clothes... (*Raises her eyes*) Back then, Momma and Poppa made us feel that the worst possible thing in life was to be what we looked like: peasants. Jewish peasants. That's my fear. That I'll wake up one day and find I'm not here, but back there in 1894. That I'll find I'm not who I am, but a Jewish peasant. That's my nightmare.

REPORTER: When did the idea for skin cream first come to you?

(Helena is not focused and pushes the microphone away with her hand)

HELENA R: Just a minute. Give me a minute.

(The reporter motions to cut)

REPORTER: Is something bothering you, Madame?

HELENA R: It's... it's just, I feel like someone's watching me and taking notes.

REPORTER: That must be me.

HELENA R: No, it's not you. It's as if there were people watching me thorough a window, watching my movements, my gestures.

REPORTER: Like a spy?

(Helena doesn't answer. Scrutinizing the audience)

HELENA R: It's something indefinable. As if this was all a play, you see? As if out there *(points to the audience)* there was an audience we can't see, but they can see us. As if there were cracks in this wall and through the cracks or the windows someone's watching us. A group of people. Not many, but a group.

REPORTER: It's just us, you and me. And the technicians. No one else. There are no windows. No one can see us, Madame Rubinstein.

HELENA R: These people expect something from me tonight. As if someone were writing me. As if I weren't me, but a character.

REPORTER: Madame: You are a character. On the world stage.

HELENA R: As if my life didn't belong to me, but to everybody. All of them. They've come to see their lives, not me.

REPORTER: And can you see these people? Are they there?

HELENA R: *(Scornfully)* Fine, if it's theater they want, then theater they will get. Let's hope it's good at least. Get on with it then. After all, every story needs reshaping.

(Helena stands. The reporter tries to stop her to change the camera angle, but Helena continues)

HELENA R: It all started with my mother.

(Lights come up on full stage. On one side, we are in Helena's bedroom in Krakow. Her mother, Augusta, applies cream to her sister Manka)

HELENA R: Momma was one of those lucky women who grow more beautiful with time. Her secret was her skin cream.

AUGUSTA: Helena and Ceska, don't fall asleep before I put your cream on! Helena? Are you asleep already?

MANKA: That cream smells like a sweaty horse, Momma!

AUGUSTA: Not true. I made it myself this morning.

HELENA: Must we use it three times a day?

MANKA: Besides, Momma, who said so, if you invented the creams yourself?

AUGUSTA: Hold still, or you'll crack the cream. As for that, no one told me. I told myself, now that's the end of it. Look *(Showing them her white arm)* Does it work or doesn't it? Besides, this cream is...

MANKA: *(Mimicking her mother)* A secret formula...

HELENA: Given to you by a Hungarian actress!

AUGUSTA: *(To Helena, threateningly)* When I'm through with Manka, you're next.

(Continues rubbing cream into Manka)

HELENA R: She made it with tree bark essences. In those days, skin cream was considered a home remedy and was kept in the kitchen, with the other medicines and herbs. *(Augusta finishes rubbing cream onto Manka, who is now virtually ghostlike)* Momma was very methodical about applying those creams. And while she did, she always said:

AUGUSTA: Women rule through love. This cream will make us beautiful and beauty will make us powerful.

HELENA R: That was my nightly lullaby, in that Krakow of chickens, cowherds, and disenchantment.

AUGUSTA: Helena, your turn!

(She goes to her mother reluctantly. Augusta begins to cover her with a white cream that she clearly dislikes)

AUGUSTA: Don't grimace, if a stiff wind blows, your face will freeze that way.

HELENA R: You were asking about my fears? Well, there's number two. That a wind will come and freeze my face in the look of a Jewish peasant.

(The Krakow bedroom disappears)

HELENA R: But I'm not complaining. After all, Momma's skin cream is the foundation of all I've accomplished in life. Out of that cream, I created the woman I am. This Helena Rubinstein who almost doesn't have the slightest idea what to do with her soul. Am I doing this right?

REPORTER: Just fine, Madame. Go on. Your mother gave you the cream and then they sent you to Australia to work with your uncle, right?

(Lights up on the rest of the stage. A party in Sydney. Onstage several well dressed women and men. Helena walks among the women, who watch her and compliment her on her appearance)

HELENA R: I went to Australia with Momma's cream. And when those people saw me, they were stunned. *(Helena meeting everyone and modeling)* I was young, tall, I had beautiful hair, I was very well cared for, and my skin, obviously, wasn't like the other women's. Naturally, those women, with their Australian sun, didn't understand that I came from Poland, where the sun is milder and hadn't done as much damage to my skin. *(Helena laughs)* They all looked at me enviously and asked:

AUSTRALIAN 1: What's your secret?

AUSTRALIAN 2: How does your skin look so young and healthy?

HELENA R: And I told them... *(As Helena)* "My mother makes a special cream thanks to a secret recipe she got from a Hungarian actress." *(As Helena R)* And no more, because I knew what was coming next.

AUSTRALIAN 1: Couldn't you sell me a little of your mother's cream, from the secret recipe she got from a Hungarian actress?

HELENA R: And I, of course, answered philosophically. *(As Helena)* But just a little bit, I don't have much. And just like that, at the age of seventeen, I began what would be my life's work: sales.

(Helena sells containers of skin cream to all the women at the party)

REPORTER: Fascinating...

HELENA R: Shut up, I haven't finished.

REPORTER: Sorry.

(Thompson appears, in a pharmacist's lab coat. Mixing ingredients. Helena puts on her lab coat too and learns from him)

HELENA R: Then in Australia I worked with a pharmacist who little by little showed me how to mix medicines and healing powders. I also learned the use of sheep oil and lanolin in particular. I started adding local ingredients to Momma's cream made from the secret recipe of a Hungarian actress. Ingredients we got from the Toowobomba jungle, the aborigines, pine oils, cypress, Kauri tree, Bunya oils, mixing and mixing. And the stranger the mixture, the more cream I sold.

REPORTER: And did it work?

(Helena tries her own creams)

HELENA R: Of course it worked. I tested it on myself first. And it worked. It protected and refreshed the skin. Nature provided everything, all you had to do was mix it up and remove anything that gave it an awful color. And while I made my mixtures, I worked in the pharmacy and at night I waited tables too. I worked like a man, yes, that's right, put that down that in your interview, I learned it from them. *(Thompson tries to kiss her, she shies away)* Work is more important than love. *(The power relationship shifts. Helena now gives orders to the pharmacist)* Momma was wrong. It wasn't beauty, it was work. Work and power MAKE YOU BEAUTIFUL. And that's what I've always done: work. Here, before your eyes, it's what I'm doing. Working. Did you realize that?

REPORTER: I really...

HELENA R: Our time is for work, our free time is for work too and our down time is for work and our dreams are for work.

(A very attractive, colorful sign appears behind her, with the name "Valaze")

HELENA R: My first factory for my first cream: VALAZE. And thus the World's First Beauty Salon was born.

THOMPSON: Emulsion cream, removes freckles, softens and lightens skin.

HELENA: A wonder against wrinkles, sun damage and blemishes, it makes your skin, mon cher ami, as soft, clear and translucent as a child's. *(As Helena R.)* I was the first to design what today we call advertising and marketing. I was also the first to realize that there are three skin types: normal, oily and dry. And that each had to be treated differently. "Because skin that isn't cared for ages more quickly."

(The women scream in terror)

HELENA: And everything that ages quickly, dies...!

(The women scream in greater terror. They all buy from Thompson and exit)

HELENA : *(A bit ashamed)* I had to put a little scare into them.

THOMPSON: Scaring customers, breaking them down as much as possible before beginning the treatment.

HELENA: Make them feel they're coming from filth, a hell for skin so that afterward they feel revitalized like a statue in the Louvre, thanks to...

THOMPSON: Valaze! Created in Melbourne, Australia, in 1899 and sold...

HELENA: At a very reasonable price

THOMPSON: By Helena Rubinstein and Company. Cash on delivery.

(Helena sighs. Now she does look out at the audience, intensely)

HELENA R: From that day forth, skin cream would no longer be kept in the kitchen or be used solely in hospitals.

REPORTER: (*Checking notes*) And you founded your fortune. At 18: a female millionaire.

(*Thompson and Helena now alone*)

THOMPSON: Helena, you should take care...

HELENA: Is there something on my skin? My cheeks?

THOMPSON: I mean there are people who think you have too much money and they're concerned.

HELENA: Concerned? Envy is gnawing at their guts!

THOMPSON: Envy is gnawing at the guts of the Department of the Interior, which, by the way, oversees visas. And, may I remind you, you are not Australian.

HELENA: Not Australian or a man, you mean.

THOMPSON: A woman and Polish.

HELENA: Jewish, you mean.

THOMPSON: All three.

HELENA: And you think that could spell trouble for me?

THOMPSON: That always spells trouble, my dear Helena.

HELENA: But I'm barely making a profit on VALAZE! With all the costs: bringing Momma's cream, importing the product, the containers, the gold labels. Honestly, at these prices, there's hardly anything left over for me.

THOMPSON: Helena, you can tell all that to the Ministry people. But not to me. I know how much you make. I keep your books!

HELENA: Importing costs an arm and a leg, if you knew...

THOMPSON: Not even the label is imported! You get it all here, Helena!

HELENA: People want to buy products that weren't made at home. They love imports, anything foreign must be better than domestic goods they think.

THOMPSON: And the import permits?

HELENA: I haven't needed any so far.

THOMPSON: Because you're not importing anything, my dear Helena.

HELENA: So?

THOMPSON: So, you're an importer who doesn't import but everything looks imported. And the Government wants to know, my dear Helena, what right you have to import something you don't import without the required permits to do what you're not doing. *(Reads from the magazine)* "In my travels throughout Europe I've never found such specialized creams and nutrients as the ones Helena Rubenstein prepares and imports."

HELENA: It sounds divine.

THOMPSON: It sounds like you make a lot of money.

HELENA: Give me one reason I can't be a millionaire in Australia.

THOMPSON: I'll give you three: Polish, Jewish, female. *(She drops her eyes)* AND SINGLE, which also is frowned upon, as you well know. And so the hatred.

HELENA: Is that true? They hate me?

THOMPSON: I can help you. I can convince them to give you AUSTRALIAN citizenship, and you can use the passport to go to Europe.

HELENA: Go back to Krakow? Never!

THOMPSON: To Paris. I'll help you with the paperwork.

HELENA: Paris?

THOMPSON: It's where you belong.

HELENA: You're right. I'm going to expand the business. I'm going to Paris.

THOMPSON: Good. Then there's just one thing left. *(He stares at her. She questions him with her eyes)* Me.

HELENA: You?

THOMPSON: What are you going to do with me?

HELENA: Me with you. I don't know. What about your wife?

THOMPSON: She's fine.

HELENA: Then so are you.

THOMPSON: So?

HELENA: That's that.

(He turns her around. She goes to him affectionately, but he holds her away)

THOMPSON: There's no need. By now I've grown used to dying for you.

(The rest of the set disappears. Only the reporter and Helena remain)

HELENA R: You see? That's what I mean when they talk to me about "that other woman." *(Her fury escalates)* That other woman had everything handed to her by her brothers, that's why she put her foot in it so badly and so often. Her Canadian peasant pig's feet, she even ate her own snot with those trotters, from what her best friends tell me. That woman never had to work, never had to fight against men, or swim with the crocodiles the way I've had to!

REPORTER: Madame...

HELENA R: Yes?

REPORTER: You said we wouldn't talk about her.

HELENA R: Then why did you bring her up during my interview? That's it! Let her get her own coverage, the lesbian slut! WE'RE FINISHED! You violated one of my conditions: never talk about that other woman.

REPORTER: Bu...but...

HELENA R: Goodbye! *(She gets up, is about to leave, whirls around)* Did you know that woman likes to sleep with horses? Ha! Who knows what else she likes to do with the filthy beasts!

(Helena looks at the audience. She realizes that everything was taped. Terror seizes her. We see a vivid red door)

2 /

Lights up on the right side of the stage. On stage, Elizabeth Arden and the reporter.

E. ARDEN: That's what that Communist Jew told you?

REPORTER: More or less.

E. ARDEN: More, you needn't pretend. Contempt, my dear, is a terrible feeling, there's nothing good about it. Except when it's mutual.

REPORTER: She also said something about feeling watched.

E. ARDEN: She always was a stupid cow.

REPORTER: I asked her what she was afraid of and she said "of being a peasant."

E. ARDEN: That's the difference between us. Write this down. Write that I, unlike that woman, am fearless. *(She pulls a pin from her hair. She pricks a finger. Shows the reporter)* See? Red. I'm not afraid. *(Licks her finger)* Where shall we begin?

REPORTER: Can I use your real name?

E. ARDEN: My real name is the one I've used my whole life: Elizabeth Arden.

REPORTER: You changed it when you were seventeen? Why?

(To one side, a hospital bed appears. Elizabeth dresses as a nurse while speaking)

ELIZABETH: I was born into a well-to-do family, where the men took care of business and the women took care of the home. We all had ridiculous names, mine was Florence Nightingale Graham. Mother died when I was a girl and then, well with a name like that, I wanted to be a nurse. *(Elizabeth takes a patient's temperature and rubs some cream into his leg)* In the hospital I learned to give therapeutic massages and I found out about a skin-regenerating cream for injuries. And I thought: If this cream can heal the skin, maybe it would also work to revitalize it. *(Elizabeth takes off the nurse's uniform and picks up her suitcase)* Then I left the hospital and asked my brothers to send me to New York, to work on my idea with the best of the best: Elizabeth Hubbar.

(Sign: 1909. Lights up on full stage. Elizabeth Hubbar's salon. A green door in the middle. Above it, a sign: Elizabeth Hubbar Products. On stage, Elizabeth and Miss Hubbar)

ELIZABETH: It says here: "...Miss Hubbar has opened a beauty salon on Fifth Avenue..."

HUBBAR: And you think our clientele reads that magazine, Florence?

ELIZABETH: Of course, Elizabeth. Look at these articles, look at what they talk about, the people they cover. The royal family, the Kieltys, the Vanderbilts. All stars.

HUBBAR: But they aren't going to come to this store.

ELIZABETH: They won't, but the people who want to be like them will.

HUBBAR: Anyhow, I don't like the name of that magazine. How do you pronounce it anyway?

ELIZABETH: Vogue

HUBBAR: It sounds completely foreign. Mark my words: that magazine... (*Mispronouncing*) "Vogue" won't survive to next season.

ELIZABETH: I think it has great potential.

HUBBAR: Because you're an ignorant Canadian, my dear. But here in New York you've got to have a clearer idea of what will sell and what won't.

ELIZABETH: Like the name of this store.

HUBBAR: There's no reason to feel that way, Florence. How would this salon have sounded with your name alongside mine? ELIZABETH HUBBAR & FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE GRAHAM." Hideous. Now listen to this: "Helena Rubinstein." You see?

ELIZABETH: This Rubinstein, who is she?

HUBBAR: A bitch who's patented horrid little skin creams in Paris. But don't forget her, because that woman is our direct competition. The enemy, you could say.

ELIZABETH: I won't forget her.

HUBBAR: And she's Jewish.

ELIZABETH: How awful!

HUBBAR: But she's successful. She makes money. She comes up with things. She was the first one to put it in every woman's head that all these skin creams are a necessity and must be taken seriously.

ELIZABETH: But does she exercise?

HUBBAR: I told you, she's a barbarian, brewing up potions like some kind of crazy witch. She knows nothing about health. That's our edge. You do your thing, health, and I'll do mine, creams and advertising. We're a good team, Florence. (*Gives Elizabeth money*) Here's your share. You've earned it.

ELIZABETH: The first thing I'm going to buy myself is a pair of gloves. My hands ache from this cold and the massages. Yesterday alone I had fifteen clients. I thought I'd die.

HUBBAR: I saw Mrs. Barber gave you a good tip.

ELIZABETH: She's the only one; the rest are still trying out the salon to see if they like it.

HUBBAR: Well, tips are tips and they're yours, I suppose.

ELIZABETH: That's standard. What's going on Elizabeth?

HUBBAR: Nothing, I'm just remembering our agreement. The tips are yours, since you're the one giving the massages in any case. *(Preparing to leave)* Well, I'm sure we'll both do better this month. *(Hands Elizabeth a paper)* I almost forgot.

ELIZABETH: And what's this?

HUBBAR: The rent.

ELIZABETH: Seventy-five dollars!

HUBBAR: That's the rent, you knew that.

ELIZABETH: Of course I knew that.

HUBBAR: This is Fifth Avenue and it doesn't come cheap, you yourself insisted on this place...

ELIZABETH: But what I don't understand is...

HUBBAR: "Convenient for wealthy families," you said.

ELIZABETH: But: why are you giving the bill to me?

HUBBAR: For you to pay it, of course.

ELIZABETH: And the money?

HUBBAR: What do you mean, "the money"? That's for you to figure out.

ELIZABETH: Elizabeth: I can't pay the rent all by myself.

HUBBAR: Well that was the deal.

ELIZABETH: That was not the deal.

HUBBAR: Of course it was. I fixed your hospital creams and put up the seed money. And the furniture, that's mine, or isn't it?

ELIZABETH: Yes, it's yours, but we...

HUBBAR: And you put up your ideas and your work and you pay the rent.

ELIZABETH: We didn't discuss that.

HUBBAR: It's in the contract. (*Shows it to her*) The tips are yours, of course.

ELIZABETH: (*Reading*) I didn't read this.

HUBBAR: But you do know how to read Florence, or don't you?

ELIZABETH: Of course I know how to read!

HUBBAR: Then I honestly don't understand why you didn't read it. If you can walk, you walk. If you can read, you read. Or have you seen someone who can walk going around in a wheelchair?

ELIZABETH: You know what I mean. We drew up a contract with a few clauses, a few you said, because it was between friends, sisters practically, and now I find out things were added.

HUBBAR: Were added? By whom? You think there are other people adding things to our contracts? Don't frighten me.

ELIZABETH: You don't have to mock me, Elizabeth.

HUBBAR: I'm not mocking you, sweetheart, it's just I don't like to waste time on the obvious. You pay the rent and I put up the rest. You shouldn't complain.

ELIZABETH: Well I am complaining, this business is both of us.

HUBBAR: The business is the creams.

ELIZABETH: Which smell horrid.

HUBBAR: Like your massages with those fishwife's hands of yours.

ELIZABETH: For your information: my massages are what bring people to this salon.

HUBBAR: To be strangled by your elephant hands.

ELIZABETH: They don't come to smell your snake oil potions.

HUBBAR: If you don't like them, you can leave.

ELIZABETH: This is my salon!

HUBBAR: You're wrong. This is my salon!

ELIZABETH: My name's on the contract!

HUBBAR: So is mine. And my name's on the sign. "Elizabeth Hubbar Products."

ELIZABETH: I never should've let you talk me into that!

HUBBAR: Well go cry to your brothers who paid for your trip and your share in this business. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have even let you through the door, you sniveler. Go back to your moron of a father who gave you that name, Florence Nightingale. To top it off, the real one's dead. And that's what you'll be if you don't get out of my salon this instant!

ELIZABETH: You're kicking me out?

HUBBAR: No. I'm tossing you out on the street.

ELIZABETH: Well then I'm tossing you out too.

(The two look at each other furiously. Miss Hubbar takes her purse and puts on her hat)

HUBBAR: Fine. Tomorrow we'll settle this once and for all.

ELIZABETH: *(collecting her things)* Tomorrow then.

HUBBAR: I'm warning you I know people in this city.

ELIZABETH: And I'm warning you, every night I draw my blood with a thick needle.

HUBBAR: Good God! How barbaric! What do you do that for?

ELIZABETH: To make sure it's still red and I'm still fearless.

(Miss Hubbar exits to one side, Elizabeth to the other. Lights up on E. Arden and the reporter)

E. ARDEN: We both went home. The next morning, we both got up at the same time. She put on a stunning outfit and went to her lawyer's office. I put on a fabulous outfit as well, I took the seventy-five dollars and went to pay the rent. *(enter miss hubbar and her lawyer)* Then, at noon, we met at the salon. She came with her lawyer and they spoke first.

HUBBAR: I've come to break off my business relations with you.

ELIZABETH: That's fine by me. You can go.

HUBBAR: I think the one who has to go is you.

ELIZABETH: I think otherwise, this salon is leased in my name.

HUBBAR: What?

ELIZABETH: The rent receipt is in my name and the owner, since it was the first time I paid, assumed that I'm responsible. And, as the contract we both signed well says, I'm the one responsible for paying the rent. So, as long as I pay, the place is mine.

HUBBAR: *(Looking at her lawyer)* That's not possible!

LAWYER: I'm afraid in this case... she's right.

HUBBAR: Bu...bu...but everything here is mine! Fine, I'm taking the furniture, the creams, the machines, the decorations, the carpet, everything, it's all mine and I'm taking it all with me.

ELIZABETH: But I'm keeping the doors, the windows and, in particular, New York's Fifth Avenue!

HUBBAR: You'll have to take my name down out front! I won't let you use it! Or the green door, it's the symbol of my business! The cost of replacing those gold letters alone will ruin you. I'll be back in my salon in no time. You'll beg me to get you out of debt. You'll see!

(Miss Hubbar and her lawyer leave)

ELIZABETH: Yes, go, go and take it all with you! Good riddance, your taste is atrocious. I'll turn this cheap salon into a Venetian parlor, with a magnificent hand-blown lamp right in the reception room. I'll buy an oriental rug, antique French chairs, and the walls will be damson plum with satin sashes. I'll paint her filthy green door... ah... ah... *(Picks up the first paint she finds)* RED! Because it's what I've got! And I'm especially going to change those reeking gas lamps that make everything smell like a sinking ship, to electric. That's it. The invention of the century. The twentieth century won't be about weapons, or technology, or medicine. This will be the century of skin! And every woman with soft skin will be gorgeous! *(Looks at the Elizabeth Hubbar sign)* Changing that sign's going to cost me a fortune. *(She gets up on a ladder and covers the last name "Hubbar" with a cloth)* But this won't cost a penny. From now on, I'll call myself ELIZABETH. "Hello, how are you? I'm Elizabeth..." Elizabeth what? *(Looks for magazines)* If I'm going to make up a last name for myself, let poetry decide. *(Finds something)*

E. ARDEN: Then, I found a poem by Alfred Tennyson, my mother's favorite poet.

(Elizabeth reads aloud)

ELIZABETH: "And Enoch Arden, seasoned sailor/
Made orphan by a winter shipwreck/
Play'd among the waste and lumber of the shore/
Hard coils of cordage, swarthy fishing-nets/" Well then
I'll be "Elizabeth Tennyson."

E. ARDEN: Sounds awful.

ELIZABETH: "Elizabeth Enoch"

E. ARDEN: Worse.

ELIZABETH: "Elizabeth Arden!"

E. ARDEN: That's it!

(She writes it on an envelope. She closes it. Reads)

ELIZABETH: "Elizabeth Arden"

E. ARDEN: That's it.

ELIZABETH: So there's a Helena Rubinstein?
Well it's time she found out there's an Elizabeth Arden too.

(Pricks herself with a needle and repeats mechanically)

ELIZABETH: Yes, it's red, like my door. And I'm fearless.

E. ARDEN: I'm fearless. Even today, in the midst of this winter shipwreck.

(Music)

3 /

Lights up on the left side of the stage. Helena R., alone, facing the audience.

HELENA R: Before Paris, I stopped at my house in Krakow.

(Lights up on the krakow house. Helena arrives with suitcases. Augusta enters and hugs her)

AUGUSTA: Helena! My child!

HELENA: Oh, it's so good to see you! I'm so glad to be home again!

AUGUSTA: How was your trip?

HELENA: Long and wet. Where is everyone? Didn't they know I was coming today?

AUGUSTA: Look how skinny you are! How is Australia? Is everything they told us true?

HELENA: What have they told you?

AUGUSTA: That you've made lots of money with my creams.

HELENA: Money yes, but they're my creams now.

AUGUSTA: Your creams?

HELENA: Momma: the base is your cream, but...

AUGUSTA: It's made from a secret recipe that I got from...

HELENA: A Hungarian singer.

AUGUSTA: An actress, not a singer.

HELENA: I've changed it with new ingredients.

AUGUSTA: And now you're a millionaire and famous!

HELENA: I'm still not half as famous as I'll be once I get to Paris. I'm going to open my first Salon there!

AUGUSTA: Can you do that?

HELENA: With the money I have, I'll buy a factory, a small one, and then the salon. The French women who tried my creams in Sydney have ordered more and more. I've sent it and now all Paris wants Valaze. Where is everyone? Poppa? Manka? Regina? Ceska?

AUGUSTA: You know your father. He didn't want to see you.

HELENA: He doesn't want to see me?

AUGUSTA: Helena, for God's sake, you know all this. You're the oldest sister and you're still not married.

HELENA: And so...?

AUGUSTA: Well, Poppa doesn't want to see you. He won't come home till you leave.

HELENA: Because he expected me to return with a husband!

AUGUSTA: And children, Helena. Sons, to be precise. You know how long he's wanted a grandson.

HELENA: And my sisters?

AUGUSTA: Exactly. And your younger sisters. Who can't get married either until you do.

HELENA: Is that why they're not here?

AUGUSTA: Besides, every single woman of marrying age trails, shall we say, a halo of...

HELENA: Momma: this is 1905. The twentieth century started FIVE YEARS ago. Even if it does feel more like the eighteenth century around here!

AUGUSTA: You and your new century and your arrogance.

HELENA: Me and my new century and my family's hypocrisy.

AUGUSTA: My child, the stories reached us before you did. How you took over my creams, how you pass yourself off as an Australian, how some man Thompson manages your money, how you live with him in sin, because he's married.

HELENA: Momma!

AUGUSTA: And he's not even Jewish! That's what we've heard in this house. And as I'm sure you will understand, the family chooses not to see you. Will you stay to eat?

(The two women look each other in the face. Finally, Helena can't take it anymore and looks away from her mother. Augusta feels her victory over her daughter)

HELENA: I have to go. My train to Paris leaves Warsaw early tomorrow morning. If I don't go tonight, I'll miss it. *(Her mother gives her another intense look)* Of course, I really would have liked to eat with the family and see Poppa and explain myself. But maybe it's best if I write a letter. To him and my sisters. *(Leaving. Her mother watches her intently)* Tell them I'll try to get

married as soon as I can. (*Her mother seems to wait for her to finish her sentence*) After all, that's all an obedient daughter can aspire to, right?

AUGUSTA: (*Goes to Helena and kisses her. Helena cries*) Go on, go to Paris, you'll miss your train. And when you get there find yourself a nice Jew to give you a son.

(*Helena exits. Helena. Moves to stand near her mother, with hatred*)

HELENA R: And just like that, I had to cancel the visit with my family, who, once again, made me feel like the same peasant they always did.

AUGUSTA: (*Speaking to someone we can't see*) She wasn't home for even an hour!

HELENA R: An hour that felt like a century or two! (*To the audience*) In so many words, thank you all for supporting me in my new career, thank you very much you stinking Polacks. I'm going to Paris!

AUGUSTA: And she left.

(*The stage is lit for the first time with a colossal light. We are in Paris 1905*)

HELENA: The light, the fashion, the people, the language. But in Paris everything was about "going to the spa." Marienbad Spa, Salt Villes Spa, Wiesbaden Spa, Spa here, Spa there. They went on vacation and they kept "spa-ing"; Spa daughters and Spa wives. Paris taught me two things. One, varicose veins. That was the Spa fashion. Varicose veins! How did those serpents slip past me? Women hate varicose veins and the Spas promised what they couldn't deliver: to make them disappear. "Valaze Varicose Veins" That's where I got my first brilliant idea in Europe. The other thing I learned in Paris was that everyone talked about the Salons, Salons in London. (*Voices "London" "London"*) So that's where I went. (*White light. Big ben chimes*) In London I visited Atkinson and his eternal Yardley lavender water. That was all the world had had for 200 years. Nothing new, I said to myself. And there was Eugene Rimel's shop in Soho. Nothing new, I said to myself. (*Big ben chimes. Standing on a chair*) So, from Big Ben, I looked out on the city, on the people, on Europe and I said, out loud: On this continent the only new thing, is me! And then I hired my first employee: a Press Director.

(*Enter Titus. London office*)

HELENA: Mr. Titus?

TITUS: Madame.

HELENA: You received a very high recommendation from our mutual friend John Thompson, in Australia. Did you live there long?

TITUS: For some time. Long enough to know all about you and your business. You, I must say, are a marvel. The most important woman of the century.

HELENA: Tell it to my mother. But the century's just beginning, Mr. Titus, so that's no great flattery.

TITUS: The century will follow you. It will progress through your creations.

HELENA: Are you Jewish? (*Titus nods*) I thought so. And Polish, surely.

TITUS: Polish at heart, but with an American passport.

HELENA: American? How unusual. Is it useful?

TITUS: Tax exemptions and freedom to do business. That country has real potential. Those Yankees will go far, believe me.

HELENA: So I've heard. But we'll worry about the Yankees later. We're interested in London and Paris. I want to make a press announcement about my new version of VALAZE-LONDON, with the latest laboratory techniques and European developments.

TITUS: A formula that's, shall we say... ADVANCED!

HELENA: That's it. "Advanced Formula!" It sounds magnifique.

TITUS: "The latest of the latest: exclusive treatment!"

HELENA: Excellent: "From Ruter and Berthalot Laboratories!"

TITUS: Ruter and Berthalot? What's that?

HELENA: How should I know! It sounds very French, doesn't it?

TITUS: You're making it up?

HELENA: Of course I'm making it up! It's all made up, Titus! "From Ruter and Berthalot Laboratories and the Viennese experts, comes Formula Valaze, the only cream for VARICOSE VEINS!"

TITUS: Varicose veins?

HELENA: Didn't you know? Valaze, Advanced Formula now works on varicose veins.

TITUS: And when did you create this cream?

HELENA: I just did, Titus. A couple of minutes ago. With you.

TITUS: But, who cares about varicose veins?

HELENA: Titus: don't argue with me. Varicose veins are the future. With varicose veins we'll make enough money to open my first salons in London and Paris.

TITUS: Just to be sure: Can it really get rid of varicose veins?

HELENA: Get rid of? WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT GETTING RID OF. We're talking about "erasing," "toning down," "concealing," "retouching."

TITUS: And how can it do that?

HELENA: The same way we do everything around here. Theater. From theater makeup to “Valaze Advanced”: what women want.

TITUS: “VALAZE: for skin like a pearl”

HELENA: “VALAZE: gives you that “je ne sais quoi”... French kills them.

TITUS: “VALAZE: beautifies while you sleep!”

HELENA: Our salons will be called “Operating Rooms.” Our clients will be called “patients.” We’ll give them spa treatments but with the added advantage of doing it right here in the city: the union of healing and beauty. Good health, but with good looks. Death before ugliness, cheri.

TITUS: Madame: You are magnificent!

HELENA: Yes, like a heart attack. You may as well learn to die for me. You may call me Helena.

TITUS: And you can call me Titus.

HELENA: I already call you Titus, Titus!

(The left side of the stage is lit again. Manka enters)

HELENA: I opened a new salon in London and bought a building on Grafton St. where I installed my factory. I invested in advertising, I treated the aristocracy for free, so they’d talk about me. Because there’s nothing a millionaire likes better than something free and nothing gives the poor greater pleasure than something expensive.

MANKA: But what left us all speechless...

HELENA: Was that I married Titus. I already said that.

(Excitement on stage. Titus gives Helena flowers)

MANKA: So are you going to tell us?

HELENA: The London salon is on...

MANKA: ABOUT THE WEDDING!

HELENA: Well, what could I do? Titus pursued me. Gallantry here, gallantry there. He started telling everyone he loved me and then, when they’d see us together, they’d get that look like piglets at the trough. People assumed we were a couple. And Titus loved it. Then came the first telephone. He took me to see the invention, which seemed like nothing special at the time, and he said...

TITUS: Helena: marry me.

MANKA: By telephone!

HELENA: No, but in front of one. A GHASTLY black device.

MANKA: AND YOU SAID YES!

HELENA: Well, of course. What could I do?

MANKA: *(To audience)* Until then I thought he was only attracted to her for her money, maybe because she was his boss.

HELENA: He's attractive, a good conversationalist, seductive, he's quite charming and cultured, I mean he certainly likes art and all that, I can marry a man like that. But none of that sentimental nonsense when there's work to be done. Work comes first.

TITUS: As you wish, my love.

MNAKA: *(to audience)* The London salon became our work and the factory our first home.

HELENA: After all, if he loves me for my money, then he can at least help with the business. *(Enter Titus, tipsy)* Titus: Where were you?

TITUS: I went to the casino.

HELENA: I looked for you in the casino and you weren't there.

TITUS: I went out for a walk.

HELENA: It's our honeymoon, Titus.

TITUS: And we're having a marvelous time, my love.

HELENA: You're having a marvelous time.

TITUS: What are you talking about?

HELENA: Your walks with the Countess.

TITUS: Who's been telling you that?

HELENA: Your flirtation with Mrs. Theranas.

TITUS: Me with a married woman?

HELENA: We've been married for less than two weeks!

TITUS: Helena: you have to learn it's all public relations. I do it for the business. It's all for you.

HELENA: *(To one side)* Well thanks a lot. Anger, hatred, fear and shame. I hadn't felt like that since Poppa and Momma treated me like a filthy, ignorant Krakow peasant. *(She pauses. Dries a tear)* That's when I decided that all this love nonsense was for another kind of woman, but not for me. Because inside me that Jewish peasant would forever be locked in mortal combat with the twentieth-century woman.

(Helena comes back on stage, decided. Titus goes to her, but she rebuffs him. Helena goes to Manka. Titus disappears)

MANKA: How could you forgive Titus after everything he did to you?

HELENA: If you don't believe in love, you don't believe in infidelity. As long as he works and lets me use him, that's enough for me. His infidelity costs him plenty. And as long as he sells, what do I care? The point is: business is booming. I need you here with me! And not just you, Regina and Ceska too! All the sisters together!

(Manka surprised)

MANKA: All of us!

HELENA: I don't want you as employees, I want you to run my salons. With money and power you'll be married in under six months. So, do you come to London and Paris and make salaries in the millions, or do you stay in Krakow raising chickens and waiting for some ignorant fishmonger to lead you to the altar? What's your choice?

(Manka is overjoyed)

MANKA: Of course! We're all going with you! *(Shouts)* Momma: We're going with Helena!

HELENA: A touch of revenge, of course. Taking Poppa and Momma's daughters. After all, they orphaned me first. Always return the blow: it's healthy. It wards off age spots and it's known to help prevent wrinkles. The wonderful thing about contempt, cheri, is that it runs both ways. Round trip. *(To Manka)* I bought the Maison de Beauté Valaze in Paris. Starting today, all the labels will read: LONDON-SYDNEY-PARIS. *(As Helena R.)* An idea that to this day is copied by the less fortunate.

(Enter Titus accompanied by two women)

TITUS: 1912 is here and the house of Helena Rubinstein in Paris offers only the best for its exquisite clientele! Try our new skin tonic. We call it VALAZE PASTEURIZED. You pay a little more, but get a lot more!

HELENA: *(Facing Titus and his friends)* Titus, are you having another party?

TITUS: These are some friends from the Chatelet Theatre. Come, let me introduce you. Mr. Cocteau, a very talented writer; Mademoiselle Colette, the most celebrated lesbian in all Paris.

HELENA: Congratulations, Mademoiselle.

TITUS: Mr. Nijinsky, a fabulous ballet dancer who had his debut today in the theater and young Marcel Proust, a budding Jewish writer.

HELENA: A Jewish writer, what a novelty. Just what we needed. And this "Prust" has the added charm of smelling like mothballs. What does the boy write about?

PROUST: It's called "In Search of Lost Time"

HELENA: The title's too long. A guaranteed failure.

TITUS: Leave him alone, you can see he's very sensitive. *(Introduces her to the younger woman)* And this wonder, this seductive young woman with marvelous ideas, is named Coco.

HELENA: The girl's a scarecrow, Titus. They're all horrid. They look like a lunatic circus. *(Leaving)* If they're staying the night, at least let me sleep. And don't break anything.

TITUS: Good night, sweetheart.

HELENA: The poor thing... what did you say her name was?

TITUS: Coco. Coco Chanel.

HELENA: She looks like a Meshuggenah.

TITUS: Good God, what's that?

HELENA: Forgotten your Yiddish so soon? That "Cocoa" Chanel looks mad as a hatter.

(Titus laughs)

TITUS: Chanel! *(Calls her over)* You'll never guess what Helena just said about you...

HELENA: Don't say a word! *(Meeting Chanel)* Nothing, I said nothing at all. Titus and his overactive imagination. *(Smelling her)* You smell very nice. Is that perfume you're wearing?

COCO: A perfume I invented.

HELENA: You invent perfume? Well. Most interesting. *(Taking her by the arm)* Let's leave these madmen to their liquor and have a nice cup of tea. Do you drink tea, Miss Coco? What kind of name is that, Coco? Are you French, Lesbian or Monarchist?

(Colette joins them. The three drink tea and talk nonstop)

HELENA: Of all Titus's little menagerie, I only became friends with two: the lesbian Colette and the perfumed Chanel. *(The three laugh)* The perfumed Chanel talked about aromas. And her perfumes really were fabulous. They started selling splendidly and that's when it occurred to me.

(The men recite poetry and disappear)

COCO: What if your creams weren't just marvelous for your skin but also for your nose?

HELENA: *(To audience)* Simple words, perhaps. But with those simple words, I changed the world of cosmetics.

COLETTE: It was the most important advance in the history of skin creams.

HELENA: It cut the ties between us and hospitals.

COCO: If it smells like perfume, it doesn't smell like medicine.

HELENA: And in the minds of our clients a seed of doubt grows: is this medicinal or just good for your skin?

COCO: So what do you plan to do?

HELENA: Go after a woman's dearest desire.

COLETTE: Which isn't to feel good.

HELENA: But to look good.

COCO: And smell better.

HELENA: VALAZE will smell divine.

COLETTE: Women will be able to carry it in their purse.

COCO: Display on their vanity.

HELENA: Chanel was crazy, which is a good thing. After all, look how she's done. Though, after Number 5, I never tried another thing she made. *(Colette hugs helena. Coco smokes)* Now, my second triumph was Colette.

COCO: Colette knows everybody in Paris society. And she sells her contacts. If you want to meet someone, she'll introduce you.

COLETTE: But I made my fortune from another business.

COCO: Colette reigns over a string of cabarets dedicated to...

COLETTE: The Lesbian arts. My cabarets all have a separate room for special massages.

HELENA: Massages? Massages are commonplace.

COCO: Helena, these are no ordinary massages.

COLETTE: To your everyday massage we add a few touches.

HELENA: What I'm saying is that in those days, during a massage, it was perfectly legal...

COCO: And very respectable

COLETTE: To touch a woman, there...

COCO: In her secret place.

COLETTE: Genital Massage Therapy.

HELENA: Well! Well well well!

COLETTE: Using a device like this...

(Pulls out a penis, the first vibrator)

COCO: That vibrates.

COLETTE: So that a dry vagina...

COCO: ...is naturally refreshed.

HELENA: Naturally refreshed! Of course! It keeps skin younger too!

COLETTE: And between women, of course, the massage is more beneficial.

COCO: As you know, these massages are wonderful because they release fluids that moisten "that place" and they're fabulous at fighting...

COLETTE: Hysteria, for example. A long, uninterrupted massage with the vibrating device and the masseuse's hands stimulating your skin and you reach a very pleasant state that's a surefire cure for nearly every problem plaguing women today.

COCO: Whatever the reason, what we do know is that we all leave more beautiful, satisfied and less hysterical after one of Colette's massages.

HELENA: So, always keen for a good business venture, I brought the vibrating massages to my Gold Salons in Paris. Scented creams, special massages, "Vibrateur." One night I added up everything I had and I fainted. (LAUGHS) Surely, I said to myself, no woman can have more money than I. *(Lights dim further on stage. The reporter appears. We hear gunshots)* Until the war started

REPORTER: The war of the trenches in 1914.

HELENA R: Don't be stupid. I wasn't the least bit interested in that war. I'm talking about the war with "the other one."

REPORTER: Elizabeth Arden?

(Helena yells at the reporter furiously, like an animal)

HELENA R: A WAR I WOULD GO TO NEW YORK TO FIGHT AND WIN!!! (IMAGE OF NEW YORK, 1914) TO NEW YORK! TO WAR!

4 /

E. Arden, on the right side of the stage. The Rubinstein salon in Paris is still lit.

E. ARDEN: Take this down. *(She tidies herself)* New York was behind the times so I took a research trip. So, of course, I went to Paris.

REPORTER: To see her?

E. ARDEN: To see her? Don't be silly. To see what she was up to. I made no effort to meet that peasant.

(Elizabeth enters the Rubinstein salon. She meets Ceska)

ELIZABETH: Are you Helena Rubinstein?

CESKA: I'm her younger sister, Ceska. Helena's on her way. Are you American?

ELIZABETH: You can tell from my clothes?

CESKA: No, because you're speaking English in Paris. Here everyone speaks French.

(She turns, moving away)

ELIZABETH: Honestly, this might be the cradle of the avant garde, but Parisian women have the manners of a jackass.

REPORTER: But that was Ceska, her sister. She was Polish.

E. ARDEN: Well, they were all French to me. Being Polish meant nothing. It was like being a plant or a pot or a teacup. "Hello, I'm a teacup." Well, congratulations. So what? A teacup's a teacup and sometimes even less.

REPORTER: Do I write that? Should we cut?

E. ARDEN: Do what you want. Anyway, the point of this interview isn't Polish women or French women or teacups. The point here is this matter of our hatred, our contempt. And my contempt for that woman began that day.

REPORTER: What did she do to you?

E. ARDEN: Nothing, it was nothing personal. It was her...her... arrogance. You know, Jews, in the end, that's how they are, a bit arrogant. They think they're better. And she was very Jewish that way. In the press, in all her advertisements, she proclaimed herself...

REPORTER: *(Reading a label)* “The world’s beauty queen.”

E. ARDEN: I hated that. I mean, how could she know that anyway? What did she know about the world? Just because she has salons in...

REPORTER: *(reading a label)* SYDNEY, LONDON AND PARIS

E. ARDEN: That arrogant woman printed it on all her labels. I didn’t see her, I didn’t talk to her, but I didn’t like her, that’s it. With her gold salon, her decadent decorations, I don’t know, we got off to a bad start that day. I kept saying to myself...*(As Elizabeth)* Don’t forget she’s older than you, she started before you, she has the lead. She has more experience, more words, she knows artists, she has the pioneer’s advantage. But remember you’re going to catch her. I won’t be ignored like this. I’ll be much more than I am now. You’re here, in her salon, and that woman has no idea you’re going to be the one who will snatch away her crown.

REPORTER: Miss Arden, when you visited Helena’s Salon, did you have one of her famous special massages?

E. ARDEN: Oh! Now that I liked. Very scientific. That massage did very well in Europe, but not in the U.S. Women here, as everyone knows, aren’t hysterical like European women.

(Elizabeth takes a bag filled with skin creams. She pays for them and goes into an enclosed area, her hotel room)

ELIZABETH: I bought a sample of all her products. It cost me an arm and a leg. Then, creams in hand, I went to my hotel and spent five days analyzing them. The first thing I had to admit was they smelled very nice, better than mine. And the temperature was pleasant, better than mine. In short, those creams were clearly the best. And I had to improve on them.

REPORTER: Miss Arden, there you were, alone in your hotel room, surrounded by Madame Rubinstein’s products. How did you feel?

ELIZABETH: I was in awe. What could her formula be? Nothing a good American chemist couldn’t figure out, of course. And, what could I add? That’s how I discovered her weak point: her creams were very thick. Now that I can fix! Scar creams are light. Yes! And the race was on. That night I told myself...I’ll be better than her. Of that I was certain. Do you know what that’s like? When you discover, suddenly, that you’re better than the best? That you aren’t yet but you know you can be, and very soon? At first it’s a bit daunting, because you don’t just see the path you can take in life, to a better life, a better product, to be the best, but also all at once you understand yourself. And you tell yourself: This is me and I’m a new woman. A different woman. I’m seeing myself for the first time here in this hotel room, surrounded by the very best products, but ones that will, without a doubt, become a thing of the past, not as good as mine. And you know who you are. That night my life began. Not as a reflection of hers, but a better life than Hers. Our life, really, it belongs to both of us, because she couldn’t know it that night, in a little Parisian hotel, her real competition was born. The one who would make her life impossible and who, pardon my lack of modesty, would make her fight and be better than she ever would’ve been without me. Because without Elizabeth Arden of New York, that backwater Helena Rubinstein of Paris would have stagnated there, in her perfumed, but sticky cream.

(The little paris hotel disappears. Only the right side remains lit)

REPORTER: Then you returned to New York. And you officially launched...

(Lights up on a sign: "Arden")

ELIZABETH: VENETIAN CREAM! Venetian Cream with its secret formula brought from Europe, exclusively for Elizabeth Arden Salon!

REPORTER: And you became the highest paid woman in the United States.

(Arden salon with its red door. Many people getting massages and buying creams)

E. ARDEN: The business grew. "Elizabeth Arden" was conveniently located near important families. The wealthy bought my products and got the best of the best. Men adored me, especially bankers. They gave me all the loans I could ask for. I paid off all my debts. I became a millionaire. Politicians went down on their knees so their wives could walk through my red door and experience the pleasure of being a somebody, of being special. The world had a certain order then, you know?

(Lights down on the stage, we hear military marches. Helena appears)

E. ARDEN: Until the war started. And that woman came to New York.

(Helena screams at the reporter furiously, like an animal)

HELENA R: A WAR I WOULD GO TO FIGHT...!

E. ARDEN: A WAR I HAD TO WIN IN NEW YORK!

(Thus, the two come face to face in the same area where helena finished the previous scene. The rest of the stage falls dark. The reporter stands between the two, terrified)

ELIZABETH: Why didn't you stay in London?

HELENA: Why did you copy my formula?

ELIZABETH: Why did you invade my life?

HELENA: Why did you bombard my achievements?

ELIZABETH: I'll welcome you with my bazooka.

HELENA: I'll visit you with my machinegun.

ELIZABETH: Prepare to be surrounded by trenches.

HELENA: I'm ready with my bayonet.

ELIZABETH: I'll greet you with cannon fire.

HELENA: I'll conquer you with grenades.

ELIZABETH: I am war.

HELENA: I am maximum devastation.

ELIZABETH: Destroying you will give me meaning.

HELENA: Annihilating you will be a warning.

ELIZABETH: This is a fight to the death.

HELENA: Between the other one

ELIZABETH: And that woman.

HELENA: Between her.

ELIZABETH: And me.

HELENA: Rancid cream.

ELIZABETH: Sticky cream.

HELENA: May the best woman win.

ELIZABETH: May the winner revel in her triumph.

HELENA: Why don't you just surrender?

ELIZABETH: Why don't you just die?

(The reporter can't take it and cries)

BOTH: *(To the audience)* This interview is over. Goodbye!

(Again, the sound of machinegun fire. In the distance, we hear a woman singing, painfully)

End of act one.

PART TWO
The Meeting

1 /

The machinegun fire mixes with images of World War I. Suddenly, silence and darkness. Both women are sitting in wheelchairs. A beam of light shines on both Helena R. And E. Arden

HELENA R: After all that's happened, I feel the time has come to be a bit more prudent.

E. ARDEN: And to start giving some real thought to what will become of all this, if something more serious happens to me.

HELENA R: More serious, naturally, than swollen legs.

E. ARDEN: Sometimes I wonder if any of you know just how complex and difficult this business is.

HELENA R: That's why I asked you to meet with me.

(Lights up on Manka, in the golden Rubinstein area)

E. ARDEN: That's why I called this meeting.

(Lights up on Virginia, in the pink Arden area)

HELENA R: I wanted you to give me your impressions because in a little while a reporter is coming to interview me and...

E. ARDEN: I'm asking you to write down here what you think of me, to give it to the reporter and...After all, I'm 79.

HELENA R: I'm 89 now.

MANKA: Madame, you look sixty.

VIRGINIA: Miss, you're still so young.

MANKA: Madame, you'll live 20 more years at least.

VIRGINIA: Miss, you're in enviable shape.

HELENA R: I said my legs were swollen, not my head.

E. ARDEN: Or my brain.

HELENA R: Don't treat me like a child.

E. ARDEN: I'M 79 YEARS OLD!

HELENA R: And I look old,

E. ARDEN: But she...

HELENA R: She looks worse

E. ARDEN: Wild

HELENA R: And wrinkled

BOTH: Like a witch!

E. ARDEN: Come now, write down...

HELENA R: What you have to say...

E. ARDEN: About Miss Elizabeth Arden

HELENA R: And Madame Helena Rubinstein.

BOTH: *(Loud)* Snap to it, get writing!

(A sign appears: New York, 1914-1917)

ELIZABETH: *(Shouting at her employees, who read the paper, scandalized)* Need I remind you we're at war?!

VIRGINIA: That's what we were reading, Miss. We're at war!

ELIZABETH: I mean us against her! And what I want to know is how you're planning to finish off the enemy when your General's no longer here to tell you what to do!

LEWIS: Are you going somewhere?

VIRGINIA: Are you going back to Canada?

LEWIS: Are you going to the War in the trenches?

ELIZABETH: My God! I'm surrounded by lapdogs! That's real poverty for you: no passion whatsoever! I'm taking a business trip all around the country. We're opening Arden Salons in San Francisco and Chicago. Europe's carving itself to bits and all the money's here. But while I'm gone, I imagine, I expect, you to be the faces of the company.

(On the other side, Helena, surrounded by her sister and Titus)

HELENA: We'll open our first New York Salon. I've already seen the place. Number 15, 49th Street. The biggest beauty event this city's ever seen!

MANKA: Sister, that street's near, the other one...

HELENA : What other one?

TITUS: The Arden woman.

HELENA: Precisely. My plan is simple: drive her out of business. That's all. An ignorant Canadian can't possibly be as successful as she is in this city. We're from Europe, where everything was invented. We won't ask for permission, we'll just push her into the sea. She can go somewhere else.

MANKA: Good god!

TITUS: Will we really do that?

MANKA: I'm a little scared.

TITUS: Won't that be a crime?

HELENA: These people, their language, seeing the future in these Yankees' eyes, none of that scares me. It's people like you, with your laissez faire and your laziness, who hurt me. But it's also parasites like you that give me my strength. Really, I feel better already. Ready for war! All out against that woman! (*Shouts*) New York! Here I am! Valaze is here! Vanity! You defend my trenches!

(Clamoring from the Arden side)

LEWIS: She stepped off the Lusitania two weeks ago and our sources are telling us, Miss Arden, that Madame Rubinstein plans to open a salon right here!

ELIZABETH: Well she can sell her curdled milk creams to nurses and prostitutes. I run the market here.

VIRGINIA: She told the press that...

HELENA: (*Standing on a chair*) The most famous Beauty Treatment in the world has now arrived in New York!

ELIZABETH: The arrogance of that farm girl!

LEWIS: Just like you didn't even exist.

ELIZABETH: Well I'll show her I exist!!

(Tension in the Rubinstein area)

MANKA: Madame. Bad news: Elizabeth Arden just bought a whole building a few blocks from our salon.

HELENA: TITUS! Buy the two buildings beside the Arden Salon. And I want to see a full page ad in the Times: “HELENA RUBINSTEIN: THE WORLD’S FINEST TREATMENT IN NEW YORK”

(Tension in the Arden area)

ELIZABETH: Oh really? Well I want a page and a half: ELIZABETH ARDEN – VENETIAN CREAM – UNRIVALED IN THE FIELD OF BEAUTY!

HELENA: *(Seeing the newspaper)* A two-page ad! “DIRECT FROM PARIS, SYDNEY AND LONDON: VALAZE TAKES NEW YORK WITHOUT A FIGHT”

ELIZABETH: Don’t you wish, you godforsaken bumpkin. *(Yells)* Two and a half pages, front and back covers: “ELIZABETH ARDEN, THE GREATEST EXPONENT OF BEAUTY TREATMENTS”

HELENA: You think you can teach the master, you illiterate zombie? *(Shouts)* A full insert in the newspaper, eight pages. With my picture! “HELENA RUBINSTEIN, THE ONLY BEAUTY EXPERT, BECAUSE IT’S HER SPECIALTY!”

ELIZABETH: Squatter. *(Yells)* A magazine in the Times and every paper in the city! “THE BEST FOR SKIN TONE!”

HELENA: In every paper in the country: “THE BEST FOR DRY, OILY AND NORMAL SKIN”

ELIZABETH: Dry, oily and normal?? That Polish swineherd doesn’t know what she’s talking about!

HELENA: Skin tone? That ignorant Canadian has no idea what she’s talking about!

ELIZABETH: Lewis! Raise the ad budget!

HELENA: Titus! All our profits to advertising!

ELIZABETH: Lewis! More money for messages and slogans.

HELENA: Titus! My savings for brochures and billboards. *(Yells at Elizabeth)* VALAZE to revive your eyes!

ELIZABETH: Ardena Orange for pretty skin!

HELENA: Rejuvenating essence and muscle strengthener: “Georgina Lactee.”

ELIZABETH: Rejuvenating essence? Where does she come up with these words? Well, if we’re going to make things up... *(Shouts)* A gift from the Gods: “Lily” Cleansing Water.

HELENA: Cleansing water? That woman’s a witch. *(Shouts)* “VALAZE NEW YORK: renews skin cells.”

ELIZABETH: Skin cells! (*Slaps Virginia*) I told you that sounded good. (*Yells*) “ARDENA: WHITENING CREAM.”

HELENA: VALAZE EXTRACT: the only lotion that fights wrinkles!

ELIZABETH: ARDENA CREAM: the only ANTI-WRINKLE TREATMENT!

HELENA: VALAZE: the first and only cream!

ELIZABETH: ARDENA: The best, unrivaled cream!

HELENA: Don't be fooled by imitations!

ELIZABETH: Don't let them sell you hazardous goods!

HELENA: The original means quality!

ELIZABETH: Foreign means flawed!

HELENA: Bitch!

ELIZABETH: Hag!

HELENA: Crone!

ELIZABETH: She-devil!

HELENA : After all, those phrases...

ELIZABETH: That everyone uses today.

HELENA: I came up with them.

ELIZABETH: So did I.

HELENA: The world's first professional advertiser.

ELIZABETH: The best advertiser on the face of the Earth.

(The two drink champagne and raise glasses to toast)

HELENA: Helena Rubinstein Lipstick; PARIS- LONDON-NEW YORK.

(Pause. The Arden side is completely thrown)

VIRGINIA: Lipstick?

LEWIS: What's that?

ELIZABETH: What? Lipstick? But... but... how revolting. New York women will never paint their lips like the African aborigines that hysterical Polish Jew is so enamored of! We won't waste our time on that. It'll never catch on!

(Lewis approaches and gives her a lipstick)

LEWIS: Lipstick sales now account for 20% of Rubinstein's business.

ELIZABETH: *(On the verge of hitting Lewis)* Very well, we'll prepare an Arden lipstick. And it will be the best.

LEWIS: Where will we get it?

ELIZABETH: What do you mean, where will we get it, numbskull? Find some of that Jew's people who want to come work for me, they can tell us how she makes it!

VIRGINIA: Will they want to?

ELIZABETH: I'm not talking about wanting, I'm talking about buying!

(Lewis buys the formula on the Rubinstein side and takes it to the Arden side)

MANKA: Madame! Miss Arden has hired away some of our Paris employees!

HELENA: TITUS! Pay one of your whores to say Arden's cream made holes in her skin, that it gives you blackheads, purple spots, blindness and cholera!

ELIZABETH: You wouldn't dare!

HELENA: Watch and learn, cherie.

ELIZABETH: So that's how it is?

HELENA: And that's how it's going to be.

ELIZABETH: Well, prepare yourself.

HELENA: And you: do something with yourself.

BOTH: What's coming next is fire!

(Women speaking all at once. Helena and Arden join in the battle. The screaming starts to resemble machinegun fire. Lewis and Titus separate. With a bomb in the battle we see on video, the war dissipates. The Arden area grows dim. Titus and Monica speak to Manka)

TITUS: Helena's changed, Manka. Especially her moods. If she was unbearable in Paris, here, with this war of hers she's intolerable!

HELENA: And him, Manka, he's no great help. If he wasted his time in Paris in bars with hack writers, here he keeps even worse company.

TITUS: I've brought Eugene O'Neill, Man Ray and Djuna Barnes to meet her, and you know what she said?

HELENA: They're nothing but a bunch of drunks, homosexuals and whores!

TITUS: And here the only one in theater is O'Neill. (TO HELENA) But my friends are from the best families in the city! Take O'Neill, for instance, he gave me an invitation for us to meet the Vanderbilts.

HELENA: The Vanderbilts? Aren't they best friends with that Canadian rat?

TITUS: So I understand.

(Helena's mood changes. She goes and kisses him. Takes the invitation)

HELENA: You see how sometimes you and your friends can be useful? Give Mr. O'Neill our thanks. What's his name? Ah! Eugene. Fine. Irish, I'm sure, and a drunk, I'm even more sure. Give him our thanks. What is it he does? Theater? An occupation with no future. Tell him if he wants a hit, to write about me. He'll win the top awards. And tell him to come visit us. Do you think Mr. O'Neill likes tea? *(Titus furrows his brow)* We'll put whisky in his. *(Titus furrows his brow)* A lot? *(Titus furrows his brow)* Plenty? *(Titus furrows his brow)* A bottle of Whisky and no tea? *(Titus nods)* Consider it done! *(Helena kisses the invitation)*

(Arden area, Elizabeth throwing things)

ELIZABETH: *(Furious)* How could the Vanderbilts invite her to their party? How could they do that to me?

MONICA: Her husband, Titus, has artist friends and...

ELIZABETH: A husband! That's what she has that I don't. A husband! *(Staking Lewis with her gaze)* A husband for parties and contacts. Now that does come from Paris: the convenient husband. A husband in your pocket and a husband who fills your pockets. That's why that Polish heifer lands in New York and gets invitations. Because she's got a husband. A lunatic, homosexual, opium sucking friend to whores and artists of the worst stripe. But a husband. That's how this city is and that's how I aim to be!

LEWIS: What are you saying, Elizabeth?

(Helena's area)

TITUS: Miss Arden's getting married in November!

HELENA: She's getting married? Well, I finally beat her at something.

TITUS: Are you insinuating something about me?

HELENA: Titus, YOU ALREADY KNOW that being married is a disadvantage. I've been fighting against that woman while married to you and it wasn't fair. Now it's her turn to feel what it's like to carry a weight on your shoulders, HA! That uncouth Canadian will end up painting her little doors black!

TITUS: Are you trying to say that if I weren't here you'd be better off?

HELENA: And how! Is that an offer?

TITUS: Helena!

HELENA: You could live with your friend, the Australian woman? What was her name?

TITUS: I never...!

HELENA: There's no need to make a scene, Titus darling. Honestly, business is business and the best thing for me and the company is for us to separate.

TITUS: But, Helena!

HELENA: Don't worry. We'll still work together.

TITUS: I...

HELENA: We don't love each other anymore, right?

TITUS: I do...

HELENA: I don't. And you don't either, Titus. We have two sons, this company, and a war to fight. Maybe even two wars, who knows? We can go on together, only separated.

(Manka enters running. She hands a newspaper to Helena. They embrace happily)

HELENA: The suitcases! Let's get packing!

(Betty enters running, newspaper in hand. Shows it to Elizabeth)

LEWIS: My love!! My wife!

ELIZABETH: Don't call me your wife, much less your love. There's no need to go overboard. So, what's happened? Tell me I'm winning!

BETTY: The war's over.

ELIZABETH: What do you mean it's over? (HAPPY) The Jew died?

BETTY: No, of course not. I meant the war in Europe.

ELIZABETH: It's ended?

BETTY: Yes. And Madame Rubinstein is going back to Paris!

ELIZABETH: THANK GOD! PARIS?

(Helena's area)

HELENA: (*Euphoric. Ready to leave*) ...With the money we've made here I'll open in Cannes, Monte Carlo, Rome, Berlin. The war's over and now everyone will want to look good, after all that bloodshed, mutilation and surgery. The dollar buys a lot of franks these days. We're off to Europe. We're going home. (*To Titus*) Are you coming?

TITUS: (*defeated*) Of course... of course I am.

(*Enter Manka with another newspaper in hand*)

HELENA: More good news? Are they refunding my taxes? Is France welcoming me with open arms?

MANKA: No Madame. Miss Arden just announced she's opening a salon in Paris!

HELENA: WHAT? WHAT? Fine. Now we fight on my territory. But from this day forward, and listen to me carefully everyone, no one, NO ONE...

ELIZABETH: No one ever, ever!

HELENA: Is to mention that woman's name in my presence! I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT EVER AGAIN! From now on, she's "the other one."

ELIZABETH: From now on, she's "that woman."

HELENA: Period.

ELIZABETH: End of story.

(*We hear 20's era jazz*)

2 /

On stage Elizabeth in her wheelchair. Beside her, Lewis. Behind her, the image of a horse.

E. ARDEN: Before the reporter gets here, I want to take the opportunity of this meeting to clarify something that's dogged me ever since those days. It has to do with a rumor, gossip, what they said about me. It so happens that back then, a reporter said I adored horses, but I didn't like Jews. Well, of course, that wasn't true.

I didn't like that Jew. And there was a time, I admit, when I came to think they were all like her. But later, when I got to know those people, I realized the only odious one was that woman. For instance, not long ago I met a young orchestra conductor, this Bernstein, Leonard! He seemed very talented, truly the boy's a genius. I liked him, I found him very pleasant. And he was Jewish, but German. Someone told me there was a difference, but how should I know?

All this about horses and Jews, they say that about me only because of that woman. Just look at the Vanderbilts, the Williamses or the Hearsts, no one criticizes their attitudes about other people. But because they know I despise that woman, they come after me.

Though you have to admit we all let things slip, depending on our upbringing and our culture. You can't argue that.

FOR EXAMPLE, that woman's idea to sell lipstick for a dollar. In the end she targets the masses while I target the aristocracy. We're different, obviously, but giving your work away shows a kind of contempt for what you do and who you are. And if you despise yourself, well what's wrong with me despising you too?

Besides, in those days it was fashionable to talk about me. I was the talk of the town, not only because I divorced Lewis, who anyway was good for nothing, but taking lovers. *(Lewis tries to say something to her, but she rebuffs him)* If he at least kept the books like the Jew's husband! But mine was useless. Plain useless.

Then, I asked him to leave. And he left with nothing. Not even a single share in the company, here he was a nobody. That really hurt him. From our divorce, Lewis, Tommy, got... one hundred dollars. That made him angry. And he talked. Gossip, stories. He called me frigid. And the rumor got started. The rumor that I was a lesbian. *(Lewis disappears)* If you can't love men, does that make you a lesbian? If you don't love Jews, does that make you a racist? Is it so terrible to prefer horses?

I watched how my mother struggled to raise us while my father frittered away his time, criticizing the meals she cooked, wearing the clothes she made, bragging about the children she raised. It was only natural I'd grow up with a contempt for men. Who wouldn't?

And, yes, I do adore horses. But I don't prefer them to people. I think. After all: what does a horse cost? And a man? What is one worth? And a woman? Whatever price they put on it, you always know a horse will cost less than it's worth. Certainly, no one would sell a horse for a dollar. Or even a woman.

But, a man?

I'm saying. A dollar for a man? And for a Jew? How much for a Jew?

(E. Arden disappears into the image of the horse. A sign appears: the 20's. Lights up on Helena with Ceska. To the right, Elizabeth with Virginia also appears. The jazz grows louder)

ELIZABETH: This world of the Roaring 20's belongs to women.

HELENA: *(talking to Ceska)* There's Coco...

ELIZABETH: There's Dorothy Gray, Diana Cooper and Josephine Baker.

HELENA: Isadora Duncan was on the horizon and when Coco came out with her best "Chanel" I told her: call it "Number 5", five's an eternal number. A woman's number."

ELIZABETH: It's us and only us: the Jew, Coco, and me. The market is all ours.

HELENA: Until men showed up.

ELIZABETH: Just what we needed! Many?

HELENA: What's his name again?

CESKA: Some Charles Revlov.

HELENA: Revlon? God, what a ridiculous name.

ELIZABETH: He'll change it, I suppose.

HELENA: With a name like that he won't get anywhere.

ELIZABETH: I'll bet you a horse this Mr. Revlon will be no more than a passing fancy...

HELENA: In a couple of years no one will be talking about him.

VIRGINIA: But there're more.

HELENA: More men?

CESKA: Several joined the firm of an old Russian man...

VIRGINIA: Some MAX FACTOR.

HELENA: So where do these Max Factor men come from?

CESKA: Cinema.

HELENA: They make movies?

VIRGINIA: They make greasepaint.

HELENA: Greasepaint?

CESKA: They make up the actors.

ELIZABETH: Well then, "Mac Factor" won't be any competition.

HELENA: Who'd want to look like a movie star?

ELIZABETH: We'd better focus our big guns on that woman.

HELENA: We'd better concentrate on destroying the other one.

BOTH: The men are nothing to worry about.

HELENA: After all...

ELIZABETH: In the end...

(Loud 20's era jazz)

ELIZABETH: By 1925 I had a line of 700 products!

HELENA: By 1925 I had 700 products around the world!

ELIZABETH: By 1926 I had cornered the market in Boston, Washington and Los Angeles.

HELENA: By 1926 I dominated Europe!

ELIZABETH: By 1927 Elizabeth Arden arrived in Madrid, Berlin, Cannes and Rome!

HELENA : By 1928 I invested in gold!

ELIZABETH: And I invested in pounds sterling!

HELENA: I hired employees to match the furniture.

ELIZABETH: I invented the Lounge Salon, where clients could spend THE ENTIRE DAY!

HELENA: The whole world was Valaze Rose Rubinstein, Rubinstein moisturizing baths...

CESKA: ...enormous gold rooms and raspberry lipstick from Madame Helena Rubinstein.

VIRGINIA: Those were the years of Jodie d'Elizabeth, la Reve by Elizabeth, Mon Ami Elizabeth and L'Amour Elizabeth, revitalizing exercises and the red door!

ELIZABETH: By 1929 I was the richest and most well known woman in the West!

HELENA R: By 1929 I made the deal that made me the richest woman in the world!

(The music stops abruptly. Everyone finally congratulates Helena. They toast with champagne. Elizabeth, annoyed)

ELIZABETH: Deal? What deal did the Jew make now?

VIRGINIA: She sold her company.

ELIZABETH: She sold?

VIRGINIA: She just sold "Helena Rubinstein America" to Lehman Brothers.

ELIZABETH: The stock market Lehman's? But... how much did they pay her?

VIRGINIA: Seven million dollars.

ELIZABETH: Stupid Jew. She sold!

VIRGINIA: And she took all her money to Europe. She exchanged it for gold.

ELIZABETH: For gold? My, the sow certainly likes her gold. Well if another war breaks out there, they can bury her under a solid gold gravestone.

(Helena steps toward the audience)

CESKA: But what came was the Great Depression and 9 billion dollars was wiped from the map of the United States.

VIRGINIA: Overnight, 32 million people fell into poverty.

HELENA : And in the midst of the crisis, I bought back my company in America. For one million dollars. I kept my gold intact. And I became THE RICHEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD! Actually, I became one of the five wealthiest human beings on the entire planet.

(Helena finally raises her glass, showing off her success to Elizabeth, who explodes in fury)

ELIZABETH: I HATE HER I HATE HER I HATE HER! THAT DAMNED JEW I HATE HER! HOW DOES SHE DO IT? HOW DID SHE DO IT? JESUS CHRIST HOW DID SHE DO IT?

(Elizabeth disappears. Helena continues toasting with her sisters. Enter Titus, much the worse for wear)

TITUS: I've come to congratulate you on your great stock market coup. Everyone's talking about it.

HELENA: It's just business.

TITUS: For someone to beat out the banks is admirable. For that someone to be a woman...

HELENA: They'll soon find a way to make me pay, one way or another. Men are men.

TITUS: You've made an unbelievable amount of money, Helena. And you have two sons you can enjoy now and a husband, an ex-husband, who loves you and only wants a chance.

HELENA: Maybe you miss me when we're apart, but the minute we're together again, you hate me.

TITUS: I've never hated you.

HELENA: Maybe you hate the money when we're apart, but when we're together, it's the only thing you love.

TITUS: Don't say such a horrible thing. Time and life fly by us and we don't know what they mean until it's too late. And, actually...

HELENA: Yes?

TITUS: I wanted to ask you for something.

HELENA: Money?

TITUS: Your help...

HELENA: What woman have you gotten in trouble this time?

TITUS: There's this writer...

HELENA: Writers, Titus! Always writers! I don't know where you get your love for writers. Jewish?

TITUS: No, this one's not Jewish.

HELENA: How much do you want?

TITUS: Let me explain.

HELENA: I'm going to give you the money without explanations. It makes the transaction smoother, cheri.

TITUS: I just want you to know what I'm doing...

HELENA: I already know what you're doing. Throwing money to the wind with these writers. Honestly, I don't care. You're the father of my children and if you want money, I'll give it to you. It's not like I need it, you know.

TITUS: I'm going to publish a novel. I want to be a publisher.

HELENA: Marvelous. Good luck.

TITUS: It's a good book. Well written. I think it will be a success.

HELENA: How much do you want?

TITUS: About three thousand pounds should be enough to...

HELENA: Fine.

(As though giving someone a tissue, Helena takes the three thousand pounds from a box and hands them to him. He lowers his head)

HELENA: Out of curiosity. What's the title of your novel?

TITUS: "Lady Chatterley's Lover"

HELENA: Nice title. Who's the author?

TITUS: A friend. David Herbert Lawrence.

HELENA: I congratulate him. There's a name that's worth three thousand pounds! But take my advice and make it D. H. Lawrence. It's more commercial.

TITUS: I'll do that, Helena. Thanks.

(Titus leaves. Helena watches him go. She's about to say something to stop him but doesn't. She is left alone and also disappears. Helena remains onstage)

HELENA R: The truth is the novel was a success, of course. I even liked it. It didn't hurt that the author, Lawrence, was a weak man and died when the third edition of *Lady Chatterley* was coming out. Then the novel became a super bestseller. That's when I saw Titus with new eyes. He had done something. That was a novelty. You have to understand, that man, the only thing he had done with his life of any value, was to marry me. Well, that and the children. But I made them myself, didn't I? I'll admit to our little group gathered here for this meeting, before the press arrives, that thanks to him I met Hemingway, Man Ray, Picasso, Dalí, Eluard, Duchamps, Tzara, the pervert Henry Miller and that oddball Breton. He published that slut Anaïs Nin, who was Titus's lesbian lover and if I'm honest, had all the talent in the world. *(Walks to one side)* He spent hours with those people and one day I realized, while I was the most important woman in the world, he was one of the most respected men in Montparnasse.

And that's everything or nearly everything: the reason we come into this world, do what we do, we love, let ourselves be loved, we hate, we work, we compete, we struggle and succeed. For respect. Respect is what makes us stars. And Titus, that little man, was a star. In his way, in his universe, but a star. That's the thing about stars. Hm? They never shine the way you think they will. They're tricky. Does a star know it's a star? I mean the ones in the sky? Do they know? Do they know we admire them? I certainly would. I would know they admire me, I knew they admired me and here, with you, I know you admire me. That I know. But I don't know if I'm a star. Then I began to buy art. All I could. There wasn't a wall without a painting by someone famous. In my Paris and London Salons we had beauty and beside it, art. They're one and the same, aren't they? While that ignorant Canadian was buying horses, I bought Matisse, I helped Eluard, Léger and even that madman James Joyce. And they respected me, me, the Jewish peasant; I could feel their admiration. Art made my cream more beautiful. After all, that's what it's all about, beauty. Hm? Women are like art. It's their duty to be admired. They have to work to stay young, vital like art, so they must have adventures, travel, work hard, earn money, spend it, love someone deeply, have children, lose what they love most and regain it though it isn't theirs anymore. That's life and that's art. That's, beauty.

(Music. Elizabeth appears in jockey's silks)

ELIZABETH: Now we were both single again.

HELENA: Meaning, there was an open position in marketing.

ELIZABETH: And in business any void

HELENA: Gets filled with money.

ELIZABETH: She bought artists and I bought horses, which at least smell better than artists.

HELENA: And then out of the blue, I got married again. This time to Prince Gourielli-Tchkonina. Which, in the most select circles, made me a Princess!

(We see a photo of a ridiculous prince)

MANKA: And Rubinstein's sales skyrocketed.

ELIZABETH: And then, also out of the blue, I got married again too, but to a Russian Prince: Prince MICHEL EVALONOFF.

(We see a photo of a ridiculous prince)

BETTY: And Arden's sales skyrocketed.

ELIZABETH: Michel has a better pedigree than that woman's Gourielli

HELENA: Gourielli comes from Europe's best families.

ELIZABETH: Michel isn't just a prince, he's close relative of the TSARS of Russia.

HELENA: Gourielli is useless, faithless and a spendthrift. But a prince

ELIZABETH: Evalonoff is abusive, perverted, he hits me, mistreats me and before my very eyes, on our wedding night, had sex with a man! But he was a prince.

BOTH: And with a prince, me a princess: more sales.

HELENA: And that's what mattered at the end of the day.

ELIZABETH: Not getting beaten

HELENA: By that harpy.

ELIZABETH: By that rattlesnake.

HELENA: And then, my greatest blow.

MANKA: Helena, we need to hire a new sales manager. And we have three options. But there's one that may interest you more than the others.

HELENA: One? Who?

MANKA: Thomas Lewis

HELENA: THOMAS LEWIS? Elizabeth Arden's ex is asking for a job?

MANKA: He's begging for the job.

HELENA: I can't believe it! He wants to work for me? Well hire him, immediately, and while you're at it announce I'm launching the first waterproof mascara. And make sure the other one finds out as soon as possible.

(Elizabeth hears the news)

ELIZABETH: What? Who did you say is working for that woman? *(Screams in fury)*
Nooooooooooooo! *(Almost full blackout. We only see Elizabeth and to one side, E. Arden)* I wish that Jew would drop dead! *(AS E. ARDEN)* And of course, my day of vengeance would come. Don't go thinking here in this meeting, that she won them all. No, *(Laughs)* oh, no. The Jew didn't win them all. *(Ugly laugh, like a hyena. Large nazi banners unfurl onstage. We hear hitler making a speech)* Soon it'll be my turn.

(Nazi shouts, anthems and shadows)

3 /

Onstage, we only see E. Arden and Helena R. in their wheelchairs. They speak in the meeting.

E. ARDEN: It's just a few of us women meeting today, so it's easier to say it. The greatest hatred men feel is toward women with power. And I'm not the one who said it, Eleanor Roosevelt did.

HELENA R: By then, in the 30's, VOGUE had given women permission to wear lipstick all day long, though it recommended it only for morning and evening.

E. ARDEN: And as always, while we didn't invent lipstick, it was Arden that brought it to its fullest expression. I called them Coquette, Victoire and Carmencita.

HELENA R: And while Isadora Duncan helped me promote lipstick, I got another idea while visiting an African Art exhibit. It was...

E. ARDEN: I thought it was horrid, naturally.

(Then Helena and Elizabeth appear, 1930's)

ELIZABETH: She's going to drive me crazy. Someone stop the madwoman!

HELENA: Nail polish!

ELIZABETH: *(Tired of saying it)* It will never work!

HELENA: We made it in Paris.

ELIZABETH: And of course, that idiot Revlon brought it to America. That's why he was known as the Nail Man.

HELENA: They tell me Revlon's making 300 thousand dollars a month with my nail polish.

ELIZABETH: And once again...! Elizabeth Arden presents its new, advanced and exclusive nail polish! How humiliating!

(The whole stage is lit except the area with nazi banners)

MANKA: Madame: the workers are complaining...

HELENA: From Greek beauty to African beauty.

BETTY: Miss, the factory has a union.

ELIZABETH: Revlon copied my Carmencita lipstick!

MANKA: There's a group of leaders...

HELENA: Revlon copied my advertising campaign!

BETTY They're meeting until late at night...

ELIZABETH: He copied my Blue Grass perfume

HELENA: That she had copied from me first!

ELIZABETH: That she copied from Chanel!

MANKA: Madame, we have to talk about the workday...

BETTY: The unions...

HELENA: Do you think this Revlon could be dangerous?

ELIZABETH: Do you think this Revlon might have a future?

BOTH: NO! He's not the competition. The competition is her, the other one, that woman, the same as ever! And we're winning!

(We hear the internationale. The nazi banners have become union banners reading: "strike! Arden = parasite. Rubinstein = leech! The followers become worker's groups. The leaders shout)

LEADER1: REGULATE THE WORKDAY!

LEADER2: PASS THE LUXURY TAX!

WORKER1: CUT THE WORK WEEK TO 48 HOURS!

WORKER2: CUT THE WORK WEEK TO FIVE DAYS!

(Helena and Elizabeth confront them. The workers boo each time they complain)

HELENA: Listen here, all this nonsense the Government wants to impose won't be followed in this company.

(Booing)

ELIZABETH: Here we'll go on working the way we've always done, with a humane workweek: seven days and fifty-two hours with no overtime, of course. Our workers need to rest. A little.

(Booing)

HELENA: Now of course, if you want to get ahead, employees have the opportunity and the duty to work up to 60 hours a week. It's normal!

(Booing)

ELIZABETH: It's not like I want you to die, my darlings.

(Booing)

HELENA: After all, how can you live without a cook or a butler?

(Booing)

ELIZABETH: Or a chauffeur or personal assistants?

(Booing)

LEADER1: The Medical Association warns that the use of creams does not rejuvenate skin tissue!

HELENA: But, what do doctors know?

ELIZABETH: When I've taught them everything they know.

LEADER2: Skin creams should be tested and approved by the Government!

LEADER1: They must carry a warning label!

HELENA: We won't be able to do business like this. We'll starve to death.

ELIZABETH: Communism. That's what it is.

HELENA: Warning: my marvelous skin cream may produce an allergic reaction.

ELIZABETH: Warning: this cream is not safe.

HELENA: It doesn't really heal.

ELIZABETH: Or beautify.

ELIZABETH: But some of my clients have even eaten my skin cream. And they say it tastes delicious.

HELENA: And it was nutritious!

ELIZABETH: And not fattening.

HELENA: They forgot to make us list the ingredients on the label!

ELIZABETH: I wouldn't put it past them!

HELENA: This is the age of horror

ELIZABETH: It's a good thing World War II started. And everyone forgot all about that business.

(The whole stage in black and white. The red door turns black. The nazi banners appear again. Elizabeth walks among the nazis and sits at a table with Goering. German music of the period)

ELIZABETH: I met him in Berlin, with his wife. I went there to open one of my Arden Salons and his wife, an admirer of mine, bought up our entire stock. *(She laughs)* We had to close the salon for 15 days to wait for more supplies! He was the Air Transport Minister, of course, and Berlin was a splendid, bustling, glamorous and most of all, very efficient city. His wife introduced us and we spent every minute of that afternoon together. When we went in to dinner, I told Goering he was a bit overweight and suggested he get some exercise. And he listened to me. *(Elizabeth and Goering toast, enjoying themselves)* And he told me...

GOERING: I know you invest in jewels, but I'm telling you, invest here, Miss Arden. The German mark will be like gold. Now is the time to exchange your dollars for Deutschmarks!

(On the other side, Helena appears, beside her helena and regina)

HELENA: My sister Regina, who was in Germany, said...

REGINA: Don't worry, Helena. Everything you hear about anti-Semitism is a rumor. The Air Transport Minister himself, Goering, has denied he's persecuting the Jews.

HELENA: And you're all right? You're sure?

REGINA: Of course, Helena. It's not all rosy. It's true there's a boycott; Germans won't buy in our stores or in Jewish businesses, but they're not persecuting us. Besides, plenty are still doing business, not everyone living in Germany is a German in the party, Helena.

HELENA : That's what she said. And I replied: Regina, I know you want me to relax, but this whole situation in Germany has me worried. Not just because the army's taking all my employees, but because everyone over there seems more interested in gunpowder than skin cream.

ELIZABETH: *(Happily)* Berlin's my favorite place. I visit several times a year. And thanks to the Party, I've opened my own factory here. I did what Goering said: I invested here, in this city, it's so fascinating, so colorful, always festooned with the imperial and NAZI banners flying side by side. Ah! If only New York had such beauty!

HELENA: *(Nervous)* Titus tells me they've removed all the Jewish artists and intellectuals from decision-making posts. And deported them. And no one even knows where some of them are. I think we should shut down our operations in Berlin. We've lost several shops, they've burned them down, vandalized them, and the Nazi party seems to prefer other companies in the field...

ELIZABETH: I don't know why she says that. The Jews, though they are what they are, have nothing to fear from the Nazi Party. Goering himself told me so.

(Shadows appear. Tense music)

HELENA : That week they gave the Jews two weeks to turn over their passports to the authorities. November 9 was Kristallnacht and seven thousand Jewish shops and businesses were sacked...

(The situation onstage is more chaotic. Fires. People running with suitcases. Shouting. Firing squads. Elizabeth tries to explain to anyone who comes near her. The FBI approaches her)

ELIZABETH: Of course I met with party members.

FBI: Answer this: Does the GESTAPO use your offices as operating bases around the world?

ELIZABETH: You just don't understand. To me they're not GESTAPO, they're simply, friends of my friends. I never thought they were doing anything wrong.

FBI: Nothing wrong? Just taking over the world. That's all.

ELIZABETH: You might be exaggerating a bit. Don't you think?

FBI: Have you benefited from your friendship with the Nazis?

ELIZABETH: Nothing illegal. Just connections for my products.

FBI: They've confiscated all of Helena Rubinstein's assets in Germany.

ELIZABETH: I've got nothing to do with it. I'm sure that's all politics. And I hate politics. Besides, none of it's serious, really. If you walk through Berlin, all you'll see is excitement. But hate? There's no hate. They don't hate anyone.

FBI: And do you hate Rubinstein?

ELIZABETH: *(Laughs)* Of course not! If her business is bad, she must've made mistakes. Don't you think?

(On the other side, Helena, terrified, packing her bags. With her, Titus, nervous)

HELENA: We have to go back to New York and stay there. I'll send my sisters away from Europe...

TITUS: I'd suggest you take all your paintings with you.

HELENA: Do you think they'd touch my property? Will they reach Paris? Is it possible?

TITUS: Picasso said it was. He said he's considered a Bolshevik and he's leaving too. To them, everything Jewish is decadent. And you're the most famous Jew in the world.

HELENA: Have you heard anything about a concentration camp called Dachau?

FBI: *(To Elizabeth)* Have you heard anything about a concentration camp called Dachau?

ELIZABETH: Well, they told me something about a women's-only retreat in Ravensbruck. But it sounds like a place to protect them.

FBI: So you haven't heard that it's a concentration camp just for women? That they're taken as prisoners?

ELIZABETH: Who could come up with a concentration camp just for women!

HELENA : That was the first time I heard talk of Ravensbruck. *(Goes to Regina)* I mentioned it to my sister. And she said...

REGINA: Don't worry, Helena.

HELENA : And she went there to die.

(Regina is about to scream, but disappears. Leaves her scarf centerstage. Helena picks it up, in pain)

HELENA R : On September 1st, the Germans invaded Poland. The rest of the Rubinstein family, who stayed there, we never saw again. My sister Regina was the first to disappear. Of the 60,000 Jews that lived in my hometown, only 1,200 survived. And that was because they were chosen to work in Oscar Schindler's factory.

(Helena runs with her suitcase. Elizabeth remains talking to the FBI)

ELIZABETH: Officer, pardon me, but I just don't understand this war. Everyone is sad and defeated, but my salons in Berlin are working at peak capacity. We're doing very well, what am I saying very well? We're doing splendidly. The reports are marvelous. Look what my employees there are saying...

VIRGINIA: The situation here is marvelous!

ELIZABETH: Full salons!

VIRGINIA: Good news from the war has increased sales!

ELIZABETH: You see? The women in Berlin are happy and they're spending all their money at Arden. And surely, you know what I think? I think this is Europe's business. We Americans should stay out of that war. The best thing about us is our isolationism. So we shouldn't get involved in other people's problems. Don't you think?

(Sound of machinegun fire. Images of tanks. FBI man becomes Revlon and walks to the audience. On either extreme, E. Arden and Helena R.)

REVLON: The United States entered the fighting and World War II began.

HELENA : In Europe my enemies were the Nazis, but in the U.S. the worst ones were the other one. And Revlon.

ELIZABETH: Who accused me of being a Nazi.

(Revlon accuses her)

HELENA : And me of being foreign.

(Reylon accuses her)

ELIZABETH: Of refusing to pay the war tax.

(Reylon accuses her)

HELENA : Of associating with communists

(Reylon accuses her)

ELIZABETH: While he...

HELENA : Offered himself up, like a prostitute.

REVLON: My name is Reylon. And I know everything about powder, acids, containers, chemicals, miniatures. I can manufacture camouflage, poison and grenades for the army. Yes? *(Reylon makes a victorious gesture)* When this war's over, those two old cows won't know what hit them.

ELIZABETH: And just between us...

HELENA :The truth.

BOTH:We didn't know.

(Sign: 1940's. The war. Sad music)

ELIZABETH: The movies show men...

HELENA: Old Spice is the cologne preferred by today's soldiers.

ELIZABETH: And suddenly, men become beautiful.

HELENA: And voilà: THE HOUSE of GOURIELLI, designed for the male market!

ELIZABETH: We opened five new salons: creams, baths, barbering and cologne, just for Men.

HELENA: Estrolar: The new hormone and estrogen cream for men.

ELIZABETH: Our soldiers will take free France and free French women by storm!

(Lights dim)

REVLON: Elizabeth finally realized that the NAZIS were the bad guys and that nothing's worse for business than if people hate you.

ELIZABETH: I supported Germany out of naïveté.

REVLON: It's a very short step from naïveté to barbarity.

ELIZABETH: And from barbarity, you end up face to face with your worst pain. Don't forget my former Nazi friends, Goering and Gobbels, bombed London. They destroyed my salon. And killed my best friend. And in Paris they arrested my sister and put her in a concentration camp until the war ended. AND HERE SHE WAS NORMAL, SHE WASN'T A JEW!

(Helena to one side, surrounded by her paintings, lighting the menorah)

HELENA: I didn't realize it when they took my Berlin businesses, or when they bombed my house in London, or even after what happened to my family. It happened one day, in one hour, maybe two minutes. Suddenly, in two minutes, I realized I was a Jew. Of course I knew I was a Jew before then, but I hadn't realized it. There's a difference, of course. For me, Jews were other people; the ones who prayed, went to synagogue, spoke Yiddish, those people who never tired of saying how Jewish they were and said it with pride. I never said to myself "I'm a Jew" until my hometown was razed. Until the Krakow ghetto and (*Emotionally*) ...the Auschwitz and Birkenau extermination camps, those camps that were hardly an hour from my home, places I had gone as a child, with their beautiful scenery, their excellent train stations, their breathtaking sunsets. Then, I realized that not only to other people, but also to myself, I was, just like that, a Jew. A Jew. A Jew.

(Images of Leningrad, Normandy, the Reichstach taken. Finally, the atom bomb. Sign: "War is over")

REVLON: And the war, like everything, ended.

(Estee enters and joins Revlon)

ESTEE: Helena returned to Paris, to salvage what she could. There was an empire to rebuild. Again.

REVLON: Elizabeth took refuge in horses. She bought racehorses and built up a whole racing stable.

ESTEE: In the end, everything had changed. With Arden stained as a Nazi and Helena, a Jew and in Europe, (*She points to Revlon*) Revlon came out of the war in a dominant position.

REVLON: Me and a new enemy. (*He points Estee*) A no one named Josephine Esther Mentzer.

ELIZABETH: ANOTHER JEW! IT'S AN INVASION!

REVLON: Josephine Esther married this Joseph Lauter. And so she became...

ESTEE: Estée Lauder, from Vienna.

ELIZABETH: Her name isn't "ESTÉE", that woman's name is ESTHER. AND she's not from Vienna, she's from Brooklyn!

ESTEE: The queen of cleansing creams.

ELIZABETH: Cleansing creams? But I invented them and no one wanted them!

ESTEE: Now, they were a sensation. It was normal: after the war, there was a lot of cleaning up to do.

ELIZABETH: Every day I understand the world less and horses more!

(Elizabeth is about to leave but just then, at that moment, comes face to face with Helena)

REVLON: *(to Estee)* And the two old women? Did they ever meet?

HELENA R. AND E. ARDEN: Never!

REVLON: Although there is a story.

ESTEE: Never verified.

REVLON: About a day.

ESTEE: When one was coming in somewhere.

REVLON: Just as the other was leaving.

ESTEE: After all, every story.

REVLON: Needs reshaping.

(The two women look at each other, petrified)

ELIZABETH: I pictured you as shorter.

HELENA : I imagined you more voluminous.

ELIZABETH: But you look very good.

HELENA : And you look remarkably well.

ELIZABETH: Maybe this would be a good time to ask you something.

HELENA : I think perhaps we could exchange a few polite words.

ELIZABETH: That sounds like a good idea.

HELENA : Splendid.

ELIZABETH: You first.

HELENA : No, please. You.

ELIZABETH: What are we going to do about Lauder?

HELENA : And Revlon. What are we going to do about him?

(Elizabeth and Helena talk. We don't hear what they say. Their words are few, secret, and without malice. They look at each other. There is something more to say. They move close together. This time Helena speaks and Elizabeth stays silent. Pause. They look at each other, with hatred and admiration)

HELENA : Very well. We're agreed then.

ELIZABETH: Agreed.

HELENA : There's no need to shake hands, is there?

ELIZABETH: No, no need.

HELENA : That would be going too far.

ELIZABETH: And it might be dangerous.

(They face each other in silence)

HELENA : One last thing.

ELIZABETH: Yes?

HELENA : I want you to know "you can't hate what you disdain." And, of course, I don't disdain you.

ELIZABETH: I don't disdain you either.

(Music)

4 /

Onstage, Helena R. And E. Arden in their wheelchairs. They are surrounded by their followers.

HELENA R: This meeting is important

E. ARDEN: I would say, defining.

HELENA R: Do you know what this is? They're called Antibiotics. They're what's keeping me alive. I ordered them to buy up the factory. My body NEEDS me to have my money, just like your bodies need this company not to fall in the hands of that insult Revlov or that harpy, chéries. It's the business! WAKE UP!

E. ARDEN: You have to understand, the difference between you and me is that I know how to work. When I started out I worked 24 hours a day. But you don't know how to work. You all want more free time because you think something more important will happen in your insipid little lives after work. But nothing ever happens to you. Work is what's important! Work is life!

(Both women rise from their chairs and walk toward two tv sets, which turn on when they reach them)

HELENA R: After the war, two things changed the world.

E. ARDEN: One was television. A horrid device that got its start because of those sleazy movie starlets.

HELENA R: The other: women started to dye their hair.

E. ARDEN: A repulsive practice that got its start because of those sleazy movie starlets.

HELENA R: Well, if girls are going to spend 10 dollars on hair dye, then I'll take those 10 dollars. Television?

E. ARDEN: Like movies. I'm not interested.

HELENA R: It's not for me.

E. ARDEN: But him

(Revlon appears)

HELENA R: That monster Revlon.

E. ARDEN: You'd think he couldn't live without it.

REVLON: Because television was where I began to finish them both off.

(Estee enters)

ESTEE: Those competitive years were the best. Revlon made very good commercials.

REVLON: And if Helena launched a new product with hormones.

HELENA R: Lauder did too.

E. ARDEN: Revlon would make it accessible and cheap.

ESTEE: And Arden elite and expensive.

HELENA R: But I was always the original.

ESTEE: And if there were no new products...

REVLON: Then you took an old one...

ESTÉE: And gave it a new name.

E. ARDEN: You gave it a new label and voilà!

HELENA R: "New improved formula!"

ALL: Deep cleansing!

REVLON: I give the world the latest, the best: Eterna 27. The first rejuvenating cream

HELENA R: That's direct provocation!

E. ARDEN: You'll see. Soon enough ETERNA will be RETURNA!

REVLON: By the mid 50's, the old biddies were no longer competition.

ESTEE: Instead, Revlon took the lead.

(Helena R. and E. Arden pace, with difficulty)

E. ARDEN: Our lip liner is a disaster! In two months it goes rancid. And no one tells me. I had to find out for myself!

HELENA R: The same goes for our skin creams: after a while they turn black...I used the hormone cream on my face and it made me break out!

E. ARDEN: How can something so well made turn rancid and old so quickly?

HELENA R: And Revlon's cutting prices!

E. ARDEN: What annoys me is how people can spend so much time and energy on something cheap.

HELENA R: The truth is people don't want to make the effort to look better.

E. ARDEN: Nothing's going right for us lately.

ESTEE: Then Miss Arden won the Kentucky Derby with her favorite horse, Jet Pilot. And her interest in the business cooled. She used the creams on her horses and gave them the same treatments she gave women: Daily baths, ARDEN SKIN TONIC and even eight-hour cream.

E. ARDEN: At least they know what they're worth!

REVLON: They say she really loves those horses, even though one bit her finger.

HELENA R: Good heavens, poor thing. So tell me: how's the horse? Will it recover?

ESTEE: Until Elizabeth makes the mistake of annoying the Mafia and in the end they burn her stable and kill her horses.

(E. Arden slumps in her wheelchair)

E. ARDEN: It was a terrible blow. And I never recovered *(Feels pain)*

REVLON: Helena buys art. She donates a collection to MOMA. And her passion for art distances her some from her skin creams.

HELENA R: If a woman couldn't buy a Picasso, she bought a Helena Rubinstein lip liner, which she could do. And while others surround themselves with bankers and horses, I dine with Capote, Dalí and most of all Gore Vidal.

ESTEE: Then, almost at the same time, her son Horacio died and shortly after, Titus.

(Helena slumps in her wheelchair)

HELENA R: It was a terrible blow. And I never recovered.

(Feels pain. E. Arden moves around the stage in her wheelchair)

E. ARDEN: In these days of television and Revlon, I put on purple for Minister Nehru of India, pink for his daughter Indira Ghandi, pastels for Mamie Eisenhower, white for Mrs. Whitney. I patronize the colors of a very talented young man, Oscar de la Renta. Still, with all this color, so often, all you can wear is black. Too often. In the morning: funerals, in the afternoon: tea and talk about the morning's funeral. But at night, I can't talk. Who says I can't talk because coughing involves blood vessels? They've confined me to bed and from bed to a wheelchair, and no talking. I feel better, but I'm worthless. And if it's not a cough, it's my sinusitis, germs, low blood pressure, my digestion, my circulation, my teeth, my heart. The other woman, of course, is sick too. Worse than I am. I'm going to say her name: Helena Rubinstein? I hope she doesn't die. Because if she does, they'll all be waiting for me. Since it's always been the two of us...

(Helena moves quickly in her wheelchair)

HELENA R: Yesterday they broke into my house. With me inside. Three masked men. The thieves saw me and threatened me. I told them the truth, a truth I didn't know till that day. That I'm an old woman and death doesn't frighten me. Then they took what they could or what they understood. They tied me to a chair and while they were doing it I screamed and howled. The thieves left, with no more than two hundred dollars. They left my box of gold nuggets, my Matisse's, my Picassos, my Braques. And that's when I realized. Revlon and Lauder, and all the rest, all the newcomers, were like those thieves. They have no idea what this art of beautifying women is all about. I'm going to say her name: Elizabeth Arden? At least that witch is worth something. The rest? They're worthless without us. So, the old woman wasn't me. It was the world that had gone senile. This world that's not the important one anymore. That isn't the one. In this knockoff world, this world of the cheap and popular, of the uncultured, of the ignorant: is there room for Helena Rubinstein?

E. ARDEN: What can I tell you now? That I'm diabetic and fell to the floor twice this week, fainted dead away, unable to even recall where I'd fallen?

HELENA R: It's always the same. I wake up in bed and remember I was a peasant from Krakow, that I lived in Sydney, in Paris and I've lost everyone.

E. ARDEN: Then, in my dreams, a horse appears, It's Jet Pilot, my winner, my only winner. And he tells me he's not burning, because he's so fast the wind puts out all the flames.

HELENA R: Picasso's come to paint my portrait. He's made 409 studies! Lines, head, eyes, body. He makes things up, he looks at me, and I can see he's bored. You can tell he's doing it as a favor. I wonder what Pompidou said to him? The old broad's dying. That's it, the old broad's dying. Do me a favor and paint her.

REVLON: Those two were sick and out of the competition, it's true.

ESTEE: But when they got better, then it was bad for Revlon.

REVLON: But if they got sick, I did well. And those two, stronger than the sea, if they got sick a hundred times then they recovered a thousand!

HELENA R: If I had to do it, I'd do it again. All again. I'd be Helena Rubinstein again.

E. ARDEN: If this business keeps going downhill, I'll have to do it all again. And be Elizabeth Arden all over. Of course I would!

HELENA R: We're the same,

E. ARDEN: We're indestructible.

HELENA R: We're Improbable!

E. ARDEN: Inadmissible.

HELENA R: Incredible.

E. ARDEN: Indomitable. *(Looks at her)* How old is that woman by now?

HELENA R: Eighty nine. How old's the other one?

E. ARDEN: I'm almost eighty. So old and so wild...

HELENA R: Like a witch.

E. ARDEN: My hair gone white

HELENA R: And my spirit limp.

E. ARDEN: Double pneumonia.

HELENA R: Two heart attacks

E. ARDEN: Enlarged arteries

HELENA R: I always knew varicose veins would kill us! So, I've called this meeting. Not because I'm going to die, of course not, but because I want to leave everything in order so Helena Rubinstein continues in business for the next 100 years. We should write it all down quickly. A reporter will be here soon. To interview me. So, write... Come, Ceska, write for me.

(Helena then has a stroke)

REVLON: On Tuesday, March 30, 1965, Helena had her first stroke. She was taken to New York Hospital, where she had two more. She died at 3:30 a.m. on Wednesday, April 1st.

(The light on Helena R. goes out)

VIRGINIA: She died alone in her hospital room.

E. ARDEN: Shut up fool. You have no right to say that about her. What nerve that Jew had. To die now. Now they'll all start watching me. How old's Arden? How long do you think she's got? What'll she do now without her best enemy? Where does hatred go when death comes?

REVLON: Helena left 100 million dollars in property, 177 million in factories and salons, 15 million in the stock market and 60 million a year in sales in 100 countries.

VIRGINIA: Her will was 34 pages long.

E. ARDEN: I've started forgetting names, but I swear I remember faces very well. But in my head I can't put words to people. I've had two strokes already, my hands are mummified, and I have to take large doses of Novocain for the pain. I'm not going to die, of course not, but I'd like to leave everything in order so ELIZABETH ARDEN continues in business for the next 100 years...And about her...the other one...Virginia...

VIRGINIA: Ma'am?

E. ARDEN: This, write this... It's very important.

VIRGINIA: Yes?

(The light on E. Arden goes out)

ESTEE: At midnight on October 18, 1966, Florence Nightingale Graham, known to all as Elizabeth Arden, dies of pneumonia.

VIRGINIA: She left 60 million dollars in property, 100 salons in the United States, millions in the stock market and jewelry, and 60 million a year in sales in 78 countries.

ESTEE: Her will was 8 pages long.

(Virginia, Estee and Revlon move to centerstage)

VIRGINIA, ESTEE & REVLON: *(Alternate saying the company names)* Charles Revlon, Estée Lauder, Max Factor, Colgate Palmolive, Lóreal, Eli Lilly, Fabergé...

REVLON: All took their piece once the two companies were broken up.

ESTEE: The heirs took the money.

ALL: And they lost it all.

(Lit up once again)

E. ARDEN: The interview will be joint. With me and that woman.

HELENA R: With me and the other one.

E. ARDEN: Don't be alarmed

HELENA R: Not everything will be true

E. ARDEN: But it may as well be.

HELENA R: Like in theater.

E. ARDEN: Every story.

HELENA R: Needs reshaping.

(Then the reporter appears, as at the beginning of the play. Helena rises)

REPORTER: Is something bothering you, Madame?

HELENA R: It's... it's just, I feel like someone's watching me and taking notes.

E. ARDEN: It's like someone's watching me through a window, watching my movements,

HELENA R: ...my actions, my gestures.

(Helena R. and E. Arden look out at the audience)

HELENA R: Like there's an audience we can't see

E. ARDEN: Like someone was writing me.

HELENA R: Like I wasn't me, but a character.

E. ARDEN: Like my life didn't belong to me.

HELENA R: But to everyone. All of them.

E. ARDEN: They've come to see their lives, not me.

HELENA R: They came to see the color of hatred.

E. ARDEN: They want to know if it looks good.

HELENA R: If it goes with their eyes.

E. ARDEN: If it rejuvenates their skin.

HELENA R: To see these boats going down.

E. ARDEN: In this winter shipwreck.

HELENA R: *(to a spectator)* And you? Can you see those people?

E. ARDEN: Can you see them out there?

(Music. Blackout)