

Thursday Tea Dance

Slice of life · 7-character play · 5 women, 1 man, 1 either · 35 min · Beginner

At Les Glycines retirement home, Thursday is tea-dance day. Jeanne, 81, has never danced in her life; Rose offers to teach her the waltz, in secret, in the laundry room. But no secret lasts long at Les Glycines: the other residents open a betting book on the man who must be behind these lessons, and the spring party is coming, with its opening waltz.

The common room, the laundry room and a corridor of Les Glycines retirement home, in Angers, on five Thursdays in March and April, today.

Casting

JEANNE (Female role, Senior) 81, widowed, moved into Les Glycines last autumn; has never danced.

ROSE (Female role, Senior) 79, former seamstress; danced every Saturday at the local dance hall for fifteen years.

IRÈNE (Female role, Senior) 88, the oldest resident, a retired accountant.

GISÈLE (Female role, Senior) 74, the youngest of the residents, never misses a tea dance.

MARGOT (Female role, Senior) 76, retired nurse, reads a novel a week.

LUCIEN (Male role, Senior) 83, the only man who comes to the tea dance; he brings his own records.

CAMILLE (No gender marker, Adult) adult, has run the activities at the residence for two years.

SCENE 1: FIRST THURSDAY

(The common room at Les Glycines, a Thursday afternoon. Tables, chairs, a teapot, a plate of biscuits. A record player on a side table. Lucien and Gisèle are dancing a tango. Irène and Margot sit at one table, Rose at another. Jeanne sits alone at the back, her handbag on her knees.)

(The record stops.)

GISÈLE. Another one, Lucien.

LUCIEN. I'm catching my breath.

GISÈLE. You caught it last week.

LUCIEN. It got away again.

IRÈNE. Let him breathe, Gisèle. He's the only one we've got.

MARGOT. We should take care of him. Like a collector's item.

LUCIEN. Thank you, Margot.

MARGOT. I didn't say it to be nice to you.

(Camille comes in with a cardboard box and a stack of coloured sheets.)

CAMILLE. Is everyone here? Perfect. Two minutes, and then I'll let you dance.

IRÈNE. Camille, when you say two minutes, you mean a quarter of an hour.

CAMILLE. A quarter of an hour, then, Irène. In four weeks, it's the spring party.

GISÈLE. We know.

CAMILLE. This year, we're doing it like we used to. Paper lanterns, a buffet, the families coming in. And a ball.

MARGOT. A real ball?

CAMILLE. A real ball. With a waltz to open it. One couple, alone in the middle, and everyone watching.

(A silence. Nobody moves.)

CAMILLE. I'm taking volunteers.

MARGOT. And last year, who opened it?

CAMILLE. Nobody. We opened with the raffle.

IRÈNE. I won an iron.

CAMILLE. There you are, it was a lovely party.

IRÈNE. I've got nothing to iron, Camille. I only have jumpers.

CAMILLE. This year, no raffle. A waltz.

IRÈNE. At eighty-eight, I open letters. Not balls.

GISÈLE. I'd do it. If Lucien would.

LUCIEN. Lucien doesn't waltz anymore. Lucien turns, and the waltz turns the other way.

GISÈLE. You danced it at Christmas.

LUCIEN. And you saw what happened.

MARGOT. The Christmas tree remembers.

CAMILLE. Think about it. I'm putting the sheet up by the lift. There's room for two names.

(Camille pins a sheet to the wall. Lucien picks a record. A java.)

LUCIEN. A java. For beginners.

(Gisèle gets up at once. Lucien looks towards the back of the room.)

LUCIEN. Jeanne? You never join in.

JEANNE. I watch.

LUCIEN. You've been watching for six months.

JEANNE. It's very interesting to watch.

GISÈLE. Lucien, the java won't wait for you.

(Lucien dances with Gisèle. Margot leans towards Irène.)

MARGOT. She never dances. Have you noticed?

IRÈNE. I'm eighty-eight, Margot, I notice everything. It's the only sport I've got left.

MARGOT. Maybe she had her heart broken. A man who danced with another woman. At a ball, under the lanterns.

IRÈNE. Or her feet hurt.

MARGOT. You've got no poetry in you.

IRÈNE. I've got orthopaedic shoes. Same thing.

(Rose takes her cup and goes to sit next to Jeanne.)

ROSE. It's a good one, this java.

JEANNE. I wouldn't know.

ROSE. You don't like it?

JEANNE. I don't know if it's a good java. I've never danced one. No java, no nothing.

ROSE. Never?

JEANNE. Never.

ROSE. Not even at your wedding?

JEANNE. My husband didn't dance. He said it made him seasick.

ROSE. And you?

JEANNE. I held his jacket.

ROSE. For forty years?

JEANNE. Forty-three.

(A pause. Rose watches Lucien and Gisèle.)

ROSE. I danced every Saturday from the age of sixteen to thirty-one. At the Loire dance hall, in Saumur.

JEANNE. Every Saturday?

ROSE. All but one. I had the measles.

JEANNE. You must have had lots of partners.

ROSE. Not a single one.

JEANNE. That can't be true.

ROSE. There weren't enough boys. They were off doing their military service, or sitting in the café. So the girls danced together. And I was tall. I danced the man's part.

JEANNE. You led?

ROSE. Fifteen years running. I can't even follow anymore.

(Jeanne laughs. The record stops. Gisèle applauds Lucien.)

GISÈLE. Bravo!

LUCIEN. You did all the work.

GISÈLE. I know.

(Camille goes round the tables with the teapot.)

CAMILLE. Jeanne, a little tea?

JEANNE. Yes, please.

CAMILLE. And the sheet by the lift, are you thinking about it?

JEANNE. Camille, I don't even know where you put your feet.

CAMILLE. On the floor, usually. The rest comes later.

(Camille moves away. Rose leans towards Jeanne and lowers her voice.)

ROSE. The laundry room.

JEANNE. Sorry?

ROSE. On Thursday mornings, nobody goes there. Washing is on Mondays. Next Thursday, ten o'clock.

JEANNE. What for?

ROSE. A waltz. You can learn it in four weeks.

JEANNE. At eighty-one?

ROSE. Especially at eighty-one. After that, there's less time.

JEANNE. And what if someone sees us?

ROSE. In a laundry room? Nobody ever looks at anybody in a laundry room.

(Lucien puts on a new record. A slow dance. He comes over to the table at the back.)

LUCIEN. Rose. A slow one? For once.

ROSE. I lead, Lucien. You'll end up in the buffet.

LUCIEN. I've been in the buffet. There are worse places.

GISÈLE. Lucien! That's my slow dance. You promised it to me at Christmas.

LUCIEN. You see. I haven't had a choice since Christmas.

(Lucien goes back to Gisèle. They dance. Margot watches them, her hand on her heart.)

MARGOT. Look at them, Irène. It's like the end of a novel.

IRÈNE. Mostly it looks like he's treading on her feet.

MARGOT. In novels, they tread on each other's feet too. At the start.

(Jeanne looks at Rose.)

JEANNE. Ten o'clock.

ROSE. Wear flat shoes.

JEANNE. That's all I've got.

ROSE. Then you're ready.

SCENE 2: SECOND THURSDAY, MORNING

(The laundry room. Two washing machines, a big tumble dryer, a folding table, an empty washing line. Jeanne stands waiting, her handbag in her hand. Rose comes in with a shopping bag and a small radio.)

ROSE. You're here.

JEANNE. Since quarter to ten. I counted the buttons on the machines.

ROSE. How many?

JEANNE. Thirty-two. And I still don't know what they're for.

(Rose sets the radio on the folding table and takes a pair of men's shoes out of the bag, black and polished.)

JEANNE. Those are men's shoes.

ROSE. Leader's shoes. Size forty-one. I bought them at sixteen, for my first Saturday. They did fifteen years of Saturdays.

JEANNE. And you kept them?

ROSE. You don't throw away a partner who's proved his worth.

(Rose changes shoes, laces up the dancing shoes and stands up tall.)

ROSE. There. Now I lead. First thing: no more "Madame". Nobody waltzes with a "Madame".

JEANNE. Really?

ROSE. Try saying "Madame" while you're turning. You'll see, you get all tangled up.

JEANNE. Rose.

ROSE. There. Second thing: your left hand, on my shoulder. Not on my collar. On the shoulder.

(Jeanne puts her hand there. Rose takes her other hand and puts her own on Jeanne's back.)

JEANNE. And yours stays there?

ROSE. It stays there. It's what tells you where to go. You don't have to decide anything.

JEANNE. I decided everything, all my life. The shopping, the bills, the holidays. He always said "whatever you want".

ROSE. And what did you want?

JEANNE. Once, at my niece's wedding, the band played a waltz. I stood up. He said "do you really want to?" I sat back down.

ROSE. You sat back down.

JEANNE. I ate wedding cake. A lot of wedding cake.

ROSE. Well, this morning, I'm the one who wants. And nobody sits back down. Count with me. One, two, three.

JEANNE. One, two, three.

ROSE. Right foot steps back. One. The other one follows. Two. Feet together. Three.

(They take a few steps. Jeanne treads on Rose's foot.)

JEANNE. Sorry.

ROSE. This shoe has seen worse.

JEANNE. Sorry, sorry.

ROSE. Don't look at your feet. They won't run away.

JEANNE. I'm looking where I'm going.

ROSE. You're going where I'm going. Look at me.

(Jeanne looks up. A pause. They look at each other.)

ROSE. There. One, two, three.

(They start again. The steps are slow, then surer. Rose switches on the radio. A waltz.)

JEANNE. It's too fast.

ROSE. It's a waltz, it turns. Let it turn, we'll catch up with it.

JEANNE. One, two, three. One, two, three. Rose, I'm turning.

ROSE. You're turning.

JEANNE. I'm turning and I haven't fallen over.

ROSE. You haven't fallen over because I'm holding you.

JEANNE. Don't let go of me.

ROSE. I've never let go of anyone. Fifteen years of Saturdays.

(The waltz stops. They stay like that for a moment, Rose's hand on Jeanne's back. Rose is the first to step away.)

ROSE. Right. Now you're going to understand what I do. Put the shoes on.

JEANNE. Yours?

ROSE. To know how to follow, you have to have led once. That's the rule of the dance hall.

(Rose takes off the shoes. Jeanne puts them on.)

JEANNE. They're enormous.

ROSE. You've got the feet of a Saumur girl. It's small, Saumur.

JEANNE. I look like Charlie Chaplin.

ROSE. Chaplin was a lovely dancer.

(Footsteps in the corridor. They freeze.)

JEANNE. Someone's coming.

ROSE. On a Thursday? Nobody comes on a Thursday.

(The door handle turns. Rose, in her socks, hides behind the dryer. Margot comes in, a basket under her arm.)

MARGOT. Jeanne?

JEANNE. Margot.

MARGOT. What are you doing here? It's Thursday.

JEANNE. Washing. I wash on Thursdays.

MARGOT. The machines are off.

JEANNE. I'm waiting for them to cool down.

MARGOT. I left my blouse here on Monday. The blue one. It must still be in the dryer.

(Margot heads for the dryer. Jeanne steps in front of it, in the big shoes.)

JEANNE. It's not there.

MARGOT. Have you looked?

JEANNE. I've looked everywhere. There's nothing in the dryer. Nothing at all. The dryer is empty.

(Margot looks down at Jeanne's feet.)

MARGOT. Jeanne. You're wearing men's shoes.

JEANNE. They're comfortable.

MARGOT. A forty-one, at least.

JEANNE. I've done a lot of walking.

MARGOT. Just now, in the corridor, I heard someone counting. One, two, three. A deep voice.

JEANNE. That was the radio.

MARGOT. The radio counts now?

JEANNE. It's a programme. For learning to count.

(A pause. Margot looks at the shoes, the radio, Jeanne.)

MARGOT. I won't say a word.

JEANNE. There's nothing to say.

MARGOT. That's exactly why I won't say a word.

(Margot leaves without her blouse. Rose comes out from behind the dryer, in her socks. She is holding a blue blouse.)

ROSE. It was there.

JEANNE. She's going to tell everyone.

ROSE. By lunchtime, the whole building will know.

JEANNE. Know what?

ROSE. That there's a man in the laundry room. With a deep voice and size forty-one feet.

(Rose takes Jeanne by the waist.)

ROSE. One, two, three. We've still got twenty minutes.

SCENE 3: SECOND THURSDAY, AFTERNOON

(The common room, the same day. Irène sits at a table, an exercise book open in front of her, a pen in her hand. Margot and Gisèle lean over the book.)

IRÈNE. Let's go over it again. Margot, the facts. Nothing but the facts.

MARGOT. Quarter past ten. The laundry room. Jeanne, alone, in front of the dryer.

IRÈNE. Alone.

MARGOT. Alone, apparently. Men's shoes, black, polished, size forty-one. A radio. And a deep voice counting to three.

GISÈLE. Only to three?

MARGOT. Several times.

IRÈNE. It's a waltz. A waltz counts to three. After three, it's a tango.

GISÈLE. And how far does a tango count?

IRÈNE. I never found out. That's why I don't dance it.

(Irène writes in the book.)

IRÈNE. The Glycines book is open. Five-euro stakes. I'm the bank.

GISÈLE. Same as for belote.

IRÈNE. Same as for belote, same as for the manager's flu, and same as for the wedding of the young girl in the kitchen. I won them all.

MARGOT. You lost on the flu.

IRÈNE. I lost on the flu. The manager never caught it, that's not playing fair.

(Irène raises her pen.)

IRÈNE. Margot. Who's the man?

MARGOT. Bruno.

GISÈLE. The physio?

MARGOT. He comes on Thursdays. He's got big hands. And he always says "nice and gently, nice and gently". That's a dancer's line.

IRÈNE. That's a physio's line, Margot.

MARGOT. The two jobs are alike. In novels, the physio always confesses in the end.

IRÈNE. Five euros on Bruno. Gisèle?

GISÈLE. Lucien.

MARGOT. Lucien?

GISÈLE. He's the only one who dances. The only one with records. And he's a forty-one, I'm almost sure of it. He's trodden on me often enough.

IRÈNE. Five euros on Lucien.

GISÈLE. And I hope I lose them.

(A pause. Irène writes without looking up.)

IRÈNE. I'm betting on the bread man.

MARGOT. He's fifty years younger than she is.

IRÈNE. He comes at ten, he whistles waltzes while he parks his van, and I've never once seen him leave at five past. Numbers don't lie.

(Camille comes in with the plate of biscuits.)

CAMILLE. What are you three plotting?

IRÈNE. Nothing. We're doing the accounts.

CAMILLE. The accounts for what?

MARGOT. For the laundry room.

(Camille puts down the plate.)

CAMILLE. Well, well. The laundry room. The laundry room key disappears from the board every Thursday at ten to ten. And at eleven, it's back on its hook.

GISÈLE. And you don't say anything?

CAMILLE. It comes back. I never ask questions of a key that comes back.

IRÈNE. Will you have a bet, Camille?

CAMILLE. No. I work here, Irène. I don't bet on the residents.

IRÈNE. Five euros.

CAMILLE. No.

IRÈNE. Two euros.

CAMILLE. No.

(A pause.)

CAMILLE. Two euros on the gardener.

IRÈNE. Two euros on the gardener.

CAMILLE. And I'm not the one who placed it. You didn't see anyone.

MARGOT. We didn't see anyone.

(Lucien comes in with a box of records under his arm.)

LUCIEN. Hello, hello. It's so quiet in here, it's like a waiting room.

GISÈLE. Lucien, where were you this morning, at ten?

LUCIEN. In my armchair. With my crossword.

GISÈLE. Can anyone confirm that?

LUCIEN. The armchair.

MARGOT. What size?

LUCIEN. Sorry?

MARGOT. What size shoe are you, Lucien?

LUCIEN. Forty-two. Forty-two and a half in the evening.

GISÈLE. A foot can shrink. When it wants to.

LUCIEN. May I ask what I'm being accused of?

IRÈNE. Nothing. Not yet. We've opened the book. Jeanne has a dance partner, in the mornings, in the laundry room.

(Lucien puts down his box. He looks at the book, then at the door.)

LUCIEN. Jeanne. In the laundry room. In the mornings.

IRÈNE. Will you bet?

LUCIEN. I'll bet.

IRÈNE. On who?

LUCIEN. On someone nobody looks at.

IRÈNE. That's not a name.

LUCIEN. Write it down just like that. Five euros.

IRÈNE. "Someone nobody looks at." You always make things complicated.

LUCIEN. I taught geography for thirty-seven years. I never gave an answer without showing the map.

(Jeanne and Rose come in, one after the other. Silence. Everyone looks at them.)

ROSE. Hello.

GISÈLE. Hello, Rose. Hello, Jeanne. Lovely weather.

MARGOT. Lovely.

IRÈNE. Very seasonal.

JEANNE. It's raining.

IRÈNE. Very seasonal all the same.

(Jeanne sits at the back, in her usual place. Rose stays standing. Lucien puts on a record. A waltz.)

LUCIEN. A waltz. Who wants a waltz?

(Nobody moves. Everyone looks at Jeanne. Jeanne looks at her hands.)

ROSE. Me.

GISÈLE. You?

ROSE. Lucien. A waltz.

LUCIEN. Are you leading?

ROSE. I'm leading.

(Rose takes Lucien and sweeps him into the middle of the room. They waltz. Rose leads, Lucien follows, as best he can.)

MARGOT. She's creating a diversion.

IRÈNE. Or she likes to waltz.

GISÈLE. He's never followed me like that.

(Jeanne watches Rose dancing with Lucien. Camille comes and sits beside Jeanne.)

CAMILLE. The sheet by the lift is still empty.

JEANNE. I know.

CAMILLE. Three weeks to go.

JEANNE. Camille, what if I could only dance with one person?

CAMILLE. Then we'd have to write that name next to yours.

(The waltz stops. Rose lets go of Lucien, who leans on a chair.)

LUCIEN. Rose, you led like that for fifteen years?

ROSE. Fifteen. Minus one Saturday, the measles.

(Rose comes back to Jeanne. They look at each other, without a word. Irène, in her book, underlines something.)

SCENE 4: THIRD THURSDAY, MORNING

(The laundry room. The radio is playing a waltz. Jeanne and Rose are waltzing, Rose in her dancing shoes. They turn without counting. The waltz stops.)

ROSE. You didn't count.

JEANNE. I did. In my head.

ROSE. You didn't look at your feet either.

JEANNE. I looked at you.

ROSE. That's the right answer.

(Jeanne sits on the folding table.)

JEANNE. Rose, I'm not going to do it. The party.

ROSE. Why not?

JEANNE. Yesterday, at lunch, Margot asked me if I preferred big hands or small ones. Irène asked me what time the bread man comes. And Gisèle didn't say hello to me.

ROSE. Gisèle never says hello before her coffee.

JEANNE. She'd had her coffee. She's betting on me, Rose. They all are. Like with the manager's flu.

ROSE. They're betting on a man.

JEANNE. And if there isn't one?

ROSE. Then nobody wins. And Irène keeps the kitty. She'll love that.

JEANNE. At the party, they'll all be looking at me. They'll be waiting for someone. And Camille will push me into the middle with Lucien, because he's the only one.

ROSE. You don't want to dance with Lucien?

JEANNE. I can only dance here.

(A pause. Rose sits next to her, on the table.)

ROSE. At the Loire dance hall, I danced with every girl in Saumur. The dark ones, the fair ones, the shy ones, the chemist's daughter who weighed more than I did.

JEANNE. Every one?

ROSE. Every one. And at the end of the night, they went home with a boy. The one who'd been waiting in the café. I put my shoes back in their box.

JEANNE. Every Saturday?

ROSE. Fifteen years. I never asked a single one to come back and dance with me the next Saturday. Not once.

JEANNE. Why not?

ROSE. Because they had their boy.

(A pause. Jeanne looks at Rose's shoes.)

JEANNE. I haven't got a boy in the café.

ROSE. No.

JEANNE. Then ask.

ROSE. Jeanne. Come back next Thursday.

JEANNE. I'll come back.

(Rose takes Jeanne's hand. A knock at the door. They jump up. The door opens. Lucien comes in, a white shirt on a hanger, an iron in his hand.)

LUCIEN. Sorry. I thought nobody came here on Thursdays.

ROSE. Nobody's here.

LUCIEN. So I see.

(Lucien looks at Rose's shoes. Then at Rose's hand, still in Jeanne's. Rose lets go.)

LUCIEN. Size forty-one.

JEANNE. Lucien...

LUCIEN. I've come to iron my shirt for the party. Irène lent me her iron. The one from the raffle. It's never been used.

(Lucien plugs in the iron and lays his shirt on the folding table.)

LUCIEN. I'm not looking. I'm ironing.

(Voices in the corridor.)

GISÈLE. Camille, open up. The key isn't on the board.

CAMILLE. Gisèle, I'm not going to open a door just because a key is missing.

MARGOT. We heard a waltz. And a man's voice.

ROSE. The dryer.

(Rose hides behind the dryer. Lucien puts down the iron, takes Jeanne's hand, puts his other hand on her shoulder and holds her close.)

LUCIEN. Pretend.

JEANNE. Pretend what?

LUCIEN. Pretend you know how.

(The door opens. Gisèle comes in first, then Margot, then Camille, holding a bunch of keys. In the middle of the laundry room, Lucien and Jeanne are in each other's arms.)

GISÈLE. Lucien.

LUCIEN. Gisèle.

MARGOT. It isn't Bruno.

GISÈLE. No. It isn't Bruno.

MARGOT. I'm down five euros.

GISÈLE. And I win.

LUCIEN. Gisèle, it isn't...

GISÈLE. You're a forty-two and a half in the evening, I know. In the morning, it shrinks.

LUCIEN. She learns fast. I'm only holding her.

GISÈLE. You've never held me like that.

LUCIEN. You've never given me the time.

(A pause. Gisèle looks at the shirt on the table.)

GISÈLE. You're ironing your shirt. For the party.

LUCIEN. Yes.

GISÈLE. You never iron anything.

(Gisèle leaves. Margot looks at Jeanne, then at Lucien.)

MARGOT. In my book last week, the count hid his waltz in a linen room too. At the end, he married the laundry maid.

LUCIEN. I'm not a count, Margot.

MARGOT. Nobody is, at the start.

(Margot leaves. Camille stays at the door. Camille looks at the dryer. The tip of a black shoe is sticking out from under the dryer.)

CAMILLE. Right. The laundry room closes at eleven. The key will be back on the board, like every Thursday.

LUCIEN. Thank you, Camille.

CAMILLE. I didn't see anything, Lucien. Nor did the dryer, I imagine.

(Camille leaves. Rose comes out from behind the dryer.)

ROSE. You didn't have to do that.

LUCIEN. No.

JEANNE. Why did you do it?

LUCIEN. I placed a bet, Jeanne. I don't want to lose before the end.

ROSE. And Gisèle?

(Lucien picks up his iron again. He looks at the door.)

LUCIEN. Gisèle is another map. I haven't unfolded that one yet.

JEANNE. She thinks you're teaching me to waltz.

LUCIEN. I can't even dance it. I've been turning the wrong way since I was twenty. Everyone thinks I can dance, because I'm the only man still standing.

(A pause. Rose looks at Lucien, then at the radio.)

ROSE. Put that iron down.

LUCIEN. My shirt...

ROSE. Your shirt can wait. There's half an hour left before eleven. Take Jeanne.

LUCIEN. Are you leading?

ROSE. No. You are. It's time.

(Lucien takes Jeanne as before, his hand on her shoulder.)

ROSE. No. The shoulder is for Jeanne. You, your right hand, on her back.

LUCIEN. On her back? All my life, I've put it on the shoulder.

ROSE. That's why you turn the wrong way.

(Rose switches on the radio. A waltz. Lucien takes Jeanne, his right hand on her back. Rose stands behind him, her hands on his shoulders.)

ROSE. Left foot steps forward. One. The other one follows. Two. Feet together. Three.

LUCIEN. One, two, three.

JEANNE. Don't look at your feet, Lucien. They won't run away.

LUCIEN. You sound just like her.

JEANNE. I had a good teacher.

(They turn. The right way.)

SCENE 5: FOURTH THURSDAY, BY THE LIFT

(The corridor, by the lift, late in the afternoon. On the wall, Camille's sheet, still empty. The end of the tea dance can be heard in the distance. Irène and Margot stand in front of the sheet.)

MARGOT. Still nothing.

IRÈNE. One week before the party. Not one name.

MARGOT. She won't dare. Write her name next to his, by the lift, where everyone walks past.

IRÈNE. Margot, there's no mystery left. You saw him with your own eyes, Lucien, in the laundry room.

MARGOT. I saw him. That's exactly what bothers me.

IRÈNE. Why?

MARGOT. Because it looks too much like what we were expecting. In novels, when it looks too much like it, then it isn't it.

IRÈNE. In real life, when it looks like it, it is it. I did the town hall accounts for thirty years. I never once saw a number in disguise.

(Gisèle arrives, her handbag in her hand. She stops in front of the sheet.)

IRÈNE. Gisèle. You've won. Twenty-two euros. I'll give it to you at the party, that's the rule.

GISÈLE. Keep it.

IRÈNE. You don't keep other people's money. Except at belote.

GISÈLE. I don't want it, Irène. I didn't bet to win.

MARGOT. You didn't dance this afternoon.

GISÈLE. There was nothing to dance to.

MARGOT. There was a tango, a java and two waltzes. And Lucien.

GISÈLE. That's what I'm saying.

(Jeanne arrives, a pen in her hand. She sees the three of them in front of the sheet and stops.)

JEANNE. Good evening.

IRÈNE. Good evening, Jeanne.

(A pause. Irène takes Margot by the arm.)

IRÈNE. Margot, come on, let's go and see if there are any biscuits left.

MARGOT. We ate all the biscuits.

IRÈNE. Then let's go and check.

(Irène and Margot leave. Gisèle stays. Jeanne goes up to the sheet. She doesn't write anything.)

GISÈLE. Go on, write. Don't mind me.

JEANNE. Gisèle...

GISÈLE. I've danced with him every Thursday for two years. He's trodden on my feet a hundred times. I never said a thing. And he's never ironed a shirt for me.

JEANNE. It wasn't for me that he ironed it.

GISÈLE. Who for, then?

JEANNE. For the party. To dance. With someone who already knows how to turn the right way.

GISÈLE. You.

JEANNE. No.

GISÈLE. He was in the laundry room. He was holding you.

JEANNE. He was holding me to help me out. It's not Lucien, Gisèle. It's never been Lucien.

(A pause. Gisèle looks at Jeanne.)

GISÈLE. Then who is it?

JEANNE. You'll see at the party.

GISÈLE. And why did he pretend?

JEANNE. Because he's kind. And because he placed a bet.

GISÈLE. Who did he bet on?

JEANNE. Ask him. He won't tell you, but ask him anyway.

(Lucien arrives with his box of records. He sees Gisèle and stops.)

LUCIEN. Gisèle.

GISÈLE. Lucien. Who did you bet on?

LUCIEN. On someone nobody looks at.

GISÈLE. That's not an answer.

LUCIEN. No. It's a map.

GISÈLE. And me, Lucien? Am I someone nobody looks at?

LUCIEN. You? Nobody sees anyone but you. That's why I never dare tell you anything.

(A pause. Gisèle picks up her handbag.)

GISÈLE. Next Thursday, at the party, the second waltz.

LUCIEN. The second one?

GISÈLE. The first one's already taken, apparently. The second one is mine. And you hold me like you did in the laundry room.

LUCIEN. I'll try.

GISÈLE. You won't try. You'll do it.

(Gisèle leaves. Lucien watches her go, then turns to Jeanne.)

LUCIEN. Did you tell her?

JEANNE. I told her it wasn't you.

LUCIEN. That's already a lot.

(Lucien leaves in turn. Rose arrives from the other end of the corridor. She sees Jeanne in front of the sheet, pen in hand.)

ROSE. Are you writing?

JEANNE. I can't get the pen open.

(Rose takes the pen, opens it, and hands it back.)

ROSE. There.

JEANNE. Rose. I've known how to waltz for two weeks.

ROSE. I know.

JEANNE. I kept coming anyway.

ROSE. I know that too.

(A pause. Jeanne writes a name on the sheet. Then she holds out the pen to Rose. Rose looks at it for a long time. She writes in turn. Camille arrives with the box for the party and sees the sheet.)

CAMILLE. Ah. We have names.

JEANNE. We have two.

(Camille reads the sheet. A pause. Camille takes the sheet down, folds it in four and slips it into a pocket.)

CAMILLE. Perfect. I won't put it back up. Irène's book doesn't need this.

ROSE. Aren't you going to say anything?

CAMILLE. I'm saying we'll need some room in the middle of the floor. I'll go

and push the tables back.

SCENE 6: THE SPRING PARTY

(The common room, hung with paper lanterns, the tables pushed back against the walls. Irène, her book on her knees, sits next to Margot; Gisèle stands next to Lucien, who wears an ironed shirt.)

IRÈNE. Betting is closed. Twenty-two euros in the kitty. Bruno, the bread man, the gardener, Lucien, and "someone nobody looks at".

MARGOT. Bruno didn't even come.

IRÈNE. Nor did the gardener.

MARGOT. Nor did the bread man.

IRÈNE. He doesn't deliver in the evening, Margot. That proves nothing.

GISÈLE. Lucien came.

LUCIEN. Lucien always comes.

(Camille comes in with a cordless microphone. The chatter dies down.)

CAMILLE. Good evening, everyone. Welcome to Les Glycines, families, neighbours, and the grandchildren who've already found the buffet.

IRÈNE. We've seen them.

CAMILLE. This year, no raffle.

IRÈNE. Thank God.

CAMILLE. This year, we open the ball with a waltz. One couple has signed up. I'm not allowed to read out the names. I've been asked to let the first person come forward unprompted. Lucien, the music, please.

(Lucien puts on a record. A waltz. He stays by the record player. Nobody moves.)

MARGOT. She's not coming.

IRÈNE. She's coming. I saw her at lunch. She didn't eat a thing. When you don't eat a thing, you come.

(Rose sits alone near the buffet.)

MARGOT. Rose, aren't you dancing?

ROSE. I'm waiting.

MARGOT. Who for?

ROSE. The music. It hasn't started yet.

MARGOT. It started a minute ago.

ROSE. Not mine.

(Jeanne comes in. She has a shoebox under her arm. Everyone looks at her.)

GISÈLE. She's got a box.

MARGOT. A shoebox.

IRÈNE. Note the time.

(Jeanne crosses the room. She walks past Lucien. Lucien leaves the record player, greets her with a nod and goes over to Gisèle.)

LUCIEN. Gisèle. I know the first one's taken. I'm booking the second one anyway.

GISÈLE. You've already booked it.

LUCIEN. I'm booking it twice. Just to be sure.

(Jeanne stops in front of Rose. She opens the box. Inside, the dancing shoes.)

ROSE. My shoes.

JEANNE. You lent them to me on Monday. To try on.

ROSE. To try on, I said.

JEANNE. I tried them on. They fit.

(Jeanne takes off her shoes and puts on the dancing shoes. She holds out her hand to Rose.)

JEANNE. Rose. A waltz?

ROSE. In front of everyone?

JEANNE. In a laundry room, nobody looks at anybody. Here, everybody looks. I've come to prefer it here.

ROSE. I'm the one who leads.

JEANNE. No. Tonight, I am.

ROSE. I can't follow, Jeanne. I never could.

JEANNE. Look at me. Not at your feet.

(Rose stands and takes Jeanne's hand. They go to the middle of the room. Jeanne puts her hand on Rose's back. A pause. They waltz. Jeanne leads.)

(Silence in the room. Irène closes her book, then opens it again.)

MARGOT. It isn't Lucien.

GISÈLE. No. It isn't Lucien.

IRÈNE. Nobody bet on that.

LUCIEN. Read it again, Irène.

(Irène reads the book again.)

IRÈNE. "Someone nobody looks at." Lucien, everyone's looking at Rose. She's in the middle of the room.

LUCIEN. Tonight, yes. For fifteen years of Saturdays, everyone looked at the girl she was dancing with. Never at her.

IRÈNE. And how do you know that?

LUCIEN. She told me while she was spinning me round. People talk a lot when they lead.

(Irène counts out notes and coins and hands them to Lucien.)

IRÈNE. Twenty-two euros. That's the second time the bank has lost. After the manager's flu.

LUCIEN. Camille. For next year's lanterns.

CAMILLE. I don't take betting money, Lucien.

LUCIEN. It's lantern money.

CAMILLE. For lanterns, I'll take it.

(Camille pockets the money along with the folded sheet. Margot watches Jeanne and Rose turning.)

MARGOT. In my books, it never ends like this.

IRÈNE. How does it end, then?

MARGOT. Not as well.

(The waltz goes on. In the middle of the room, Jeanne and Rose turn.)

ROSE. They're watching us.

JEANNE. Everyone is.

ROSE. The grandchildren too. One of them has his mouth wide open.

JEANNE. He's allowed. My mouth was open too. Six months, at the back of the room.

ROSE. Are you counting?

JEANNE. No.

ROSE. Nor am I.

JEANNE. Rose. Next Thursday, the laundry room?

ROSE. What for? You can waltz.

JEANNE. The tango. Irène says it counts past three.

(Gisèle stands up and holds out her hand to Lucien.)

GISÈLE. Lucien. This one isn't over yet. We're not waiting for the second.

(Lucien and Gisèle join the waltz. They go round a few times.)

GISÈLE. Lucien. You're turning the right way.

LUCIEN. Someone showed me the map.

GISÈLE. Who?

LUCIEN. Someone nobody looks at.

(Camille holds out a hand to Irène.)

CAMILLE. Irène?

IRÈNE. I'm eighty-eight, Camille.

CAMILLE. Then we'll go nice and gently.

IRÈNE. Nice and gently, nice and gently. You sound like the physio.

(Irène stands, puts her book down on the chair, and dances with Camille. Margot is left alone. She looks around the room, then joins the waltz, alone, her arms open.)

(The lanterns. The waltz. Everyone turns. The light slowly fades.)



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