

A Brighter Garden

We can see a tower. Enter Sadie, carrying a tray. She produces a key, and unlocks the door at the foot of the tower.

Sadie I'm supposed to lock this, but my lady says to leave it open. Ho ho. (She disappears, then reappears at the top of the tower, where she puts her tray on a table.)
Mistress Melissa, your lunch is ready.

Melissa (appearing) Nobody in sight?

Sadie holds up the key, and signals towards the lower door.

Melissa Leave the key with me. (Sadie shakes her head vigorously.) I may need it.

Sadie hands over the key, and disappears, first from the top of the tower, then out the door at the bottom. Enter Quentin, looking up and admiring the woman he sees.

Quentin Oh mistress mine, oh would that you were ...

Melissa Sir Quentin. You are with me at last.

Quentin It is my ultimate wish to be with you, and yet ...

Melissa ... and yet?

Quentin They have placed you in that tower, and the door is locked.

Melissa Are you sure?

Quentin This whole castle secures you from my desire.

Melissa Yet you are already within its walls.

Quentin I disguised myself, and I paid some bribes ...

Melissa For me?

Quentin For the chance to feel this longing coursing through my veins.

Melissa I have longing in me too.

Quentin Oh Melissa! Melissa! If only you could be mine ...

Melissa Sir Quentin, you have not thought to push the door.

Quentin Push the door?

Melissa (sweetly) Push the door, and come on up.

Quentin (pushing) I did not think it would be so easy.

Melissa There are steps between us. Take them one at a time.

Quentin (rushing up) Two! Four! In a single bound!

Melissa You may share my lunch, Sir Quentin, then I'll share my mind.

Quentin We'll share your bed first, if you have a mind for that.

Melissa I do. It's in here. As we share our love, you'll see a wide land stretched around.

They go in to where Melissa sleeps. Sadie reappears, with a servant called Jacques.

Sadie I think my lady means to keep the key. That means you must keep everybody out, brother Jacques.

Jacques I'll do whatever you say, so long as you let me in.

Sadie laughs, Jacques laughs, then we hear that Melissa and Quentin are laughing too.

Quentin (reappearing) Are we fools to laugh? Is there trouble around the corner that we're too stupid to see?

Melissa (reappearing) Trouble's all right if we can keep it around the corner. It's when it gets into bed that we're in strife!

Quentin I'll bring you no trouble, Melissa. Nothing but love.

He kisses her. Sadie and Jacques look up enviously.

Sadie She grumbles about being locked away, but at least she's got a room.

Jacques If we can't have a room, Sadie mine, we can get behind a door!

Sadie and Jacques disappear behind the door.

Melissa Have something to eat. I want to keep you strong.

Quentin I could eat a wild boar. I could kill a lion with bare hands.

Melissa And I can turn your savagery into song.

Quentin Sing, my love.

She sings a song from the *Pelleas et Melisande* of Maeterlink and Debussy, given here in both French and English. Producers will have to decide between offering the song in the version more approachable for an English-speaking audience and offering the version which is more mediaeval to English ears.

Melissa

Mes longs cheveux descendent jusqu'au seuil de la tour!	My long hair falls as far as the base of the tower,
Mes cheveux vous attendent tout le long de la tour!	My hair awaits you all the length of the tower,
Et tout le long du jour!	and all the length of the day!
Et tout le long du jour!	And all the length of the day!
Saint Daniel et Saint Michel, Saint Michel et Saint Raphael,	Saint Daniel and Saint Michael, Saint Michael and Saint Raphael,
Je suis nee un dimanche! Un dimanche a midi! ⁽¹⁾	I was born on a Sunday, on a Sunday at noon!

Sadie (emerging from behind the door, below) She beds him, yet her song is full of longing. She's a strange mistress.

Jacques I wouldn't mind if you sang now, Sadie. I wouldn't mind if we sang together.

Sadie You know any good songs?

Jacques Only crude ones. I need a woman to bring out the best in me.

Sadie Who's going to bring out the best in me?

Jacques I will, if I can.

Sadie Well, don't try too hard.

Jacques I thought that's what you'd want.

Sadie When a woman loves, she changes. That's how we are.

Jacques That's not clear to me at all. Love's so wonderful, I want nothing to change.

Sadie I'll swell up and have a child. Then we'll be three, not two.

Jacques (surprised) Three?

Sadie Love's like a tunnel, or a walk around a hill. You go in, you come out changed. You set off, you don't come back the same.

Jacques You don't seem changed to me.

Sadie And yet I am. You're the change. Because you don't know yourself, you don't realise you're a change.

Jacques You're too deep for me, Sadie. I guess you might be right.

Sadie Come inside and love me again. I'm filled with the need for love when you're close.

Jacques Will we always be so loving, do you know?

Sadie We will, but it won't find its way out in the same way.

Jacques Another mystery. Let's go in and find the mystery that matters most.

Jacques and Sadie go inside again, pushing the door shut behind them.

Quentin (at the top of the tower) Are you following what those two are doing?

Melissa It's no mystery to me.

Quentin Do you think they're borrowing something from us?

Melissa I think they are, and we're borrowing from them.

Quentin Does anybody know what's going on in this tower?

Melissa Someone does, but I don't know who they are.

Quentin Then we're not secure.

Melissa That's why my father put me here, but you got in.

Quentin Ha! The moment I knew you were captive, I determined to set you free!

Melissa Freedom? There's no such thing, except in singing.

Quentin When you sang, before, it was as if my heart froze ...

Melissa Singing.

(She repeats a few lines of the song she sang before.)

Saint Daniel et Saint Michel, Saint Michel et Saint Raphael, Je suis nee un dimanche! Un dimanche a midi!	Saint Daniel and Saint Michael, Saint Michael and Saint Raphael, I was born on a Sunday, on a Sunday at noon!
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Quentin I don't think I understand. Born on a Sunday. What does that matter?

Melissa It doesn't matter at all. That's why it's important.

Quentin How's it important if it doesn't matter?

Melissa The important things are those you can't understand. It's always been so.

Quentin There's no logic in that.

Melissa None at all.

Quentin Then how ... I mean ... what ...

Melissa (appearing) Mother. My noble father. (presenting Quentin) My husband ... still to be.

Agathe Sadie! Jacques! You were guarding her!

Jacques hangs his head, but Sadie is bright.

Sadie There's a time in everyone's life when they go searching for a mate.

Rohan (angry, but also solemn) This is a dark day. Nothing good will come of this!

The stage darkens. The accompaniment gives us a rising and falling motive, which is presented many times, in one form or another, indicating the passage of time. Then brightness returns, showing us a scene that hasn't changed in essence, except that there are trees, bushes and flowers to be seen, and two people sitting on separate seats: Leo and Amanda, the children of Melissa. He is perhaps eighteen; she is almost twenty. They are fond of each other, as we see by their teasing.

Amanda (as he sniffs a flower) Leo, with a name like yours, you should be a soldier.

Leo And you should be a saint!

Amanda I think it would suit me. But a saint must do things of heroic virtue.

Leo The world's full of wrongs to put right.

Amanda (teasing him) Leo the lion strikes down wrong-doers with a mighty paw!

Leo My paws are more suited to gardening. Trees and flowers. The wrong-doers spring up everywhere, like weeds.

Amanda Then you must pull them out. Grip them by the neck, and strangle!

Leo I wasn't made for it, as you know.

Sadie enters, and then Jacques. They are an affectionate couple, and Sadie, having no children, treats Melissa's as if they are hers. Amanda comes to her to share a problem.

Sadie You haven't heard from him. Does he not write? (Amanda shakes her head.) Get your father to speak to his father.

At the mention of Amanda's father, she looks to the tower which was once the rather porous prison of her mother.

Amanda He sits up there all day, writing.

Sadie Does he read you what he's written?

Amanda When he does, it's about the loneliness of love.

Sadie Just what you want for yourself. You must borrow a poem from your father.

Amanda It would look silly, coming from me.

Sadie Jacques?

Jacques My love?

Sadie Tell my lady why she's wrong.

Jacques My lady Amanda, if the young man you love sees a paper with your name on it, he will believe the words are yours.

Amanda But they'll be father's words.

Jacques No word is ever spoken that's not been said before. If your father writes a poem, and the words express your heart, it's like a robe which has been worn by many in a lifetime's use.

Leo You've worked for my father, Jacques. His poetry has entered you as well.

Sadie A long life causes many things that nobody expects. Here's your mother!

Enter Melissa. She comes to centre stage, acknowledges those who are there, and sits.

Melissa It's the day of the lord. Your garden, Jacques, is a song of praise.

Jacques It's your son's work, my lady, more than mine.

Melissa You are generous, Jacques. Do you remember that once you guarded my door?

Jacques Only because I was told to, my lady. It was your father's wish ...

Melissa It was my father's command. Now I look after him, and mother too. Time brings changes to things we thought would last.

Sadie Nothing stands for long, my lady. We have need of the young to replace us.

Melissa Amanda, knock on your father's door. Ask him if he will come down.

Amanda (knocking) Father? Father? Will you join us in the courtyard, down below?

There is a silence.

Melissa We only exist in the poems he writes. Leo, tell us what you and Jacques are planning for the garden.

Leo Jacques says we should divide the garden with walks, one for each season of the year. In winter, a few flowers twining around bare branches; in summer, shade.

Melissa What will we do in spring?

Leo Jacques has a special plan for spring ...

Jacques We'll make a spot at the edge of the garden, some seats inside a bower ...

Leo ... and the seats will face the world ...

Jacques ... and in winter we'll look in ...

Leo ... and in summer we'll sit in shade, heavy branches drooping to the ground ...

Amanda In autumn?

Jacques There'll be a place near the gate, where messengers arrive, with flowers ...

Amanda ... if there are any ...

Jacques There'll be flowers, Lady Amanda. There always are.

Amanda For those who are happy!

Jacques Master Leo, tell her!

Leo Our garden in autumn will be a place for waiting, and in spring, a place of confidence in the world ...

Melissa Can we be sure the garden will be beautiful in spring?

Leo Mother, of course we can be sure!

Jacques (looking fondly on the mistress of the castle) My lady knows that nothing is certain but God. If the garden grows, we can be sure that God is pleased. If the garden fails, God has reason to be displeased. A garden tells us what we need to know.

Melissa And you, Jacques, say what it pleases me to hear. But can you not put those thoughts in my husband's mind? I pray you, try to do so.

Sadie (taking up this challenge to her husband) The truest words, my lady, can only be heard by those who are listening.

Melissa I cannot tell what you mean.

Sadie Ah ...

Jacques Ah ...

Melissa My children?

Amanda Mother, I'm unsure ...

Leo I'm too young to know.

Melissa When I was young, I sang a sad song. I thought I knew what life would be, but happily I was wrong. I do not sing it now.

Amanda What do you want to sing now, mother?

Her mother thinks for a few moments, then puts her head back, and sings.

Melissa There is another sky,
 Ever serene and fair,
 And there is another sunshine,

Though it be darkness there;
 Never mind faded forests ... Quentin

(She pauses; it's clear that she's put her husband's name into the verse she's singing.)

Never mind silent fields –
Here is a little forest,
 Whose leaf is ever green;
 Here is a brighter garden,
 Where not a frost has been;
 In its unfading flowers
 I hear the bright bee hum;
 Prithee, my brother,
 Into *my* garden come! (2)

Those who are with her are delighted, but they pause, waiting to see if Quentin will respond.

Sadie The master doesn't reply.
 Jacques He's occupied in his mind.

Then Quentin's voice bursts from the tower, though we don't see him.

Quentin A garden grows inside my mind.
 How long has it been there?
 When I was young, I fear that I was blind,
 That I alone had the key to humankind
 And now the key is lost: oh where? Oh where?

Sadie Still talking about that key.

Melissa That tower's not been locked in years.

Amanda Why was it ever locked? It's not a bank!
 Leo If father didn't use it, I'd pull it down.
 Amanda It gives a view of the countryside. I'd open it up.
 Melissa I'm leaving it as it is. Your father will understand.
 Amanda Why, mother? Why not do as I suggest?
 Melissa It reminds me of my restriction. I was not always free.
 Leo You've given us freedom, mother. Why do you want the tower?

We hear the voice from above, again, pondering.

Quentin That I alone had the key to humankind
 And now the key is lost: oh where? Oh where?
 Melissa He thinks a key is absolute. It's no more than a moment. And we pass it by.
 Leo Mother?
 Melissa Your father needs the tower.
 Amanda But it's you that were locked up, not him.
 Melissa Think about it. (Her children don't know what to make of this.) He released me. It was the biggest thing he did in my life, the biggest thing in his ...

Enter two old people, Rohan and Agathe. As they cross the stage, Melissa stands, and watches them until they're seated.

Agathe You are our guardian, Melissa. We only live through you.
 Melissa And Quentin. He writes about you, when he's been looking down.

Rohan Kindly, thank God. He's better to me than ever I was, to him.
 Melissa (to her children) You see? My father is searching for the key. What brought about the change?
 Leo What did bring about the change, mother?
 Amanda Is there a key? Was there ever a key?
 Sadie Oh, there was a key all right. I was supposed to lock your mother in.
 Leo Did you give mother the key? For herself?
 Sadie I did.
 Amanda Why?
 Sadie Because I needed it for myself.

Amanda and Leo are puzzled.

Jacques Sadie needed ... shall we say ... to unlock herself.
 Sadie I wanted that very much!
 Leo Is that when you got married?
 Jacques A happy time. Sadie couldn't keep your mother locked up when she was opening the door to me.
 Amanda (catching on) So there's no key, only a decision?
 Melissa There was a key. It hasn't been seen for years.
 Quentin The things I see around me
 Are the things that furnish my mind:
 Was there a time when I was blind?
 Was there a time when I was blind?
 Melissa Quentin, my love, come down. We are sitting at the foot of your tower.
 Quentin (appearing) Coming, my love.

The music offers us a few thoughtful moments, then Quentin appears. He stands in the doorway of the tower, then he crosses very slowly to Rohan and Agathe, drawing Leo and Amanda with him. Rohan and Agathe stand, they accept Quentin's embrace, then they follow as he turns and leads his tiny party to where Melissa sits.

Quentin What do you say to us, my love?

Melissa I say what I've been saying for years:

Here is a little forest,

Whose leaf is ever green;

Here is a brighter garden,

Where not a frost has been;

In its unfading flowers

I hear the bright bee hum;

Prithee, my brother,

Into *my* garden come!

The members of her family smile, content to be in the garden of her love.

(1) from *Pelleas et Melisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck

(2) Poem No. 2 (1851), from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited Thomas H. Johnson, Faber and Faber, London, 1977