

ABOUT FACE (forward march)

by Holly Adams, 2011

Main Characters

Soldier Patients:

Antonio DeVin, a simple man, a stutterer. Missing an eye. Nose and lip on right side injured and 'repaired', but still contorted. Repair includes seam near right eye hairline such that some hair sticks straight out. Right ear just a small tab.

Corporal Guy D'Oiseaux, aviation burns and scarring across whole face

Gerard Leroux. Injury affects one eye, nose, and front of upper mouth (crushed). Right hand.

Jean-Paul Muir. Face severely burned, including nose and eyelids; leg and torso injuries sustained as well.

Jeremiah Fleming. Lower jaw gone, tongue shortened, ear. Youngest.

Mrs. Anna Coleman Ladd

Eva St. Giles

Mme. L'Infirmiere Frechette

Jacques Bardes

Captain Corey DuChamps—walks with a limp

Supporting Characters:

Penelope Swift

Ambassador's Wife, Gwen

Ambassador (could be played by actor who is Guy)

Set:

SL, the studio clinic. There are two work stations, one DSLish, one more ULCS. The plaster copies of faces hang on the US wall.

SR, the hospital ward.

Historical Notes:

1) The only real person in this play is Anna Coleman Ladd, and these are fictionalized moments in her studio. In Ladd's studio, which was credited with better artistic results than Gillies', a single mask required a month of close attention. Yet, between 1918 and 1919, they produced 220 masks.

2) Gaston Leroux's 'The Phantom of the Opera' was first published as a serialization in Le Gaulois from November 19, 1909 to January 8, 1910, then released as a novel (French, 1910, English 1911). The first film version was Das Gespenst im Opernhaus or Das Phantom der Oper in 1916.

I include this detail because I find it impossible to believe that none of the 20,000 faceless soldiers drew a parallel in their own lives. In this play, its influence is very subtle (without this note, I doubt many readers would understand Gerard's self-introduction).

Setting:

Val-de-Grace Military Hospital near Paris

It is November at the newly-opened Studio of Anna Coleman Ladd, 1917

Scene One

Lights up in the hospital side of the stage. The studio is only about a month old, and the people brought together in the hospital are relatively new to each other, except for Corey's men, Jean-Paul Muir, Jeremiah, and Antonio, who are from the same Company. Jacques is his usual upbeat efficient self, scurrying about, tidying up. Antonio is trying to slick his hair, which the injury and surgeries have caused to grow strangely on the left side. Gerard lounges in his bed, reading a magazine—during this part of the scene, he will drag over the little nightstand and put his feet up on it. Jeremiah is holding a letter and a picture. Madame Frechette, head nurse, is not yet on stage. She will arrive with JP. Gerard begins singing in darkness.)

Gerard (*singing, Madelon*): Pour le repos le plaisir du militaire
Il est là bás à deux pas de la forêt
Une maison aux murs tout couverts de lière
Aux Tourlourous c'est le nom du cabaret.
And while the wine goes to their senses
Her sparkling glance goes to their hearts
Their admiration so intense is
Each one his tale of love imparts
She coquettes with them all
but favors none at all

Jacques: And a good morning to you, too, Monsieur Leroux. How's the surgery feeling today?

Gerard (*singing Madelon as Jacques checks him*): And here's the way they banter ev'ry time they call.

O Madelon you are the only one
O Madelon for you we'll carry on
It's so long since we have seen a miss
Won't you give us just a kiss

Jacques: And thanks ever so for the serenade. I'll be sure to remember you in my will.

Antonio: He-he's p-p-practicing f-for the n-n-new g-girl.

Gerard (*singing, Madelon*):
But Madelon she takes it all in fun
She laugh and says "You'll see it can't be done
I would like but how can I consent
When I'm true to the whole regiment"

Jacques: (*to Gerard as he crosses to Jeremiah*) Well, you'll have to try harder than that to scare her off—it's all been decided and she's coming today.

Gerard: And in all likelihood leaves tomorrow. She's far too pretty to actually **stay**. (*singing*)
It's a long way to Tiparary! It's a long way to go. It's a long way to Tiparary and the
prostitutes I know!

Antonio: C-c-can w-we g-g-g-g-get a r-radio?

Gerard: W-w-why? D-d-d-don't you like my singing? (*Sings again, is ignored, tapers off*)

Willie Earl met a sweet young girl one day in France,
Her naughty little glance, put Willie in a trance;
Willie Earl couldn't understand her talk you see,
He only knew two words in French
That he learned in the trench,
They were "oo-la-la!" and "wee-wee."
They would spoon beneath the moon above;
It was fun to hear them making love.

Refrain:

She'd say, "com-pro-nay voo, papa?"
and he'd say "oo-la-la! wee wee."
She'd smile and whisper "mercy ba-coo,"
He'd answer, "I don't mind if I do."

Jacques (*teasingly to Jeremiah*): Miss Eva St. Giles. Here's her picture and letter of introduction. I'm counting on you, Jeremiah Fleming, to make her feel welcome.

Gerard: Personally I wish they'd picked a man.

(*Jeremiah gets up and takes letter and picture to Antonio*)

Antonio: W-w-why w-would she co-come?

Gerard: Oh she probably got thrown out of her home for being a sexed-up drunken Bohemian or something. And she imagines she is an artist. What better way to rub daddy's nose in it than do something anguishingly noble?

(*Jacques reaches over, grabs Gerard's magazine and smacks him with it*)

Jacques: Behave.

(*Jeremiah snorts, then speaks*)

Jeremiah: Yacques, guz che gnou hal yee look? (Does she know how we look?)

Jacques: Yes. When she became one of those seriously considered, she was sent a picture, one of the sketches done by Mrs. Ladd. Mrs. Ladd sent sketches partly to prepare the possible candidates, and partly to let them know what they would be doing.

Antonio: Who-whose picture?

Jacques: Our only married man, of course! (*Jeremiah looks away*) Can't have her slaving over our dapper guests and just showing up to shop for a husband.

Antonio: Y-y-y-you're married?

Jeremiah: Got gnarried coo yeeks gefore I yas coasted (Got married two weeks before I was posted).

Gerard: Ahh, youth. Jacques, will Madame Ladd be able to fit him for a prosthetic heart?

(Madame Frechette enters wheeling in a groggy JP, who is fresh from a follow-up surgery on his leg. Jacques moves to JP's bed to assist Mme Frechette in getting JP settled)

Mme Frechette: Here we are, Monsieur Muir, back at your bed. We'll get you settled in so you can rest a bit before meeting our new associate. *(looks about, to Jacques, more discreetly)* I trust everything is in order?

Jacques: As much as it can be, Madame Frechette. *(jauntily)* You know how it is—gone are the days of wine, women, and song! *(Gereard resumes singing, which continues more quietly into the studio section)* Paris isn't what it once was.

Mme Frechette: Nothing is. This whole war has been marked with ignorant good intentions that lead to catastrophe. *(resumes briskness)* Well. Idle hands are the devil's playground; let's prepare for the onslaught and make the best of it.

(Lights up on the studio side of the stage. Penelope enters, dragging Eva into the studio. She stops and notices that Mrs. Ladd isn't there yet)

Penelope: It doesn't look like Mrs. Ladd is here yet—this is really the Dragon Lady's realm, but you already know that. This is where you'll be spending most of your time; well, half of your time, anyway.

Eva: Dragon Lady?

Penelope: *(affected Boston accent)* Mrs. Anna Coleman Ladd. *(drops accent)* She doesn't yell or storm about, but you always get the feeling that there is a lot more going on underneath, and God help you if you break her moral code.

Eva: What's the moral code?

Penelope: Oh, you know. Behave yourself with the normal ones, pretend you don't notice the rest. Little things like that. She's the boss of this side, and Madame Frechette is the boss of the hospital ward the boys stay in.

Eva: Frechette is a pretty name. What's she like?

Penelope: *(rolls eyes to ceiling in a fun way)* She's a terror, a real battle-axe. But it's honestly come by—she served as a nurse in the Bohr War so she has nerves of steel and a stomach of iron. But she doesn't necessarily appreciate the interests of young people, if you know what I mean. *(winks, Eva laughs)*

Penelope: Speaking of which, here's the low down and the who's who on the gents list. Feel free to make notes on your dance card or in your little black book! *(Eva laughs again)*

Eva: Penelope, I am **so** glad it was you who brought me! I don't know what I would have done if it had been someone dreadful.

Penelope: Thank you. It's nice for me, too. Another fresh young face if you know what I mean *(quick hug)*. Just remember that I get an arranger's fee if any of these leads work out!

(Eva laughs again)

Penelope: Okay. Doctors. All the doctors are married or overworked and unmarriageable. One or two of the married ones are discreet if you simply *must* have some male companionship out for a meal or after-dinner entertainment. Please note: you won't really see them anyway, it being War Time and you being mostly here or in the Special Ward. Brave girl, you are, by the way, for doing all this. Personally that ward and its inhabitants give me the willies. They're nice boys, I know, but *(grimaces)*. Their Captain, Corey DuChamps I think his name is, is **very** cute, but I'd steer clear if I were you; he's a little too interesting, if you know what I mean. I'm holding out for a Lieutenant or better—the further up the ladder, the less they behave like damaged goods!

Eva: Damaged goods?

(Mrs. Ladd enters part way through next speech, Corey following)

Penelope: Skittish, wary, brooding.... You'd think they would want to put it behind them and move on, but you know how men are. Let's see, have I left anyone out? Oh—there's Jacques, Jacques Bardes. You'll probably see him every day, so stay on his good side. Which isn't hard—he is really quite charming if you don't mind them a little 'light in the step'.

Mrs. Ladd: Good afternoon, Miss Swift. Thank you for bringing Miss St. Giles and giving her an orientation.

Penelope: My pleasure, Mrs. Ladd. Anything to support our boys.

Mrs. Ladd: Yes. Is there anything else I can help you with?

Penelope: Any messages for Traveler's Aid or letters to go out or anything? Or for you, Captain DuChamps?

Mrs. Ladd: We're all set, thank you. Please help yourself to a chocolate in the outer room on your way out. They are next to the checkers.

Penelope: Thank you, ma'am, but I'll decline. Must watch my girlish figure or no one else will, right? Besides, the men need them more than I. Until next time then, Mrs. Ladd, Captain DuChamps.

Corey: Miss Swift.

Penelope *(to Eva)* I'll see you before too long. Save up juicy stories for me! *(exit)*