

Lux in
Tenebris
(1919)

By Bertolt Brecht

Digitalized by

RevSocialist

for

SocialistStories

CHARACTERS

PADUK

MRS. HOGGE

THE REPORTER

THE CHAPLAIN

THE ASSISTANT

PEOPLE

MRS. HOGGE'S GIRLS

A street in the red-light district. On the right and in the background brothels with red glass doors surmounted by red lanterns. The street runs upstage where it turns left at a right angle. On the left a large canvas tent having in front an opening covered with a flap that blows in the breeze. Outside this opening, to the right, a table and chair. At some distance from the tent and surrounding it, a board fence. On the tent a large sign, reading: "Let there be light! Mass education!" A spotlight on the roof of the tent throws a chalky white light on the whole street.

1

Night. Paduk, a red-haired man, is sitting at the table with a cash register. People are buying tickets.

PADUK Soft chancre: one mark. Gonorrhoea: one-sixty. Syphilis: two-fifty. Don't push!

A MAN When does the lecture start?

PADUK In three minutes.

A WOMAN Is it wax models?

PADUK Here's your change: forty pfennigs. Then you don't want syphilis?

THE WOMAN Is it wax models, or . . .

PADUK Wax models and specimens in alcohol.

THE WOMAN Then I'll take syphilis too.

PADUK Two-fifty.

A MAN Gonorrhoea.

PADUK Right. Here you are.

A WOMAN Syphilis, please. No, just syphilis. That's the scariest, isn't it?

PADUK Can't have syphilis by itself. Lecture starts with gonorrhoea. So it's gonorrhoea.

A WOMAN (*standing in line*) My sister was so upset she couldn't sleep all night.

ANOTHER WOMAN I thought I might as well have a look. I usually go to the movies on Thursdays.

FIRST WOMAN The street alone is worth the money.

PADUK Step up! Have your money ready! Gonorrhoea, one mark; soft chancre, one-sixty; syphilis, two-fifty.

A MAN Gonorrhoea.

PADUK One mark. That's only fifty pfennigs!

THE MAN That's all I'm paying.

PADUK Then you don't get in. Next!

THE MAN We'll see about that. You want me to catch all these terrible diseases because I only have half a mark?

PADUK (*to the next person*) Syphilis, two-fifty. Right.

THE MAN You mean I don't get a ticket?

PADUK No.

THE MAN What about my health? My wife! My kids!

PADUK What about my investment! My expenses! My taxes! The lecture! Beat it or I'll call the cops!

(*The man, cursing, goes out right*)

A WOMAN He's soused to the gills.

SECOND WOMAN I wonder where he's going.

THIRD WOMAN Looked as if he'd decided to get even.

FIRST WOMAN You said it. He's going across the street.

THE MAN (*entering the brothel, right*) Damn bastards!

PADUK With half a mark? Fat chance! Gonorrhoea, one mark. The lecture is about to start. The rest of you ladies and gentlemen, kindly wait half an hour. We're open all night. (*Gets up and draws curtain. Several people are left standing on the left; they are joined by newcomers. From inside the tent, unintelligible sounds in a steady monotone.*)

2

REPORTER (*to Paduk*) I'm Schmidt of *The News*. Got a moment to spare?

PADUK You're from the press? Of course.

REPORTER Business seems to be booming.

PADUK We're sold out.

REPORTER That's very encouraging. Very encouraging, indeed.

PADUK I think so too.

REPORTER I mean because it's for such a worthy cause.

PADUK You're so right.

REPORTER What exactly does your exhibit consist of?

PADUK My exhibit portrays the disastrous effects of venereal disease. A warning against prostitution which is contaminating our society. A fervent appeal to the infected to undergo treatment before the poison destroys them body and soul.

REPORTER Is this an advertisement for some doctor?

PADUK My dear fellow! I have but one motivation: love for my fellowmen. Just think of the thousands of sufferers!

(*Reporter writes this down*)

PADUK The countless victims of prostitution who, in a moment of weakness, perhaps induced by alcohol, stagger into the arms of disease-ridden whores.

REPORTER I see you're an idealist. What made you decide to work for the good of your fellowmen?

PADUK For years I have been investigating the vice and corruption of the big city. They destroy the soul and undermine the body, paving the way for prostitution, liquor and crime.

REPORTER And crime. You have a marvelous command of the language. Are you aware of that? You sound as if you'd been a newspaperman for years. Did you go to college?

PADUK No, I just finished public school. My poor parents couldn't afford to train me for a lucrative profession.

REPORTER That's very well put. Can you tell me something about your childhood and early development? Your exhibit has aroused such widespread interest.

PADUK My life is as clear as daylight. I am a believer in clarity. I am also a self-made man. My father was a small shopkeeper whose drinking brought misery on his family. My mother was bedridden all her life. In a word my childhood was filled with poverty, privation and humiliation.

REPORTER And so at an early age you acquired a profound understanding of the suffering in our midst?

PADUK Exactly.

REPORTER And you found the root of all evil in prostitution?

PADUK Absolutely.

REPORTER Is that why you picked this particular street?

PADUK Obviously. Fight the enemy in his own backyard. The people who frequent these dens of iniquity must be induced to study the consequences of vice right here. I will not rest until the last of these unfortunates has turned his back on these hotbeds of depravity.

REPORTER It's a pleasure to hear you speak. Is your exhibition only open at night?

PADUK Yes. For the same reason.

REPORTER You sacrifice all your evenings?

PADUK I'm used to it.

REPORTER May I ask how you came to develop this subtle form of attack? It seems to me that such an idea can spring only from intense hatred.

PADUK What do you mean?

REPORTER Was it something you read, or had you some model to inspire you? Was it some experience . . . perhaps a revelation?

PADUK You might call it a revelation.

REPORTER Of what kind?

PADUK It came to me that these people pay money to have their health destroyed. Wouldn't it be far better to give them, in return for their money, at least a chance of preserving their health?

REPORTER Then it was mainly financial considerations . . .

PADUK (*taken aback*) Not at all. What gave you that idea? It was a question of morality. It's ignorance that drives these poor souls to destruction—ignorance of the danger. We must show them what these pleasure establishments do to them. Then the whorehouses will go broke and the people will be saved.

REPORTER But you do charge admission. Is that for educational reasons?

PADUK Certainly. People only appreciate what they pay for. Here they get syphilis for two-fifty. Over there, it's at least five, not counting drinks.

REPORTER (*snickers*) But then it's the real thing over there.

PADUK This is a very serious subject, sir.

REPORTER Forgive me. And what has been the reaction to your lectures?

PADUK They're sold out every night.

REPORTER I mean, what is the audience reaction?

PADUK Couldn't be better. Some faint, others throw up.

REPORTER Excellent.

PADUK And those places across the street are deserted. Up for rent.

REPORTER How do you know?

PADUK My beam spotlights anyone who goes in. There hasn't been a soul. Besides, you can tell by the piano playing when there's anyone there to be led astray.

REPORTER Then you can actually gauge your success. A most ingenious idea! But didn't you run into difficulties in carrying it out?

PADUK It's the same with anything new. I had trouble with the city, especially since I operate at night.

REPORTER But the city provided the site?

PADUK That's true.

REPORTER And the money was donated by anonymous private philanthropists?

PADUK That's right. But now the lecture's over.

REPORTER I have enough, thank you. You'll see it in the paper tomorrow. *I adore the newspapers!*

PADUK It's been a pleasure. Would you care to attend the next demonstration?

REPORTER Thank you, no. I have a distaste for such things.

PADUK Perhaps, then, you'd like to wait till the next show starts. I make a little speech.

REPORTER I'd most certainly like to hear that, yes. You are an outstanding speaker.

People leave the tent and disperse.

MEMBERS OF THE CROWD I feel sick.—I had to throw up. Good thing they had pails.—I tell you, it's just as revolting as coming out of a cat house.

MAN (*waiting in line*) Is it worth it?

MAN COMING OUT Absolutely. Especially the syphilis exhibit. It's great.

A CHAPLAIN (*to Paduk*) May I introduce myself? I'm Father Benkler, chairman of the Young Catholic Workers' Association. We are considering a visit to your institute.

PADUK All are welcome here.

CHAPLAIN (*the young workers have lined up behind him*) May I inquire whether there is a special rate?

PADUK Not usually. But didn't you say "Young Workers' Association"?

CHAPLAIN Quite so.

PADUK Catholic?

CHAPLAIN Yes, Catholic.

PADUK In your case we'll make an exception. How many of you are there?

CHAPLAIN Only half our members are here, unfortunately. Ah, yes. Seventy-three.

PADUK You can have a whole lecture to yourselves. For you it'll be one hundred marks.

CHAPLAIN Does that include everything?

PADUK Certainly. Gonorrhoea, soft chancre, and syphilis.

CHAPLAIN Here you are. A hundred marks.

PADUK But no singing.

CHAPLAIN Of course not.

PADUK (*jocularly*) We wouldn't want to interfere with people's sleep.

CHAPLAIN But surely there are no dwellings in this district.

PADUK What about the houses across the way? I'd say they've been sleeping a good deal since I started up.

CHAPLAIN Oh, I see! Excellent, excellent. No, we won't do any singing.

PADUK Do recommend me to your friends. (*Takes the young workers inside; comes back out.*) You gentlemen will have to be patient for another fifteen minutes, that's all it will take this time. (*To reporter*) Perhaps you could come by tomorrow night.

REPORTER Certainly. Thank you. (*Leaves*)

PADUK (*left alone*) Things are quieting down. Nobody comes after midnight. And I have to stick around, damn it. All because of that spotlight . . . (*Looks up*) That light is perfect. (*Walks over to fence*) Not a sound. Bankrupt! The bed is dry. The stream's been diverted. And how quiet they are! It'll be a long time before they start playing the piano again.

4

Mrs. Hogge appears in the red door, right.

MRS. HOGGE Paduk!

PADUK Huh?

MRS. HOGGE (*moves out to the street*) Got a moment?

PADUK Of course. The lecture's on.

MRS. HOGGE Business good?

PADUK Sold out.

MRS. HOGGE Paduk!

PADUK *Mr. Paduk!*

MRS. HOGGE Oh, pardon me. *Mr. Paduk.* I thought we were old friends.

PADUK (*muttering*) Not so's I remember.

MRS. HOGGE An old customer.

PADUK (*glances over his shoulder*) What do you want? Haven't you anything to do?

MRS. HOGGE It's cleaning day. But I wanted to apologize for that little misunderstanding in our house the other day.

PADUK (*distant*) Oh, don't bother.

MRS. HOGGE We treated you badly.

PADUK You do me too much honor.

MRS HOGGE In a large organization, these things sometimes happen . . .

PADUK Is it still so large?

MRS HOGGE Now you're being sarcastic.

PADUK I thought I'd be doing you a favor if I cut down your organization a little so you could take better care of your customers.

MRS. HOGGE But you really didn't have any money.

PADUK True. So I thought I'd better make some.

MRS. HOGGE But this is *our* money.

PADUK But *this* is come by honestly.

MRS. HOGGE What do you mean, "honestly"? You're taking the bread out of our mouths.

PADUK You still have the wine, though, all to yourselves.

MRS. HOGGE What about my poor girls?

PADUK They're only poor because they're your girls.

MRS. HOGGE You're very hard on an old woman. I wanted you to know how sorry I was that you were thrown out.

PADUK I was sorry too. But unlike you, I did something about it.

MRS. HOGGE You used to be one of our best customers.

PADUK That didn't prevent you from throwing me out the one time I was broke.

MRS. HOGGE Now tell me, what's this all about? Showing all these shameful things! As if that would help people to mend their ways!

PADUK You know very well that isn't the reason. I was only looking for a way to light up the street. To throw some light on your disgraceful business!

MRS. HOGGE So it's nothing but revenge, just an excuse to put up (*She looks up*) a spotlight. That's why you cooked up the whole shooting match? All on account of the spotlight? The petitions? The philanthropists? The exhibition?

PADUK That's right. I couldn't very well stand here all by myself holding up a light bulb. All for your benefit. I can't afford it. It was you who called my attention to the fact that a man needs money.

MRS. HOGGE You're really despicable!

PADUK You flatter me. I simply had a good idea—a blessing to thousands!

MRS. HOGGE We know you like a book!

PADUK Yes, I suppose I did call attention to myself.

MRS. HOGGE Torturing the girls so they'd come running to me half naked and screaming, never paying, a rowdy, the worst of the lot, a crook, kicked out because of the way he carried on, kicked out of our house.

PADUK Risen from the dead, straight up to heaven on the third day. Creator of a welfare service! A champion of morality! A capitalist!

MRS. HOGGE Pig! Scum! Filthy bastard! (*Goes back into brothel, right*)

5

PADUK (*goes back to table*) Old tart! Ignorant slut! Just because the Young Workers' Association honored *me* with their patronage this time! Pure jealousy!

MAN (*from the left, where he has been waiting in line*) What was that all about?

PADUK Any business of yours?

MAN I'm with the city. It might be interesting to find out just what you were discussing.

PADUK Only the ravings of a vulgar person; we pioneers of morality expect such abuse.

MAN All the same I'll have the matter investigated. There's other people's money in this thing! (*Leaves abruptly*)

PADUK (*stares after him*) Damn his big ears! This could be unpleasant . . . well, there's still my "marvelous command of the language," as that fool put it. And tomorrow the paper will carry my life story. Sure. Complete with heartrending details. Hm. Still, maybe something more could be done to clear up any last doubts about the civic importance of my work!

The performance has ended; the young workers stream out.

PADUK (*to chaplain*) How did you like it?

CHAPLAIN Excellent . . . that is . . . why, it's hell on earth!

PADUK So it is. Pure hell. And most of it comes from prostitution. Father, with your permission I'd like to get something off my chest. As you know, when the heart is full . . . (*He disappears into the tent for a moment; returns followed by his assistant, who places two jars filled with formaldehyde on the table. The young workers haven't moved. Those in line move closer, from the left. The street also comes to life as Paduk starts speaking; girls in dark street clothes leave the brothels singly or in groups of two and three. Some creep up to the fence; others stroll across the street, giggling. In the end they all look silently over the fence*)

PADUK My dear young friends! You have seen the fruits of vice, the dread diseases that result from prostitution. It is no accident that this institution—dedicated to moral uplift—was established in this precise location. It's an expression of solemn protest! (*He notices the girls behind the fence and clambers up on the table, holding up the two jars with specimens in alcohol*) My dear young friends, our quarrel is not with the poor unfortunates who live in those houses, but with the houses themselves; with the very spirit of those houses! I do not condemn these unfortunate young women who spend their lives in slavery, compelled to sell their God-given bodies without collecting a penny! (*Addressing himself more and more to the girls*) Only a brute would do that. They are the victims. They are more wretched than the lowest beast of burden, more wretched than any convict, more wretched than the sick and dying! What about their immortal souls and their rotting bodies? They are forced to submit to every perversion and depravity; and because they must satisfy every bestial lust they become infected with incurable diseases. (*He brandishes the jar in his left hand*) These lips ravaged by disease once sang hymns in church, just as you do.

This head pitted with festering sores was once caressed by a mother's hand. On this breast (*Picks up a wax model*) eroded by pus, a cross once rested, as it does on yours. And when these eyes (*Picks up another wax model*), these drained, wasted eyes first opened, they delighted a parent's heart even as yours did. Never forget that! Think of it when temptation beckons and the devil seduces you. There may still be time; you may be lucky; perhaps it is not too late. Therefore, give thanks. Never forget this! Do not commit fresh injustice. (*Steps down*)

CHAPLAIN Well said! Spoken like one of God's chosen. My deepest thanks.

PADUK (*holding the jars*) Please, Father; I was only doing my duty. (*Chaplain presses Paduk's hand, which Paduk must first disengage, then leaves with the young workers*)

PADUK No more performances tonight. Time to clean up. (*Goes inside*)

7

The people leave; the girls disappear into the houses.

PADUK (*comes out, followed by his assistant*) Any tips?

ASSISTANT Yes, a few marks.

PADUK Hand it over.

ASSISTANT But it's mine.

PADUK The hell it is. I pay you a salary.

ASSISTANT Then you can rattle off your own drivel from now on! It's all yours—stink and all!

PADUK You're free to leave.

ASSISTANT O.K. But this time I'm really leaving. This time you're mistaken. It's the end. The money you pay me won't even buy one night's pleasure. And the displays turn my stomach. I'm through.

PADUK Do you really mean it?

ASSISTANT Now you've decided to give in. No, sir! Not this time. I'm getting my things. You can look after that crap yourself. (*Throws the money on the table*)

PADUK Keep the money. I was only joking. Don't get so excited.

ASSISTANT No, this time I'm through. For good. Besides, I never get any respect around here. (*Goes inside*)

PADUK Damn it. Everything's gone wrong. And I've never spoken so well. Now I know how the apostles felt at Pentecost. Today His spirit was on me. But like all women, Fortune loves a fool. (*Sits down*) And now this waiting around. And I'm ravenous. But who can keep food down in a place like this. I'm having nightmares as it is. And the time it'll take to teach a new one those Latin names! Torture! And that fellow from City Hall. The ass! The fink! (*Snaps around as though struck by lightning. Several men stand at the brothel door, right. They have rung the bell*)

FIRST MAN Hell, why is the joint closed?

SECOND MAN As if the light weren't bad enough! That goddam searchlight!

THIRD MAN Open up! Gone on strike? (*Door opens; they enter*)

PADUK What are they doing over there? (*Walks over to the fence*) The first ones in more than two weeks! (*More men follow and enter other doors*)

8

Paduk goes back to the table, shaking his head. Pulls out cash box and starts counting his money.

MRS. HOGGE (*emerges from door, right; crosses street and listens. Walks quietly through gate; stands behind Paduk*) Satisfied, Mr. Paduk?

PADUK (*startled, angry*) What is this! Get out!

MRS. HOGGE Take it easy, Mr. Paduk. Our customers are beginning to come back.

PADUK Hm, I haven't heard any music yet!

MRS. HOGGE We don't play for just anyone. The first ones back are the five-mark boys. The others'll come later.

PADUK *You* ought to know.

MRS. HOGGE See here, Mr. Paduk, how about a chair?

PADUK Anything else?

MRS. HOGGE No. You stand to gain by it.

PADUK (*locks the cash box*) After the way you insulted me not ten minutes ago . . .

MRS. HOGGE A few things have happened since then. A few, I said.

PADUK I haven't noticed anything

MRS. HOGGE First of all, our customers are coming back. That's one for me. Then, there's the speech you made.

PADUK That's one for me. You've caught on.

MRS. HOGGE You haven't. You haven't caught on at all. Your speech was rubbish.

PADUK Rubbish, you say?

MRS. HOGGE Yes. From our point of view. Not from the chaplain's. But from yours and mine.

PADUK Not bad. Amusing, in fact. (*Brings a chair*) Here's a chair. Would you care to explain?

MRS. HOGGE Sure. Thank you. (*Sits down*) The fact is I'm grateful. Besides, I wanted to apologize for that misunderstanding a while ago.

PADUK You were talking about my speech.

MRS. HOGGE Now if I caught the gist of your speech, you were saying that we suck the girls' blood. A fine phrase but not entirely true. When you talked so movingly about ravaged lips that once sang in church choirs, you might just as well have mentioned the booze they drank except it would have been less effective. And that bit about the heads caressed by mothers' hands—as often as not they were being battered by the less publicized fists of a pimp. But why go into that? You ought to know. You've been a student of ours long enough. Obviously, we have to show a profit. And normally we do better than you by a long shot.

PADUK You speak well! It's a pleasure listening to you. But what about my speech being rubbish? That's the part you got the chair for.

MRS. HOGGE It's not going to make you very happy. I'll give it to you little by little. First let me say a word about your prospects for the future: you're making money now because the

novelty hasn't worn off. People flock to your exhibits because they've never seen anything like them unless they've paid the high price of seeing them on their own flesh. But since nobody will come back twice—you can bet your life on that—the party will soon be over. Two weeks after you've folded we'll be back on top. I have about 6,000 customers. We've started a campaign that's already persuaded a great number of them to stay away from your disgusting exhibits, which are in bad taste anyway because they appeal to the worst in people: cowardice and hypocrisy. The rest of them—the ones we can't keep away—are people who enjoy watching you degrade life's greatest joys—the joys of love, including married love. But even those will be back at our establishment two weeks after visiting you. Because of you our income has dropped considerably, but this can happen only once. And visitors to our establishment always come back.

(*Silence*)

PADUK (*sits across from her at his table perspiring heavily*) None of this has any connection with my speech.

MRS. HOGGE It does, though. As far as I can see, your business consists in exploiting the diseases brought on by prostitution. That will hurt prostitution as long as you're able to spread your information. Then it's over and we prosper as before. But in your speech you set out to destroy the source of infection—namely prostitution. Which is the very foundation your business is built on—like a house on a rock. In short: I don't care if you enlighten the men about venereal disease. That doesn't affect us in the least. But if you enlighten my girls, you kill prostitution and with it the source of infection—and yourself as well! (*Triumphant, but apprehensive*) That's what you did today when you sent those girls running to me in tears. Now you tell me: was that speech rubbish, or wasn't it?

(*Silence. Paduk breathes heavily. Mrs. Hogge wipes her forehead with her handkerchief*)

PADUK (*trying to sound casual*) All right. Now what? (*Silence*) Spoken like a scholar.

MRS. HOGGE I've had the benefit of higher education.

PADUK All right. I got carried away, just the way you did a while ago. But what now?

MRS. HOGGE (*sigh of relief*) Now you're talking! And here's my thank-you for the chair: a piece of advice. Close down this joint and invest the money you've made in our place.

PADUK (*rising*) What do you mean?

MRS. HOGGE Exactly what I say!

PADUK What about my reputation? And the city officials who got me the site? And the story in the paper?

MRS. HOGGE Minor inconveniences! Afterwards—success!

PADUK I can't do it. Not with my reputation. I've already thought of everything you said. But it won't work.

MRS. HOGGE What about your reputation? If you keep this up I'll be ruined—and so will you! I won't just sit by while it happens. You're forcing me to tell the world what your motives really are. Then see how far your reputation will get you!

PADUK That doesn't sound bad! But what about my beautiful scheme! And the way you treated me . . .

MRS. HOGGE Carmen could treat you that way when you were a nobody without a penny. But now you're part owner you can do whatever you like with her. Have you seen her latest pictures?

PADUK No, I've been out of touch.

MRS. HOGGE (*pulls photos from her bosom and shows them*) Here's Carmen, sideways and from the back. Here's Ludmilla—really fetching—full face. In the nude. Those eyes! Those breasts! That mouth! That gorgeous face!

PADUK (*squaring his shoulders*) All right. I'll inspect your establishment. (*Puts cash box under his arm*) I don't expect anyone else tonight. Besides, Lind is here. Oh, hell . . . Lind, stay another fifteen minutes; I've got some business to attend to.

ASSISTANT'S VOICE (*inside the tent*) Not another second!

PADUK (*to himself*) This place is on the down-grade anyhow. (*Walks away, right, behind Mrs. Hogge. Both disappear behind the red door. Inside, a piano begins to play immediately. A girl cries out. Sound of dancing*)

(*It turns dark. Silence*)

PADUK (*entering from right, somewhat disbevelled, cash box under his arm*) Let that damn fool investigate all he likes. I'll give him the information myself. (*Stops at the table*) Lind! Now where are you?

ASSISTANT (*crawling out*) Mr. Paduk?

PADUK Have you decided to stay?

ASSISTANT Only on condition that . . .

PADUK You can go. You're fired! (*Choking with triumph*) Get out or I'll throw you out! Bloodsucker! Scum! Depraved no-good!

ASSISTANT You'll pay for that. I'll expose your past!

PADUK Go right ahead! Tell them I'm the owner of a cat house! Tell them I make a hundred marks a day. Go on, tell everybody who still has something between his legs. Now beat it!

ASSISTANT (*leaves*) Bastard!

PADUK (*bums the same tune the piano played*) We could build business (*Climbs on the table and removes sign*) by showing educational films. No problem getting a license for that. Then we'd use our influence in higher circles to put through a law making private intercourse a criminal offense and abortion punishable by death. It would do wonders for business. Well, that's that. It's the ideas that count. (*He removes the sign from the entrance. Looks around, grins*) In two weeks' time business will be back in shape. Today, the first customers started turning up again. (*Switches off the spotlight; strolls humming to the right and disappears behind the red door, carrying the cash box. Piano music and the stomping of dancing feet*)