Brutal, gripping and heart-wrenching, *L’Assommoir* (also known as *The Drinking Den*) chronicles the tragic downward spiral of Gervaise Macquart, a good-natured and hardworking laundress who slides into alcoholism and despair. After her lover abandons her and their two children, Gervaise marries a tin worker, Coupeau, who helps her rebuild her life. She starts her own business and the two have a daughter, Anna (the protagonist of Zola’s later novel, *Nana*). But their happiness is short-lived as a freak accident leaves Coupeau seriously injured, beginning the family’s fall into alcohol, desperation and violence. Disturbingly realistic, *L’Assommoir* is a vivid portrayal of life in late 19th-century Paris.

Leighton Pugh trained at LAMDA, after studying Modern Languages at Queen’s College, Oxford. Radio work includes the plays *Murder by the Book* and *Scenes from Provincial Life* for BBC Radio 4 and the voice of Heinrich von Kleist in the BBC Radio 3 documentary *The Tragical Adventure of Heinrich von Kleist*. From 2010 to 2011 Leighton was in four productions at the National Theatre, including *The Habit of Art* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. For Naxos AudioBooks he has recorded *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, unabridged.

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Towards five o'clock the guests began to arrive.

At length they discovered Coupeau and Poisson...

Christ almighty! What a hole they were...

Golden horizons were opening up all around...

Gervaise exchanged a glance with Madame Boche...

Chapter 8

As soon as the Lorilleuxs knew who he was...

Then the furniture for the room had to be...

At the beginning of the new arrangement...

Gervaise was quite at her ease in this matter...

Goujet now didn't know what to do with his hands...

Now they were talking of women...

Two days passed by. The roofer had not returned.

Chapter 9

Very pale, her limbs already trembling...

Whilst idleness and poverty entered, dirtiness...

Towards the autumn, unfortunately, things...

Gently, without uttering a cry, icy cold yet prudent...

'There are three of us,' concluded the laundress.

The explanation caused the others to nod...

Happily, the cemetery was not far off, the little...

Chapter 10

It so happened that on the evening before...

This was their last happy day. Two years...