

# A Crooked French Affair

By  
Kim E. Ruyle

# A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

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## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

*"The theater is so endlessly fascinating because it's so accidental. It's so much like life."*

*~Arthur Miller*

*"With theater, you have to be ready for anything."*

*~Willem Dafoe*

*"Theater is a series of insurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster."*

*~Tom Stoppard*

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

*A Crooked French Affair* was originally produced by Fond du Lac Community Theatre in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, as part of World Premiere Wisconsin in March 2023.

### Cast

Perry.....Nicholas Wagner  
Avis.....Elizabeth Gonzalez  
Chloe.....Emma Johannes  
Louie.....Michael Detert  
Cheyenne.....Ellie Thelen Clementi  
Fawn.....Elizabeth Wustrack  
Willy.....Paul Gedlinske  
Ruby.....Valerie Wendtland  
Jazmin.....Lynn Moon  
Sergio.....Kurt Schuller

### Production Crew

Director.....Kim E. Ruyle  
Asst. Dir. and Stage Mgr....Rhea Behlke  
Set Design.....Matthew Rodenkirch  
Lighting Design.....Kev Kollmann  
Asst. Stage Manager.....Mary Runde  
Stage Crew.....Dorene Gitter  
Costumes and Props.....Claudia Winland

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

CAST: 6 Women, 4 Men

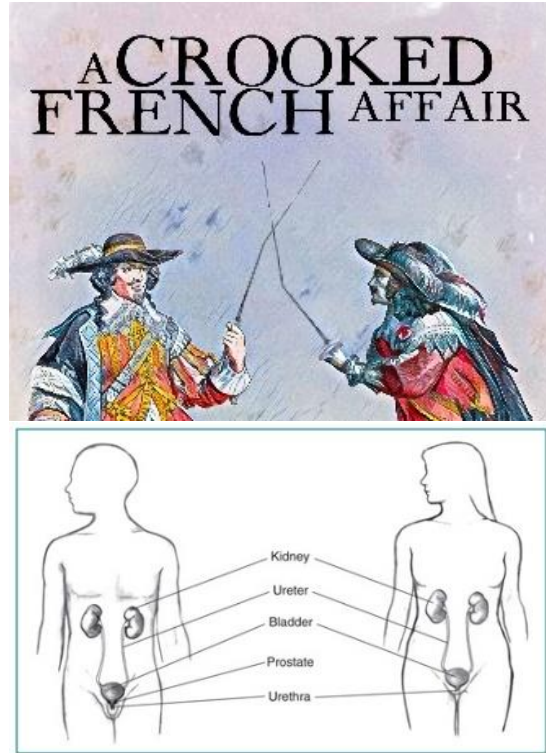
|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <u>PERRY</u>      | Male. An aspiring playwright and director. He lacks confidence but is enthusiastic about his writing. Perry directs his own play-within-the-play in which he also plays the role of François de la Peyronie. |
| <u>AVIS</u>       | Female. Board member. Self-righteous, heavy-handed, and obsessed with the thought of getting revenge on her cheating husband. Plays the part of Madame de Pompadour in the play-within-the-play.             |
| <u>FAWN</u>       | Female. Chair of the Board. Highly sensitive, sentimental.   |
| <u>JAZMIN</u>     | Female. Board member. Daring, outrageously so.   |
| <u>RUBY</u>       | Female. Board member. Practical, conservative, and competent.  |
| <u>SERGIO</u>     | Male. Board member. A player.  |
| <u>WILLY</u>      | Male. Board member. Highly insecure.   |
| <u>CHLOE</u>      | Female. Stage manager. Theatre expert, competent, and confident.   |
| <u>CHEYENNE</u>   | Female. A serious but amateur method actor. Narcissistic and entitled. Cast as Queen Marie in Perry's play.  |
| <u>LOUIE</u>      | Male. Cast as King Louis XV in Perry's play. Initially, stiff and wooden on the stage. Can't remember his lines to save his life.  |
| <u>STAGEHANDS</u> | Two or more stagehands may appear in the final scene.  |
| CASTING NOTE:     | Casting for diverse ethnicity and age is encouraged. However, Perry, Avis, Cheyenne, and Chloe should all be about the same age; Louie about the same age or perhaps a bit older.                            |
| TIME:             | About now.   |
| SETTING:          | The stage of the Pity Falls Community Playhouse.   |
| SET:              | A theater stage with a table, chairs, and a banner or sign, <i>Pity Falls Community Playhouse</i> . After the first  |

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

- scene, the stage becomes increasingly adorned in successive scenes to represent The Mars Room in the Palace of Versailles. However, the furnishings and décor should appear a bit makeshift, tacky even. The tapestry includes a griffin as the central subject.
- COSTUMES:** The ornate costumes of the 18th-century French royal court used in the play-within-the-play should have a garish, amateur appearance rather than as created by accomplished costume designers.
- SYNOPSIS:** Perry, a wannabe playwright/director has written his first play, *A Crooked French Affair*, ostensibly a dramatic romance set in the royal court of Louis the 15<sup>th</sup>. When he pitches his play to the dysfunctional Board of Directors of the Pity Falls Community Playhouse, it throws them into a conniption fit. Against all odds, Perry's play is selected, and now the real work begins with the cast of amateur, inept actors, who work on a set and in costumes designed by recruits from the local junior high school. Complicating everything is an undercurrent due to the affair between Perry's wife and the husband of Avis, a board member who is recruited to play a part in Perry's play. On opening night, the production loses its way yet creates a stunning audience reaction and a fortuitous discovery for Perry.
- NOTES:** Characters in the play-within-a-play are all historical figures. Images are available online by searching:
- François Gigot de la Peyronie
  - Louis XV
  - Marie Leszczyńska
  - Madame de Pompadour
  - Mars Room Versailles
- Feel free to be creative in setting up the theatre lobby for the performance, perhaps the poster of

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

noblemen dueling with bent swords preshow and adding the poster of urinary tracts at an intermission after Act 1. Have fun with it!



RUNTIME:

~90 Minutes.

A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

# A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

ACT 1  
SCENE ONE

*Tuesday evening. A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Pity Falls Community Playhouse. The directors, AVIS, WILLY, FAWN, SERGIO, RUBY, AND JAZMIN sit, in that order, around a table on the otherwise bare stage. There may be coffee cups, notepads, and a name plate in front of each director. A banner hangs over the side of the table: Pity Falls Community Playhouse. The board members are shocked. Paralyzed. There's a pause, everyone staring at Willy. And then, as Avis speaks, the paralysis turns to panic and frenetic conversation.*

**AVIS.** *LOST?*

**FAWN.** Let's not get –

**WILLY.** Lost.

**AVIS.** What do you mean *LOST*?

**FAWN.** Please.

**RUBY.** How can you lose electronic files?

**AVIS.** Dufus.

**FAWN.** Okay, that's not –

**WILLY.** I got a virus.

**SERGIO.** Holy crap! You mean –

**JAZMIN.** Oh, my God!

**FAWN.** Are you okay?

**WILLY.** Not that kind –

**RUBY.** You mean a computer virus?

**WILLY.** Well... Yeah.

**AVIS.** We never should have given you the responsibility.



## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**RUBY.** What about Charles? Have you asked Charles to –

**JAZMIN.** *Charles?* Guy with inverted nipples?

**FAWN.** That's not –

**SERGIO.** Guys don't get inverted nipples.

**JAZMIN.** Sure, they do. (*Willy winces, groans, and places palms on his chest.*)

**RUBY.** *Charles!* The IT guy. (*Sergio passes a note to Ruby with a sly grin.*)

**WILLY.** Charles said –

**JAZMIN.** Ohh. The IT guy.

**RUBY.** What? What did he say?

**SERGIO.** (*To Jazmin.*) You know a Charles with inverted nipples?  
(*Jazmin smiles and shrugs.*)

**WILLY.** He said...

**AVIS.** *He said! He said!* Spit it out, damn it!

**FAWN.** Okay, let's keep it civil. (*Everyone glares at Willy.*)

**WILLY.** Said the files are infected. The submitted scripts. The independent evaluations. Even –

**AVIS.** *ALL THE FILES?*

**FAWN.** Yelling won't –

**RUBY.** Do we know who submitted a script?

**AVIS.** Yeah. Don't we have their emails?

**RUBY.** God. What if we need to postpone?

**SERGIO.** *The contest?*

**AVIS.** No way!

**FAWN.** This is a disaster! The production schedule has been announced! The theatre critic from the *State Journal* has already written an article about the contest and plans to be at the premiere!

**SERGIO.** Doesn't help that our theatre is supposed to be the centerpiece of the Pity Falls cultural revival.

**RUBY.** You're right. If we postpone, it will destroy our reputation! Besmirch the entire community!

**AVIS.** We're going to look like a bunch of total amateurs!

**JAZMIN.** I thought we were amateurs.

**AVIS.** *Bumbling* amateurs! Clowns!

A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**WILLY.** I'm sorry.

**SERGIO.** We're not clowns, are we?

**AVIS.** (*Glaring at Willy.*) At least one. Clown.

**FAWN.** Let's keep it civil.

**SERGIO.** Are clowns civil?

**RUBY.** Do we have their emails or not?

**WILLY.** It was an online submission form.

**SERGIO.** So?

**RUBY.** So, no. I suppose their emails were collected on the submission form.

**WILLY.** Well... Yeah.

**RUBY.** And what? The app and all the data got –

**AVIS.** All of it, *WHAT? Corrupted?* (*Pause. Everyone glares at Willy.*)

**WILLY.** Yes. Corrupted.

**AVIS.** Damn!

**FAWN.** Civility.

**AVIS.** This is no time for civility! We have to do something or we're going to look like a bunch of... A bunch of –

**JAZMIN.** Clowns.

**RUBY.** And Charles can't recover the data?

**WILLY.** No. He said the data is irretrievably –

**FAWN.** *Are.*

**WILLY.** What?

**FAWN.** It's plural. Data *are*.

**WILLY.** Okay. The data *are* irretrievably lost.

**AVIS.** Son of a bitch.

**FAWN.** Let's keep it professional.

**JAZMIN.** I thought we were amateurs.

**SERGIO.** I can see the headline. *Pity Falls Community Playhouse falls flat.*

**WILLY.** I guess I –

**AVIS.** Really screwed the pooch, Willy!

**RUBY.** (*Pause.*) So, let's see if I've got this right. The award is to be announced tomorrow. Opening night is in three and a half weeks. It's been publicized in the *State Journal*. And we have no submissions.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**JAZMIN.** Nooo!

**SERGIO.** Crap!

**AVIS.** Damn!

**FAWN.** Yes.

**WILLY.** No. Yes. I mean, we have no submissions.

**FAWN.** I don't think we have any option. We have to postpone.

**AVIS.** And solicit scripts all over again?!

**FAWN.** Well –

**RUBY.** Don't we have anything in hard copy?

**JAZMIN.** Perry's wanting to pitch his script.

**SERGIO.** Perry? *That* Perry?

**AVIS.** *The teacher?*

**RUBY.** Junior high.

**FAWN.** English. He teaches English.

**AVIS.** No way we're working with –

**JAZMIN.** Well, he's here. With a script. I saw him before the meeting and –

**SERGIO.** He have inverted nipples, too? *(Sergio leans over and, grinning, whispers something to Ruby. Ruby snubs him with a glare.)*

**JAZMIN.** He brought his script hoping he could pitch to –

**AVIS.** *Now?* He's here now?

**JAZMIN.** Waiting in the green room.

**RUBY.** With a script? Hard copy?

**AVIS.** I can't! I won't!

**WILLY.** What's going on?

**SERGIO.** Because of his wife?

**JAZMIN.** Because of your husband?

**FAWN.** What?

**AVIS.** *(Standing.)* I won't be subjected to... You can continue the meeting without me. *(Avis grabs her notepad and storms off.)*

**SERGIO.** You shouldn't have mentioned –

**JAZMIN.** You started it! Asking about his wife.

**FAWN.** Can someone please tell me what's going on?

**RUBY.** We shouldn't be gossiping, but it's pretty common knowledge –

**SERGIO.** Her husband –

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**JAZMIN.** And Perry's wife.

**FAWN.** *(Pause.)* Oh.

**RUBY.** Okay, but do we have a script to evaluate?

**WILLY.** How is it fair to judge only one script? I mean how do we –

**SERGIO.** What about all the other entrants? We just blow them off?

**FAWN.** We can compose a nice note saying –

**JAZMIN.** And send it to who?

**FAWN.** Whom.

**JAZMIN.** What?

**FAWN.** Send it to *whom*.

**RUBY.** Right. We don't know who submitted.

**JAZMIN.** *Whom* submitted.

**FAWN.** Who. We don't know *who* submitted.

**SERGIO.** Right.

**FAWN.** We can post the note on our website announcing the winner and congratulating all the other, uh, all the other, uh...

**WILLY.** Losers.

**RUBY.** Well, we can't make a decision without at least considering his script.

**SERGIO.** What about Avis?

**JAZMIN.** She left.

**WILLY.** It's up to us.

**JAZMIN.** Shall I bring him in?

**FAWN.** Yes. Please bring him in. *(Jazmin exits.)*

**RUBY.** What a shit show.

**SERGIO.** The show must go on.

**RUBY.** A shit show? A shit show must go on?

**WILLY.** No, that's not –

**FAWN.** Please. As chair, I must insist on decorum.

**JAZMIN.** *(Jazmin enters followed by PERRY). For those of you whom don't know, this is Perry. (Fawn shakes her head, gives an exasperated sigh as Jazmin sits. Perry distributes copies of his script for everyone. He stops at the empty chair left by Avis.)*

**PERRY.** Are we missing someone?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**FAWN.** *(Taking another script from Perry.)* I'll get the script to Avis. *(The board members study the script rather than acknowledge Perry. A pause, then Sergio snaps to.)*

**SERGIO.** *Pericles?* A play by *Pericles*. *Bubba Gupta?*

**RUBY.** *Bubba Gupta?!*

**WILLY.** *(Chuckling.)* Your name is *Pericles Bubba Gupta?*

**JAZMIN.** He goes by *Perry*, *Willy*. Or should I say, *Wilhelm Lipshitz?* *(Awkward pause, eyes on Willy.)*

**PERRY.** It's *Perry*. And I appreciate the opportunity to pitch my –

**RUBY.** *A Crooked French Affair*. Is it a comedy?

**FAWN.** Ooh! Like *Neil Simon*? Our patrons love *Neil Simon*.

**PERRY.** Well, no. It's a period piece.

**RUBY.** Oh. A period piece might be difficult.

**WILLY.** You mean like *The Odd Couple?* *(Heads swivel to stare at Willy.)*

**FAWN.** Sorry. Please go on.

**PERRY.** Thank you. The play is set in the royal court of *King Louis the 15<sup>th</sup> of France* and –

**JAZMIN.** Is there sex? *(Sergio, grinning, whispers something to Ruby. She recoils.)*

**FAWN.** No, we can't have –

**JAZMIN.** Sure, we can! Our patrons love sex!

**FAWN.** We can't –

**JAZMIN.** We *simulate* it!

**WILLY.** Stimulate?

**JAZMIN.** The sex. *Broadway* does it all the time.

**PERRY.** It's a romantic drama, so there is –

**JAZMIN.** Sex!

**WILLY.** Stimulated.

**JAZMIN.** *Simulated!* Not *stimulated*.

**PERRY.** It's romantic. Nothing sexually explicit.

**SERGIO.** Too bad.

**JAZMIN.** Yeah. Can't you, you know, amp it up?

**RUBY.** What's the plot?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**PERRY.** Like I said, it's set in the French royal court of King Louis the 15<sup>th</sup> –

**FAWN.** So, it's French. With French accents?

**SERGIO.** We have anyone who can do a French accent?

**PERRY.** Well, yes. A French accent might create an atmosphere of –

**WILLY.** Frogs.

**JAZMIN.** French is sexy.

**SERGIO.** *Frogs?*

**RUBY.** The plot?

**PERRY.** Like I said, a period piece. It's refined. A high concept drama.

**FAWN.** For *our* town? Refined? For Pity Falls? High concept?

**WILLY.** What's high concept?

**RUBY.** So, not character-driven?

**PERRY.** Uh...

**SERGIO.** *High concept.* So, with drugs! Like *Scarface*, only French.

**JAZMIN.** Oh! Oh! *The French Connection.*

**PERRY.** (*Shudders, takes a deep breath.*) Maybe I can just read the synopsis. (*Reading dramatically from the script.*) Set in the French royal court of King Louis the 15<sup>th</sup>, this refined, high concept drama finds François de la Peyronie, the King's chief surgeon, pursuing Madame de Pompadour, the King's official chief mistress –

**SERGIO.** That means sex!

**JAZMIN.** Definitely! Like *Dangerous Liaisons!*

**PERRY.** Huh. Actually, that's a pretty good comparison. A period drama –

**SERGIO.** Uma Thurman bared her –

**FAWN.** We can't have sex!

**JAZMIN.** Uma got *schooled!*

**PERRY.** But there's no... Nothing explicit in my play.

**RUBY.** Wait a minute. *Peyronie?* Isn't he the –

**JAZMIN.** Oh, God! *Bent wieners!*

**FAWN.** *What?*

**JAZMIN.** He's the bent wiener guy! Am I right?

**PERRY.** The namesake, but it's not about –

**SERGIO.** Bent wieners! That's explicit.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**JAZMIN.** And funny! A romantic comedy.

**WILLY.** (*Hunching in distress.*) It's not funny! It's painful! (*Everyone stares at Willy.*)

**JAZMIN.** Peyronie's Disease causes bent erections.

**SERGIO.** Like you know. First with the inverted nipples and now bent erections. Peyronie's. That's not a real disease.

**WILLY.** Like hell, it's not! (*Everyone stares at Willy.*)

**PERRY.** The play has nothing to do with the medical condition.

**SERGIO.** Riiight.

**PERRY.** No! The concept is... It's about illicit love. Unrequited love. There's lots of conflict. Lots of drama.

**FAWN.** It sounds a bit edgy for –

**JAZMIN.** Lighten up, Fawn. We can use some edgy.

**SERGIO.** I agree. Neil Simon is lame. (*Fawn gasps dramatically.*)

**RUBY.** So Peyronie –

**JAZMIN.** With the bent wiener. (*Willy hunches and groans.*)

**RUBY.** Peyronie has an affair with the King's mistress. And then what happens?

**SERGIO.** A *crooked* French affair! I get it!

**PERRY.** We keep the audience guessing right up to the end.

**JAZMIN.** Is he bent? Or is he not?

**PERRY.** Does he consummate the relationship, or –

**JAZMIN.** That's sex!

**PERRY.** Or does he get the guillotine?

**FAWN.** So, there's violence?

**PERRY.** Nothing explicit.

**FAWN.** Period pieces can be expensive to mount. The costumes alone –

**JAZMIN.** (*Thrusting out and lifting her breasts.*) Corsets! Bustiers! We'll need corsets!

**PERRY.** The junior high has a budget for the home ec and shop classes to do community projects, and –

**RUBY.** Oh, God! Not the junior high.

**FAWN.** They have a budget?!

**PERRY.** I think I can say there would be no cost to the theatre.

**FAWN.** Well! That's very generous of you, uh, Mr. Gupta.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**WILLY.** Pericles.

**PERRY.** Perry.

**RUBY.** Thank you very much, Perry. Please excuse us now so we can consider your script.

**PERRY.** Thank you so much. (*Looking to the chair vacated by Avis.*) And I hope that the evaluation can be objective, and that personal issues won't... Well, you know, there's this situation...

**JAZMIN.** This is theatre, Perry. There's always going to be some drama.

**FAWN.** And even if we like your script, we have to find someone willing to direct.

**PERRY.** Oh! I'd love to direct!

**RUBY.** You have experience directing?

**PERRY.** Well, not a lot, but my play requires a certain sensitivity and –

**SERGIO.** Sensitivity! Of course! I mean, we're talking bent wieners.

**RUBY.** (*Awkward pause.*) Thank you for your submission. Please excuse us now. (*Perry hesitates, wanting to say more, but finally nods, spins, and exits.*)

**FAWN.** The junior high's got a budget for set and costumes. That's huge! Okay, shall we take a vote?

**WILLY.** On what?

**RUBY.** Wait a minute. Should we even *consider* Perry's script? I mean, we have no independent evaluations, and it's the *only* script. (*Ruby studies the other directors who all seem to be shrugging as if no big deal.*) Well, I guess if we do accept it, we'll just have to post an announcement on the website, issue a press release, and move ahead with the production.

**JAZMIN.** Oh, let's do it!

**SERGIO.** Absolutely. Go for it!

**FAWN.** I hope the content is suitable for –

**RUBY.** We haven't even read the script!

**WILLY.** Do we let him direct?

**JAZMIN.** If we do, we should convince Chloe to stage manage.

**FAWN.** That's a great idea. Chloe's good. And who better to write and direct a play than an English teacher?



## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**WILLY.** Except that Avis has some history with the English teacher.

**SERGIO.** *(Chuckling.)* History with an English teacher.

**WILLY.** Well, I've heard enough. I say let's do it for the public service, the social consciousness of it. *(Puzzled looks from all directed to Willy.)*

**JAZMIN.** Don't know about social consciousness, but we've got to do it!

**SERGIO.** Absolutely!

**FAWN.** If you're all in agreement...

**RUBY.** *Without even reading it?* We're just going to roll the dice? On Perry? On this... This... *Crooked French Affair?* *(A resounding unanimous assent from others.)* What the hell. The shit show must go on. *(Blackout.)*

### SCENE TWO

*Monday evening the following week. Five or six chairs arranged in a shallow crescent on the otherwise bare stage. Perry is attaching an atrocious faux tapestry to the back wall. It's a bit crooked. He stands back and studies it. He scratches his butt. Folds his arms. Studies the faux tapestry. Begins awkwardly bending to scratch and study the tapestry. As he does so, CHLOE enters carrying a notebook. She smiles, pauses to watch Perry, and notices the crooked tapestry.*

**CHLOE.** You're crooked. *(Perry jumps out of his skin.)*

**PERRY.** Oh! I didn't hear –

**CHLOE.** A *crooked* French affair. Fitting. Ready to get started? *(Perry nods, eagerly joins Chloe who pulls two sheets of paper from notebook, hands them to Perry.)*

**PERRY.** You gave me just two bios. May I see the others?

**CHLOE.** That's it. Just two.

**PERRY.** *Two?* But we need four actors! Two males, two females. What's going on? *(Chloe grimaces and shrugs.)* Can we... Can you reach out? Tap your network? You're well connected.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**CHLOE.** Believe me, I tried. I guess, uh... I guess people are afraid of the French accent.

**PERRY.** Really?

**CHLOE.** And... To be honest, there's some...

**PERRY.** What?

**CHLOE.** Resentment. *(Beat.)* Look, it's just that you're not that well known in our theatre community. I mean, not part of the inner circle, and several of our regulars had submitted their own scripts online. After the board meeting last week, the word spread like wildfire.

**PERRY.** I guess I don't –

**CHLOE.** Your script was the only one considered! Don't you get it?

**PERRY.** What I heard, all the online scripts and independent script evaluations were lost. That's not my fault.

**CHLOE.** Yeah, well, think about it from their perspective. We all know that art is subjective. Theatre is subjective. But we at least pretend to be objective and fair in our evaluations. In this case, though, with your play, fairness flew out the window. So, there you go.

**PERRY.** What you're saying, there's –

**CHLOE.** Jealousy. Resentment. Bitterness. People are pissed at the board for boxing themselves in.

**PERRY.** Again. It's not my fault.

**CHLOE.** What you get for being an easy target. I guess some in our theatre community are boycotting.

**PERRY.** *(Pacing.)* Oh, my God! Boycotting my play?! Is that going to extend to the audience? Are people going to attend the performance?

**CHLOE.** *(Chuckling.)* No worries there. People love to see a flop. *(Beat, turning serious.)* Sorry. I'm not saying...

**PERRY.** *(Falling into a chair.)* God. What *are* you saying? Why are you here?

**CHLOE.** Hey! I take my theatre seriously. Every production is a chance to learn, and I love challenges. So, have no worries. I'm here to save. Not sabotage. If we go down, we're going down together.

**PERRY.** *(Thoughtful pause.)* Okay. Thanks... I guess. But we need a couple more actors.

**CHLOE.** Can you do a rewrite? Maybe use doubling?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**PERRY.** It took me a year to write this. No way I can do a major rewrite in a week. *(Chloe looks startled. Perry follows her eyes to the wing where Avis stands. Avis steps forward.)*

**CHLOE.** Avis. Hi.

**AVIS.** Chloe. *(Apprehensive looks from Chloe and Perry.)*

**CHLOE.** Well, I've got some stuff to do backstage to get ready. Auditions are always... Fun. *(Chloe bustles off. Avis strides right up to Perry.)*

**AVIS.** *It's not me!*

**PERRY.** You're... Not you?

**AVIS.** I overheard. It's Hugo, my asshole husband. Soon to be ex-husband. He's been running all over town, stirring up trouble. Spreading rumors about your show. Your script. Alienating the sponsors.

**PERRY.** What do you mean? *He wants to sabotage my show?* Why? He's already moved in with Shirley! With my wife! He stabs me in the back and then, what? He has to twist the knife?

**AVIS.** Oh, he's a cruel bastard. He's French you know and pissed off that an English teacher is coopting his... *(Dramatically with French accent.) His milieu.*

**PERRY.** *(Leaping to his feet, pacing.) Coopting his milieu? Me? He's the one coopting! Coopting my wife! He's playing her. Taking advantage. Shirley's a Francophile and a sucker for everything French. Gérard Depardieu. Croissants. Baguettes. Beaujolais. Escargot. Smelly cheese. (Beat.) French ticklers. The son of a bitch.*

**AVIS.** Listen. You can't let him win. You've got to put on a great play. Maybe you can even get Shirley back.

**PERRY.** You think? But what about –

**AVIS.** *Hugo?* Screw Hugo!

**PERRY.** So, you don't –

**AVIS.** Want him back? Hell, no I don't! I just don't want to see him win. I want to pulverize his tiny little testicles, grind them into a fine powder.

**PERRY.** *(Falling back to chair in defeat.)* Oh. Okay. Yeah, but we don't even have a complete /cast.

**AVIS.** /Can you act?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**PERRY.** Uh...

**AVIS.** You need two more actors, right?

**PERRY.** Yeah.

**AVIS.** Count me in. You step into a role, I'll step into a role, and we're good to go.

**PERRY.** (*Rising.*) But I'm directing, not acting.

**AVIS.** You can do both. What's directing anyway? Stand here. Say your line. Walk over there. Say your line. Hit your mark and say your line. That's it! Like directing's a big deal.

**PERRY.** It's more than that! I have to guide the actors. Help them find their motivation. Find their inner life. (*Chloe enters.*)

**AVIS.** Ha! You'll be lucky you can motivate them to find their ass with both hands. Besides, you've got Chloe to help you out.

**CHLOE.** Cheyenne and Louie are in the green room studying the script. I told them they don't have to audition, that they're both getting parts. Thought we might as well skip the audition and go straight into a table read with a partial cast. Hope that's okay.

**PERRY.** Uh...

**AVIS.** Hell, yes! Bring them in! Let's get this party started.

**CHLOE.** Perry?

**PERRY.** Avis has agreed to play a role.

**CHLOE.** Really? Then we're just one short of a full cast.

**AVIS.** No, we're not. PB and J here is going to play a role, too.

**CHLOE.** PB and J?

**AVIS.** Pericles. Bubba. Gupta.

**CHLOE.** That would be PB and G.

**AVIS.** Whatever. Right now, he's just PB and J, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, but we're going to transform him. Turn him into a juicy *Chateaubriand*. A puffy *Souffle Au Fromage*. A blazing *Banana Flambe* that's going to light up the theatre! Am I right, Perry?

**PERRY.** Uh...

**AVIS.** Come on, man. Get fired up! You play the bent-wiener guy, and I'll play the mistress! (*Avis grabs Perry and plants a big kiss on him. Perry and Chloe are stunned, but Avis is charged up and skitters around the stage.*) Hugo is going to shit his pants!

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**CHLOE.** Wow! That was... That sounds fantastic!

**PERRY.** *(Catching the enthusiasm.)* Yeah. It does. *(Chloe spins and exits.)*

**AVIS.** *(Avis stops bouncing around and looks at Perry who's staring at her, eyes wide with wonder, mouth agape).* Calm down, Romeo. Keep it in your pants. That was just a stage kiss.

**PERRY.** Avis, I think you're perfectly cast as Madame de Pompadour.

**AVIS.** No shit, Shakespeare. *(Chloe enters followed by CHEYENNE and LOUIE.)*

**CHLOE.** Let's all have a seat.

**CHEYENNE.** What are *you* doing here?

**AVIS.** Honey, I'm here to play the King's main squeeze and your biggest nightmare.

**CHEYENNE.** Now wait a minute. I'd like to audition for the part of Madame de Pompadour.

**AVIS.** You're better suited to play the frumpy Queen. Tell her, Perry.

**PERRY.** Please. Everyone just have a seat and we'll start by getting to know each other. *(Slowly, they all take their seats. Avis and Cheyenne glare at each other, and Chloe takes note.)*

**CHLOE.** Conflict. That's okay. Conflict is good. Drama is all about conflict and –

**CHEYENNE.** *Who's frumpy?* You want conflict? I'll give you /conflict.

**AVIS.** /Oh, my God! That self-righteous entitled attitude! You're perfect for the Queen! Don't you think so, Perry? *(All eyes turn to Perry who averts his eyes, awkwardly shuffles some papers before looking up.)*

**PERRY.** I thought we'd start with –

**CHEYENNE.** So, you've already made your casting decisions?

**CHLOE.** Please. Everyone. Let's respect our director.

**LOUIE.** Yes. Respect. Let the man speak.

**PERRY.** How about we do some quick introductions. Name. Acting experience. Day job. And –

**CHEYENNE.** What makes you think we all have day jobs?

**LOUIE.** I'm a cop and work the late show. Eleven to seven.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**AVIS.** This is a waste of time. (*Strident singsong.*) *My favorite color is fire engine red, and if I were a tree, I'd want to be a dragon's blood tree.*

**LOUIE.** Dragon's blood! *Wicked!* If I was an animal, I'd want to be a lion or an eagle. A lion-eagle!

**CHEYENNE.** (*Referring to the tapestry.*) A griffin. It's called a griffin.

**CHLOE.** Okay, Perry. I think we all know each other well enough. Shall we start with a cold read?

**LOUIE.** I think the temperature's fine. (*All eyes on Louie.*)

**PERRY.** Actually, I think we should start by discussing the play. The story.

**LOUIE.** So, you want me to play the King?

**PERRY.** We'll get to that, but first –

**LOUIE.** Was he fat? The King? All those kings were fat.

**PERRY.** Your body type isn't important.

**CHEYENNE.** Well, I refuse to play frumpy.

**PERRY.** Okay, but let's start at ten thousand feet. You've all had a chance to look at the script. So, what do you think? What is this play about? What's the story?

**AVIS.** It's about an insecure, phallic-obsessed, barber –

**PERRY.** Surgeon! Peyronie was a surgeon.

**AVIS.** An insecure, phallic-obsessed, *surgeon* who falls for the King's super-hot mistress.

**LOUIE.** *Phallic-obsessed?* What's that got to do with the King?

**CHEYENNE.** What do you think, Louie?

**CHLOE.** There's nothing about phallic obsession in the script.

**LOUIE.** Oh. Okay.

**CHEYENNE.** Disappointed?

**PERRY.** Please! There's absolutely nothing prurient in the script.

**LOUIE.** Poo? Poo *what?!*

**PERRY.** Prurient. Vulgar. Suggestive. It's not about... (*Standing, pacing.*) Okay. Listen. Let's begin by exploring the heart of the story. What's it really about? The major dramatic question. (*Pause, looking for a reaction.*) Which is...?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**CHEYENNE.** Well, there's no question about the Queen. If I'm playing the part, she definitely won't be frumpy.

**LOUIE.** I don't have a problem playing a fat king. I can wear padding under my royal robes. Oh! Maybe my cop's body armor!

**AVIS.** Oh, God.

**LOUIE.** Like they say, *there are no small parts, only fat actors.*

**PERRY.** That won't be necessary, and Chloe will work with you on costumes later. For now, can we please... (*A deep breath and, finally, getting animated.*) The major dramatic question is a basic one. *Will the boy get the girl?*

**AVIS.** Classic.

**PERRY.** Peyronie yearns for the King's mistress, Madame de Pompadour, but there are complications. Obstacles. What do you think they might be?

**LOUIE.** Well, maybe the mistress is a ball-buster.

**PERRY.** Okay. Good. How will the mistress respond to Peyronie's advances? Will she be receptive?

**CHEYENNE.** Bet your ass, she/ will!

**AVIS.** /Not on your life!

**CHEYENNE.** The mistress is a slut and will spread her legs for anyone!

**AVIS.** Not a slut! She's a sophisticated courtesan. And think about it. If she spreads her legs right off, there's no place for the story to go. The play will be over before it begins.

**LOUIE.** Good point. You need to wait until the second act to spread your legs.

**PERRY.** No one's spreading their legs!

**CHEYENNE.** Except the King.

**LOUIE.** *WHAT?*

**CHEYENNE.** Don't you think your phallus-obsessed doctor's going to want to do an examination?

**LOUIE.** *Perry!*

**PERRY.** That's enough! This is serious drama! It's not salacious! It's not a trope! And it's not shallow!

**LOUIE.** What's salacious?

**CHEYENNE.** What's a trope?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**AVIS.** But is your play historically accurate?

**PERRY.** All the characters were real people, but I've taken considerable artistic license.

**CHEYENNE.** But let's face it. The mistress had to be a slut.

**PERRY.** Stop! This is serious theatre!

**CHLOE.** And slut-shaming is not appropriate on this stage. Or anywhere, for that matter.

**CHEYENNE.** Oh? You want to censor me? Cancel me?

**LOUIE.** What about the first amendment?

**PERRY.** Nobody's being canceled. But can we just be, uh...

**CHLOE.** Nice

**PERRY.** Yes! Let's be nice.

**CHEYENNE.** You want nice? Okay, *kumquat*. When you hear me say *kumquat*, you'll know I really mean –

**CHLOE.** No! *Kumquat*?! That's not in the –

**CHEYENNE.** *Cupcake*, then! When you hear cupcake... Think. Slut.

**AVIS.** Sure thing, *cookie*.

**PERRY.** Getting back to the play... In addition to the Queen –

**CHEYENNE.** The super-hot Queen.

**PERRY.** In addition to the Queen, the King has several mistresses but one *official* mistress, Madame de Pompadour.

**CHEYENNE.** Cupcake. (*Perry slaps his script as he leans in to give Cheyenne a wilting look that says, Shut the hell up!*)

**PERRY.** The story is about Peyronie's repeated attempts to seduce Madame de Pompadour, which is a dangerous game.

**LOUIE.** So, she is a ball-buster.

**PERRY.** (*Fired up now, really selling it.*) Because the King could find out and exact vengeance! If caught with Madame de Pompadour, Peyronie could be marched to the gallows. But he's willing to take the risk because he's totally smitten by the charms of the courtesan! She's cultured. Smart. Beautiful. Highly desirable.

**AVIS.** Told you.

**PERRY.** Okay. So, let's think about this play in three parts: the *intriguing* beginning, the *suspenseful* middle, and the *explosive* –

**LOUIE.** (*To his feet and punctuating with a hip thrust.*) Climax! Yeah!



## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**PERRY.** Okaaay. In the first part, we introduce the characters, establish relationships, and clearly reveal the goal of our protagonist.

**CHEYENNE.** The Queen!

**LOUIE.** The King?

**PERRY.** Of course, every character has their own specific motivation. But Peyronie is the protagonist, and his driving goal, his obsession, is to gain the affection of Madame de Pompadour.

**AVIS.** So, she's got to be sexy.

**CHEYENNE.** Cupcakey.

**PERRY.** He begins to attract her attention and she –

**LOUIE.** Busts his balls!

**PERRY.** No, not really. She begins to toy with Peyronie.

**CHEYENNE.** What about the Queen?

**PERRY.** How do you think the Queen will feel about the mistress? Will she encourage Peyronie?

**CHEYENNE.** She'll be jealous and –

**CHLOE.** There's great opportunity for conflict between the Queen and the mistress.

**AVIS.** Bring. It. On.

**PERRY.** So, we have this tremendous interplay between the characters, a real tug-of-war. The mistress toys with Peyronie. The Queen tries to help Peyronie at the same time she's stealthily trying to interfere with Madame de Pompadour's relationship with the King.

**LOUIE.** What does the King do?

**PERRY.** At first, he's oblivious to Peyronie's advances but in the middle part of the play, he gets suspicious which makes it very dangerous for the King's surgeon.

**AVIS.** And what happens in the end? *(Perry straightens and pauses for dramatic effect. Before he can make the big reveal, the tapestry falls from the wall, and all heads swivel to take it in. Blackout.)*

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

### SCENE THREE

*Tuesday evening, the following day. The tapestry has been rehung, still a bit crooked, and one or two other items have been added to the set, perhaps a garish, fake open fireplace on the back wall. Perry sits with a script. He cranes his neck around to look at Chloe who stands behind holding a box.*

**PERRY.** What are you –

**CHLOE.** No. Not yet. Turn around. *(Perry shrugs and turns to look straight ahead. From the box, Chloe retrieves a long, curly, 1980s style shag wig. Blonde. Think Farrah Fawcett. She places the wig on Perry who squirms a bit.)* Hold still.

**PERRY.** Don't we have time for this later?

**CHLOE.** Wigs are a bitch to get used to, so best everyone knows what they're in for. Besides, just adding the wigs in the first rehearsal will help actors begin to get a feel for their character.

**PERRY.** Do we have a mirror? I want to see –

**CHLOE.** Not yet! *(The wig now positioned, Chloe steps around to get a good look.)* Stand up. *(Perry reluctantly stands. The wig is ridiculous, but Chloe valiantly gives an encouraging smile.)* Okay. Okay. Why don't you walk around, get a feel for it? *(Perry begins to shuffle about the stage.)* In character! Walk like the chief surgeon to the King of France! *(Perry straightens his back, chest out, chin up, arms bent at the elbow, palms up, and strides slowly but purposefully around the stage. Avis, Cheyenne, and Louie enter, all wearing street clothes. They stare at Perry's exaggerated officious affect. Cheyenne turns to Avis.)*

**CHEYENNE.** And you're supposed to fall for that fancy pants?

**CHLOE.** In 18<sup>th</sup> century France, this was –

**AVIS.** I think he's hot! *(All eyes turn to Avis. Is she serious?)*

**LOUIE.** I'm not saying he's hot, but he's got a certain, uh, what do you call it? Pan-ash.

**CHEYENNE.** *Pan. Ash?*

**AVIS.** Panache! Yes, Louie, he does! Panache!

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**CHLOE.** All of you, get backstage. I want to do some quick fitting, and we're running the first scene in 15 minutes.

**CHEYENNE.** We're already doing costumes?

**CHLOE.** We're just going to experiment with a few things in the first couple of rehearsals. It's going to make it easier for you to find your characters.

**LOUIE.** Find our characters?

**CHEYENNE.** Yeah, Louie! It's a bitching idea! Let's get your skinny ass into that fat ass king outfit. *(Louie shrugs, exits with Cheyenne. Avis pauses to consider Perry who's skeptically stroking his wig.)*

**PERRY.** You really think –

**AVIS.** Yes! Napoleon's got nothing on you! He was a French dandy on the outside but a great general. And you! Francois de la Peyronie! You! You're taller than Napoleon. And a doctor no less! The ladies love the doctors.

**CHLOE.** Yes, they do. Come on Avis, let's get you fitted. *(Chloe and Avis exit. Perry looks himself up and down, unconvinced. Slowly he straightens, strikes a pose. Strikes another. And another. He resumes his officious walk around the stage. As he does so, Fawn, Ruby, and Willy enter and stare, mouths agape, at Perry who is unaware of their presence until he turns with a flourish.)*

**PERRY.** Oh! I was just... Uh...

**WILLY.** So, it's true. We heard you're playing... *(Puzzled by the wig.)* Wait. *Who* are you playing?

**PERRY.** The wig. Is it too –

**FAWN.** Yes.

**WILLY.** Maybe.

**RUBY.** Definitely. But that's not why we're here.

**PERRY.** Well, this is our first real rehearsal and we're just trying some things out, but I think we're making a good start.

**RUBY.** We need to talk.

**FAWN.** Yes, Mr. Gupta. There's a problem with our program advertising.

**PERRY.** Oh? You're already advertising? That's great, but I'm not sure what I can do about –

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**WILLY.** *I don't think we have a problem.*

**RUBY.** All our regular sponsors have backed out.

**FAWN.** It's perceptions.

**RUBY.** Of the play. I mean, a play about urology is not –

**PERRY.** *What?!* It's got nothing to do with –

**WILLY.** Urology is a public service! I keep trying to tell them. Besides, we've got new sponsors.

**FAWN.** Yes, but they're all either physicians or pharmaceutical companies.

**PERRY.** *What?*

**FAWN.** What message does that send to our patrons?

**WILLY.** We're expanding our market!

**FAWN.** Alienating our subscriber base.

**WILLY.** You don't know that.

**RUBY.** We'd like you to change the title and –

**PERRY.** Wait! Change the title?! But the title is –

**RUBY.** *And* change the characters.

**PERRY.** Oh, my God!

**FAWN.** Yes. Can't you make it a more modern setting with fictional characters? (*Perry sinks to a chair. Disbelieving. Despondent. Head in his hands and framed by long curly locks.*)

**PERRY.** Have you even read the play? It has nothing to do with urology.

**WILLY.** It doesn't?

**FAWN.** Well, there's a buzz.

**PERRY.** What buzz?

**RUBY.** A subtitle.

**PERRY.** Subtitle? (*Jazmin and Sergio enter carrying a large poster showing two French noblemen squared off in a dueling pose, each brandishing swords. Bent swords. Jazmin and Sergio stand center stage holding up the poster and wearing big smiles. Splashed above the graphic, bold text reads: "A Crooked French Affair." And underneath, also bold: "Sword-Bending! Mind-Bending!"*)

**PERRY.** What's that?

**JAZMIN.** Isn't it great? My friend, Charles, painted this for us.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**SERGIO.** You didn't tell me it was Charles painted it. Isn't he the guy with inverted –

**PERRY.** *Why are they dueling? And why are their swords bent?*

**RUBY.** Bent swords. Like I said. A subtitle.

**SERGIO.** Or a new title. *The Bent Sword Affair!*

**PERRY.** Oh, my God. *(Avis, Cheyenne, and Louie enter all wearing equally ridiculous wigs. All three are smiling, delighted with their appearance. Chloe enters behind them.)*

**CHEYENNE.** We already have an audience! Fantastic! *(Cheyenne begins strutting, modeling for the board.)*

**AVIS.** Just got to hog the limelight, don't you?

**CHEYENNE.** Wait in the wings, *cupcake.* *(Cheyenne struts and ends with a dramatic low curtsy for the board as Avis shows disgust.)*

**RUBY.** I'd hold off on making any more costume decisions.

**CHEYENNE.** Well, I think my wig is gorgeous, and with the right gown and make up, the slut mistress is going to have a run for her money.

**AVIS.** Or maybe I'll run the queen through with a dagger.

**CHLOE.** Hey, everything here's okay. We're just getting into character. And I think it's best if we keep rehearsals closed for now.

**FAWN.** There's a problem. Our subscribers think the content –

**AVIS.** *(Indicating the poster.)* What's that?

**SERGIO.** For marketing. The program. Posters all over town!

**LOUIE.** Perry, do we get to duel? That would be awesome!

**CHEYENNE.** Stage combat! Yeah! Get the boys fighting over the girls!

**LOUIE.** Can we use stage blood? Can I make you bleed!

**CHLOE.** There's nothing like that in the script.

**PERRY.** Well, at least someone has read the script. *(Everyone looks to Perry who is aghast, head still in his hands.)*

**LOUIE.** I've read it.

**CHEYENNE.** It's a good script, but the Queen could have more lines.

**AVIS.** It's not a good script. It's a great script!

**RUBY.** But the subtext.

**LOUIE.** What's that?

**FAWN.** The underlying message about, you know, crooked, uh...

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**JAZMIN.** Bent! Bent swords.

**CHLOE.** What are you talking about? There are no swords in this play. It's about secret passions and –

**CHEYENNE.** Lust! And –

**LOUIE.** Jealousy. And –

**CHLOE.** Betrayal. And –

**AVIS.** Love! This play, this play is an emotional rollercoaster!

**CHEYENNE.** The roles are meaty. I mean, the Queen could have more lines. A lot more lines! But still, there's an emotional depth to the character. Meryl Streep would kill for this role!

**LOUIE.** And the King is not one dimensional! He manipulates. And he's manipulated. Sometimes he's a fount of wisdom. But then again, sometimes he's a fool. And his appetites! My God, how many mistresses can one man –

**CHLOE.** And what about the world? The world of the play? It's a set designer's dream. The Mars Room in Versailles! A feast for the eyes!

**AVIS.** This play has Pulitzer written all over it!

**PERRY.** *(Perry straightens, astonished and appreciative of the newfound respect from his cast and crew who are all nodding heads in support of a Pulitzer).* You get it. You understand.

**JAZMIN.** What about the poster? *(Perry stands. He paces, hesitates. All eyes on him. Finally, he turns, resolute but initially restrained.)*

**PERRY.** I would like you all off my stage. Please take the poster with you.

**FAWN.** Oh, my!

**AVIS.** Go Peyronie!

**RUBY.** Now wait just a minute.

**PERRY.** I'm sorry, but you're out of line. The board – all of you – approved this production, and I'm not only the playwright. I'm the director. So please –

**RUBY.** Let's be practical. We'd just like you to listen to reason.

**PERRY.** No, you listen! This is my play! My show! And I want you all off my stage! *(Fawn bursts out crying and dashes out wailing.)*

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**RUBY.** Okay, Perry. We said our piece. Whatever happens now, it's all on you. *(Turning to her board colleagues.)* Let's go. *(Ruby exits with Jazmin and Sergio.)*

**WILLY.** *(Chuckling.)* Wow! Pericles! Uh, *Perry!* I know what it's like to incur the wrath of the board. You've taken some of the heat off me, and I want you to know that I'm rooting for you. Bent sword. Straight sword. Whatever. I'm rooting for you. *(Breaking into hysterical laughter on exiting.)* I want you all off my stage! Get *your ass* off my stage! *(As Willy exits, Perry staggers back and collapses to a chair while his cast members rush to his side.)*

**CHLOE.** My God! You really are a director, aren't you?

**CHEYENNE.** Forget what I said about fancy pants. That was ballsy!

**LOUIE.** Awesome, man! You want my mistress, who am I to stand in the way? *(Avis sashays to Perry, leans in, a hand on his chest, a sultry voice.)*

**AVIS.** He wants the mistress, he can have her. *(Perry locks eyes with Avis. Silence. The tapestry falls from the wall. Blackout.)*

### SCENE FOUR

*Monday evening, two weeks later. Two chairs sit far to one side downstage near or on the apron. Chloe sits in a chair following along in the script and observing Perry (as Peyronie) and Avis (as Mme. Pompadour) who are mid-scene in rehearsal. They are not in costume, but they are fully engaged – in character, off book, hitting their marks, competently and dramatically delivering their lines with passable French accents.*

**PEYRONIE.** Mon Chéri, you must consider the future.

**POMPADOUR.** The King has secured my future. I have risen from poverty to the aristocracy. Do you not see that?

**PEYRONIE.** But in the future. How certain is your status?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**POMPADOUR.** You speak of the future, Monsieur, but nothing in this life is certain. And here. Now. In the present. I have lands and title! Monsieur, do not forget your place!

**PEYRONIE.** *(Peyronie takes her hand as he falls to a knee.)* Madame, my place is at your feet. You have my undying devotion. Life is more than land and titles. *(Louie (as King Louis XV) and Cheyenne (as Queen Marie) enter and stop short.)*

**KING LOUIS.** *(Stiffly, without accent.)* What's this? Uh... What treachery do I own in my, uh, my apartment, see? *(Peyronie leaps to his feet and bows before the King as Pompadour curtsies.)*

**PEYRONIE.** Your Majesty!

**POMPADOUR.** Your Majesty! *(Awkward pause as everyone waits for Louie to deliver his next line.)*

**KING LOUIS.** Uh. How goes, uh, now... Uh... *(Beat.)* Line. *(Queen Marie gives an exasperated sigh.)*

**CHLOE.** Your previous line was: *What treachery do I see in my own apartment?*

**LOUIE.** That's what I said.

**CHEYENNE.** *See!* What treachery do you *see!* You said: What treachery do I *own!* *(Beat.)* I don't know Perry. We open in a week and a half, and we haven't even had a complete run through. The King is still not off book.

**LOUIE.** Yes, I am! It's just that some of the words are out of order.

**CHEYENNE.** Oh, God.

**LOUIE.** We've only had a couple of weeks to learn our lines.

**CHEYENNE.** Well, numbnuts, you and I don't have that many lines. I know *my* lines. *And* I know your lines better than you do. That's because I'm a professional and studied with –

**AVIS.** Oh, yeah! Remind us again about your resume, Queenie. What was it, the Academy of *Pompous* Method Acting?

**CHEYENNE.** *Serious!* Serious Method Acting! And at least I'm a professional.

**CHLOE.** *(Rising to run interference.)* Okay then. Let's all act like professionals. Leave the directing to the director and support your fellow



## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

actors. (*Louie stares at his feet. Avis glares at Cheyenne who is glaring at Chloe who looks to Perry. Perry addresses the King.*)

**PERRY.** Uh, let's try it again. Take it from your entrance. Wait for your cue.

**CHLOE.** Okay. Louie. Your Majesty. Listen up. You just have two lines in this scene. *What's this? What treachery do I see in my own apartment?*

**LOUIE.** Right. (*Louie turns to exit, but Chloe stops him with a sharp retort and a tug on his sleeve.*)

**CHLOE.** Wait! That was just your first line.

**LOUIE.** That sounded like two lines.

**CHLOE.** Two sentences, your Majesty, but it counts as one line.

**LOUIE.** Oh.

**CHLOE.** You have another line, the follow up: *How dare my advisors flirt with treason?*

**LOUIE.** Aah. Got it.

**CHLOE.** (*As to a child.*) First line: *What's this? What treachery do I see in my own apartment?* (*Beat.*) After they bow, your second line: *How dare my advisors flirt with treason?* (*Beat.*) And could you try it with the French accent this time? (*Cheyenne sighs, exits.*)

**LOUIE.** Got it. (*Louie exits. Chloe takes a seat to observe. Peyronie resumes the kneeling position before Pompadour holding her hand.*)

**PEYRONIE.** Madame, my place is at your feet. You have my undying devotion. Life is more than land and titles. (*King Louis and Queen Marie enter and stop short.*)

**KING LOUIS.** (*Unrecognizable Eastern European accent.*) HOW IS THIS? My own advisers daring... In my flirting apartment!

**CHEYENNE.** Oh, my God! (*Perry rises but doesn't bow. Awkward pause.*)

**LOUIE.** Sorry. The accent is messing me up.

**AVIS.** Always apologizing.

**CHEYENNE.** Just learn your goddamn lines! And what was that accent? Are you King of France or a peasant from Uzbekistan? (*Chloe steps between Cheyenne and Louie. Addresses Cheyenne.*)

**CHLOE.** What'd we just talk about?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**PERRY.** Uh, let's, uh, let's take a break. Five minutes. Get a drink of water. Stretch. Do some deep breathing. (*Unconvincingly.*) We've got this. (*Cheyenne and Avis exit. Louie, troubled, looks at his watch, hesitates, but then exits. Perry watches them go and then approaches Chloe to share a look. Uncomfortable pause.*) What do we do about –  
**CHLOE.** Louie. Yeah.

**PERRY.** I was thinking about Cheyenne. Hard enough to deal with the bad blood between her and Avis, but we can't have her constantly berating Louis.

**CHLOE.** Yeah, well there's bad blood between Avis and everyone. Cheyenne. Her husband. The entire theatre board. But at least Avis and Cheyenne remember their lines. Louie's stiff as a board and when he does manage to remember the lines, sounds like he's chewing a mouthful of maggot cheese.

**PERRY.** *Maggot cheese?* I'm not sure what that is, but it sounds/ like –

**CHLOE.** /Like Louie what it sounds like.

**PERRY.** Louie does bring an imperious bearing to the role.

**CHLOE.** I guess. Like he's got his royal scepter up his ass. If that's what imperious looks like.

**PERRY.** But Cheyenne.

**CHLOE.** I know. I know. Such a prima donna. Chewing the scenery. Milking her lines. Upstaging. All problems but nothing that's going to sink the show. Louie, though, I know he's trying, but...

**PERRY.** I can work with Louie. Run his lines with him.

**CHLOE.** Sure. Leave the scepter up his ass. But we're going to have to give up on the dialect. It's too much.

**PERRY.** Maybe not. All he has to do is change a few vowel sounds, drop some s's and h's, insert some z sounds. It's going to be close enough. I've modified his script so he can study the key words spelled phonetically.

**CHLOE.** So, when he's supposed to say, "I have focused on these things that have brought me happiness," it comes out, "*I 'ave fuckeezed on deez teeng that 'ave brought me ah penis.*"

**PERRY.** *Fuckeezed. On. Ah. Penis.* Exactly.

**CHLOE.** Brilliant.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**PERRY.** I just need to figure out the best approach for Cheyenne.

**CHLOE.** I'll handle the Queen. She wants to be Meryl Streep not Amy Schumer. I'll massage her ego, talk to her about nuance. Subtlety. How to leverage innuendo to distinguish her as an artist.

**PERRY.** *(Dropping to a chair.)* Okay. And how should I...?

**CHLOE.** You? Just make sure to catch her doing something right so when you give her notes, you can extol her for something specific – how she nailed the blocking, the delicacy of her delivery, stuff like that. Pay attention, and you'll find something that you can use to shape her behavior. She'll eat it up.

**PERRY.** You think that will work?

**CHLOE.** She lives for attention. So, yeah. That will work.

**PERRY.** Thank you, Chloe. I've got to say, I'm impressed by your insight. Your understanding of actors.

**CHLOE.** People. Actors are just people. And don't sell yourself short. You're the director. Ask questions. Pay attention. Listen. Learn what motivates your actors. Some are shy introverts who come to life on the stage. Some are preening ass wipes who die an ugly death on the stage, victim of their ego. An actor's ego will screw up their performance. But I'll tell you, Perry, an egomaniacal director will destroy the whole show.

**PERRY.** Oh, God, I hope I'm not –

**CHLOE.** *(Sitting, too, and leaning in closely.)* You? Ego's not your problem. You've got everything you need to be a great director. *(Closer, intently, a hand on Perry's arm.)* But God help Pity Falls Community Playhouse if they ever give Cheyenne the director's chair. *(They chuckle. Then, an awkward moment before Chloe removes her hand and stands.)* Okay. Well, we're back in a few minutes, and I gotta pee. *(Chloe scurries off. Perry watches her backside as she leaves, then leans back. Eyes closed. Serene. A moment, then Avis quietly enters, stands behind Perry, hands on his shoulders.)*

**AVIS.** Chloe is peeing. Louie is sulking. Cheyenne is looking in the mirror, prinking and primping.

**PERRY.** Preening.

**AVIS.** And Hugo and Shirley are probably, at this very minute...

*(Punctuating with taps to his shoulders.)* Banging. Your. Headboard.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

*(Perry keeps his eyes closed, doesn't react. Avis takes a seat next to him.)*

**AVIS.** Have you considered murder?

**PERRY.** Offering your services as a co-conspirator?

**AVIS.** All the shit going on, and you're so calm and composed. How do you do it?

**PERRY.** Wisdom. Courage. Temperance. Justice. *(Avis studies Perry who calmly sits, eyes still closed.)*

**AVIS.** What are you talking about? And what are you doing?

**PERRY.** I'm reflecting. Thinking. Trying to live up to my namesake.

**AVIS.** Your namesake? *Peyronie?*

**PERRY.** Pericles. He was a stoic. A tremendous leader. The greatest Greek statesman.

**AVIS.** I thought that was Alexander the Great.

**PERRY.** *(Eyes still closed, gives a soft smile.)* Stoicism is about accepting the things, living with the things that are beyond our control. Turns out, I suck at accepting. Not all that good at going with the flow.

**AVIS.** Going with the flow? Sounds like a chickenshit's excuse to sit on his hands. Sorry. I don't mean you're a –

**PERRY.** Not sitting on my hands. *(Beat.)* I'm reflecting. Thinking. Trying to view every experience as an opportunity to learn.

**AVIS.** We have a situation, Perry! What are we going to do about it? *(Perry finally opens his eyes, leans forward.)*

**PERRY.** Why do you think I wrote this play? A play about love and relationships. Inappropriate relationships. A play set in France. *(Rising. A bit emotional.)* I don't know. Maybe I am a chickenshit, but want to know the truth, I'm more ashamed than I am afraid. Now, this play –

**AVIS.** *(Also rising.)* No! I didn't really mean you're a chickenshit. Directing. Acting. Shepherding this troop of misfits. It's impressive really. You and I have nothing to be ashamed of. It's Hugo and Shirley who should be ashamed! And even if you did need redeeming, you think this play –

**PERRY.** *It is more of a disgrace to be robbed of what one has than to fail in some new undertaking. (Avis gives a blank stare, wags her head. Perry sits.)* A quote from Pericles. The statesman. The stoic.

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**AVIS.** Okay.

**PERRY.** I want this play to be successful. I do. But... *(Perry trails off. Avis sits, wants more.)* The disgrace. The shame of losing Shirley.

**AVIS.** You really want her back, don't you? *(Perry just gives her a look.)* Buck up, Peyronie. *(With a French accent.)* The final curtain hasn't dropped, yet. *(Louie bursts onto the stage in a panic.)*

**LOUIE.** Cheyenne's arguing with Chloe. Says she wants me to have *selective mutism*. Hear that, Perry? Selective mutism! I mean, what the hell? *She wants all my lines! (Cheyenne flies onto the stage followed by Chloe.)*

**CHEYENNE.** This isn't working! Nothing is working! Perry you've got to do something because I'm not going to play queen to, to –

**CHLOE.** Get a hold of yourself! What would Meryl Streep do?

**CHEYENNE.** Meryl. Streep. Would never put up with this shit! *(With that, Cheyenne throws her script to the floor, spins, and stomps off stage.)*

**AVIS.** What a shit show. *(All eyes turn to the tapestry as it comes loose, but this time, only one corner drops so it hangs askew. Blackout.)*

### SCENE FIVE

*The following evening, Tuesday, a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Pity Falls Community Playhouse. A table downstage center. Behind, the set for the play is dark, but there's a pail in plain sight downstage into which water slowly drips. Fawn sits and stares at a sheaf of papers and softly weeps. Ruby, Sergio, and Jazmin enter and react to the leaking roof. They take seats and stare at Fawn expectantly.*

**RUBY.** What's wrong? Give me that. *(Ruby grabs papers from Fawn, stands and paces as she flips through. Sergio and Jazmin look expectantly to Ruby until she spins and delivers the news.)* We've been served.

**JAZMIN.** *What?*

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**RUBY.** Class action suit filed on behalf of those who submitted plays to the Pity Falls Community Playhouse First Annual Playwriting Competition.

**FAWN.** (*Whimpering.*) And the board members are named as defendants. (*Jazmin and Sergio jump up to look over Ruby's shoulder.*)

**SERGIO.** Class action? You've got to be kidding!

**JAZMIN.** *Don't we have insurance?* I mean, I didn't sign up for –

**RUBY.** They're seeking damages for –

**SERGIO.** *Damages?* Oh, my God!

**JAZMIN.** *How much?*

**RUBY.** For damage to professional reputation. Just a minute. (*Fawn whimpers.*) Oh, God. Fifty thousand dollars. (*Fawn wails.*)

**SERGIO.** *And we're personally liable?*

**RUBY.** Well, the theater. What a joke. We don't even have funds to fix our leaking roof.

**FAWN.** (*Sobbing.*) We're finished.

**JAZMIN.** We need Avis in here! It's her husband! You know it's Hugo behind all this.

**RUBY.** Yeah, well, I doubt she has much sway with Hugo. Anyway, she's got rehearsal.

**FAWN.** She also has a commitment to the board!

**SERGIO.** Speaking of which, where's Willy? (*Willy bursts onto the scene. Giddy, wearing a wide grin, he skids to a stop. He has a large poster which he keeps turned so it's facing upstage. NOTE: The poster can be prepositioned on an easel so it's turned away from house.*)

**WILLY.** The SIU has come through!

**RUBY.** What are you talking about?

**WILLY.** (*Affecting French accent.*) *The Société Internationale d'Urologie!* (*Willy waits for a reaction but only gets blank stares. Again, affecting French accent as indicated.*) The International Society of Urology. *The Société Internationale d'Urologie!* SIU!

**FAWN.** Who? What?

**WILLY.** They're French. (*Off more blank stares.*) Okay. You probably know them by some nasty sobriquet.

**JAZMIN.** Sobriquet?

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**WILLY.** The Flow Patrol. Pee Pee Posse. It's shameful. I mean, urologists get no respect.

**RUBY.** What the hell are you talking about?

**WILLY.** The SIU. They're French, and that's why –

**FAWN.** I don't understand.

**WILLY.** Okay. So, they moved their headquarters to Montreal. But they're still French. It was founded in 1907. *In Paris!*

**RUBY.** *What about them?*

**WILLY.** They have retained the renowned civil litigation attorney, *Madame Amélie Meurtrière*, to defend us in the lawsuit!

**FAWN.** Oh, my! What does that mean?

**WILLY.** Her nickname. *The Assassin*. It means... She will annihilate our enemies in the courtroom.

**FAWN.** Praise be, Saint Genesius!

**JAZMIN.** Who?

**SERGIO.** What?

**WILLY.** And that's not all! Get this! They've scheduled a meeting of regional urologists to coincide with the production of the play. They bought a huge block of seats for opening night!

**JAZMIN.** What a riot! *Is there a urologist in the house?*

**SERGIO.** Let's make sure we also get some proctologists. You know, to support our diversity initiative.

**FAWN.** By diversity, we don't mean –

**WILLY.** Listen! There's more! *(Producing a check with a flourish.)* I have here a check from SIU. *(Reading from the check.)* Pay to the order of Pity Falls Community Playhouse. Are you ready for this? Seventy-five thousand dollars! A donation! A check for seventy-five thousand dollars! *(Fawn gasps, swoons, and then outright faints, face-down on the table. Jazmin, Ruby, and Sergio spring into action. Ruby checks Fawn's breathing and leans her back in her chair.)*

**RUBY.** She's fainted! *(Jazmin steps forward and slaps Fawn who doesn't respond. Ruby slaps Jazmin.)* Stop that! *(Sergio grabs the water bucket and prepares to throw the bucket of water on Fawn.)* Wait! *What are you doing? Are you crazy? (Ruby sticks her hand in the bucket and*

## A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

*flicks wet fingers into Fawn's face. She revives and looks around in a daze.)* Are you okay now?

**FAWN.** What happened?

**JAZMIN.** You fainted.

**SERGIO.** You heard seventy-five thousand dollars and then, lights out. *(Fawn swoons again.)*

**RUBY.** Get a hold of yourself. Relax. Deep breaths. *(Fawn takes rapid breaths.)* Slow down! Don't hyperventilate! *(Pause as Fawn recovers. Sergio returns the pail to its spot on the floor under the drip. Everyone turns to Willy who's holding the check and wearing a silly grin.)*

**WILLY.** They love the idea of a play about urology in a French setting.

**SERGIO.** From what Perry said –

**JAZMIN.** It's not really about urology.

**WILLY.** But about a French pioneer in the study of urology! The SIU wants us to set up a booth, an education center, in the lobby during the performance. *(With a flourish Willy spins the poster around so it's visible to the house. It's a clinical, black and white line drawing of male and female urinary tracts.)* They'll staff the booth during intermission and –

**FAWN.** *What?*

**RUBY.** My God, Willy. What have you done?

**JAZMIN.** Bailed us out, that's what!

**SERGIO.** Yeah! For seventy-five grand, they can set up a full-service clinic in the lobby!

**JAZMIN.** Step right up folks for your free prostate exam!

**SERGIO.** We can serve little blue pills at concessions!

**JAZMIN.** A section for incontinence products.

**SERGIO.** Discreetly packaged, of course.

**JAZMIN.** Our revenue will go through the roof!

**WILLY.** Make light of it if you will, but just think of it! We're breaking new ground! Don't you see? *(Dramatic pause.)* It's the future of live theatre! The urologists have saved our ass! *(Silence reigns as all consider. Ruby thoughtful. Jazmin and Sergio delighted. Fawn unsure.)*

**FAWN.** We open on Friday, and I'm so scared.



A CROOKED FRENCH AFFAIR

**RUBY.** Tomorrow night's dress rehearsal is going to tell us all we need to know. I expect us all to be seated center orchestra. (*Ruby looks to all for confirmation and gets nods in response.*) Now it's all up to Perry.

**WILLY.** Pericles. Bubba. Gupta. My hero. (*Blackout.*)

**END OF ACT 1**

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