

The French Play

A comedy by

Gonzalo Rodríguez Risco

(Excerpt)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

In Les Champs du Péché:

HORTENSE Bayard, 22, a maid and Henri's lover, played by Marge.
LUCIANNE Sardou, 22, a maid, played by Rose.
HENRI DesChamps, 25, a gentleman, played by John.
LOUISE DesChamps, 60, Henri's mother, played by Abigail.
PAULINE DesChamps, 23, Henri's wife, played by Jen.
JEROME D'Argent, 23, Louise's lover, played by Billy.

In The French Play:

MARGE, 25, a struggling actress, plays Hortense.
ROSE, 23, a struggling actress and John's lover, plays Lucianne.
JOHN, 48, a famous actor (theater-famous), plays Henri.
ABIGAIL, 45, a character actress, plays Louise.
JEN, 25, a self-proclaimed rising star, plays Pauline.
BILLY, 25, an actor/model/waiter/singer/songwriter, plays Jerome.
RYAN, 30, the stage manager.
CLOWN, over 50, overweight, former world famous porn star.

STAGEHANDS, played by the run crew.

The play is performed by 8 actors (4 men and 4 women) and the actual run crew.

SETTING AND TIME

A theater. Any theater. Now. Proscenium.

Center stage is the French play set, flanked by curtains that can rise to show backstage areas and dressing rooms. Another curtain can cover the French play set.

When all curtains are down, the remaining downstage area represents a street.

Unless indicated otherwise, all transitions are swift.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

A slash [/] indicates a character speaking his or her line before the other character is finished. Sometimes it's a rude interruption, sometimes a natural overlap. It could also mean

that an actor is responding too early to a cue.

Two slashes [//] are unanswered questions. Moments. Breathers. Don't take too long, but don't skip over them either. I mean it.

An asterisk * means, literally: "Oops, I forgot my line for a moment". A growing amount of asterisks ***** should incrementally mean: "Oh shit, I can't remember my line! What's my line? Please help me god, what's my line!" Feel free to bask, but treat it with honesty. Raise the stakes by not playing the joke. The other actors should notice this lapse and try to correct it... And if the audience claps and becomes supportive, it's working.

Three crosses +++ are actors skipping over chunks of the play. There should be a momentary lapse in concentration while everyone adjusts. This includes light and sound cues.

NOTES ON THE PLAY

Les Champs du Péché has been running for a very long time. It is old and tired. Routine is slowly killing everything and everyone. In contrast, *The French Play* should aim to be technically flawless. Even as everything starts to collapse, it must be an organized self-destruction. Choreographed chaos.

I've included, as an Appendix, the full text of *Les Champs du Péché* (The Fields of Sin). It's never actually performed as written, but it might be useful as a guide.

TO THE ACTORS

When watching *Les Champs du Péché*, we should never feel that the actors are mocking the play, or playing the farce, since any form of wink-wink acting will only distance the audience. In other words: don't add sugar to candy. With the exception of Rose, everyone in the cast of *Les Champs du Péché* is an accomplished actor, tired of doing the play, but determined to perform it with honesty. All accents and French phrases are spot-on.

Rose is also trying to do her best, she's just really bad.

Billy's lack of accent is not a sign of bad acting. It's simply a terrible choice.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Staged at Yale School of Drama's 4th Annual Carlotta Festival of New Plays (May 8-17, 2009), directed by Patricia McGregor, with sets by Paul Gelinias, costumes by Lisa Loen, lights by Marie Yokoyama, sound by Michael Skinner, production dramaturgy by Walter B. Chon. The Stage Manager was Bree Sherry.

Featuring Yale School of Drama actors Tomas Andren, Trai Byers, Stephanie Hayes, Ben Horner, Max Gordon Moore, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Sarah Sokolovic and Shannon Sullivan.

ACT ONE

A living-room. Very old and very French, like Versailles exploded and scattered fleurs de lis and toisons d' or all over the place: Heavy wallpaper on the upstage wall, a chandelier, drapes, mirrors, chaise lounges, dressed chairs, fat cherubs and painted vases, flower arrangements. Less is not more. More is not enough. Go crazy.

Also, a large portrait covered by a thick black veil hangs over the fake fireplace and dominates the room.

The living-room set is flanked by two curtains (the wings).

Music: "Four Season" by Vivaldi, or something like that. Overused.

Lights slowly up on two maids dusting the room. They speak with heavy French accents. Lucianne can't really pull it off. Her actual French is even worse.

HORTENSE

I felt him!

LUCIANNE

Oh, Hortense--

HORTENSE

I did, Lucianne! It was late last night... I was putting out the fire, and I felt him... A presence. Lurking. Behind me.

LUCIANNE

You are imagining things. Luhrg... *Luhrgking*. Who taught you such worghs?

HORTENSE

Oh... There is something wrong with this house... Ever since/ the master

LUCIANNE

Don't say it!

HORTENSE

Left us.

LUCIANNE

(Oh, such bad French:)

Silence, Hortense! Pas plus des mots!

HORTENSE

Écoute-moi, Lucianne!
Yes. Our dear master...

She looks around. Then, a whisper:

Died... Under such mysterious circumstances...

Lucianne gasps and crosses herself.

Hortense keeps cleaning the room and proceeds with the blatant exposition.

Exactly one year ago today...
But sometimes it feels like he took this household with him...
Or... Never left!

LUCIANNE

Zont zay zat!

Beat. Huh?

HORTENSE

Last night... I heard his voice--

LUCIANNE

No.

HORTENSE

A rustling behind me... Steps. The sound of his cane against the hardwood floor.

Lucianne swoons.

LUCIANNE

You must 'ave imaginz it!

HORTENSE

I know what I felt... But... *Peut-être* you're right...

The sound of the Varsouviana Polka from "A Streetcar Named Desire": Only Hortense seems to hear it. She is lost in the music for a moment. She might also develop a slight facial tic -or crazy eyes- to overemphasize the moment's drama.

HORTENSE (CONT'D)

The human mind is prone to such digressions...
It is frail, and feeds itself with hope.

The Varsouviana fades.

I know what/ I felt.

LUCIANNE

(Again with the French:)

Non Hortense... Est impossible!

Pause.

They keep cleaning the room.

HORTENSE

Henri arrives today/ He will--

LUCIANNE

Henri?/ You call him--?

HORTENSE

Monsieur DesChamps.

LUCIANNE

You speak/ his name with such--

HORTENSE

Monsieur... Arrives today. He has only been away for two months, but the house feels different without him... Unprotected. What a strange coincidence, Lucianne... As you well know, he was bound to arrive three days ago, but the summer storm kept him at bay... Maybe his late father didn't want him here until... The anniversary.

They turn to look at the covered portrait.

Dramatic music. Lights shift.

Yes. I may have imagined certain things... But then, certain others are beyond the imagination...

Pause.

Dramatic music fades. Lights restore.

The maids jump into action.

LUCIANNE

We need more flowers!

HORTENSE

Yes. Madame Louise wants to bathe the room in flowers...

LUCIANNE

Do you think, Hortense...? Do you think madame will tell her son about Jerome?

HORTENSE

Oh, je ne sais pas...

LUCIANNE

He's almost *living* here.

HORTENSE

Madame's young lover--

LUCIANNE

She should still be in mourning/ for monsieur DesChamps--

HORTENSE

They are careless! They must hide their dirty love--

LUCIANNE

No, don't say that... Madame is a paragon of virtue!

The doorbell rings.

HORTENSE

Is that?

LUCIANNE

Monsieur Henri DesChamps!

HORTENSE

Call Madame, call Madame!

They try to organize and clean the room in a hurry, they place vases with flowers and dust everything.

Monsieur DesChamps is here! Monsieur DesChamps--!!

Henri makes an entrance. His accent is British.

HENRI

Call me Henri, Hortense.

Lights shift. Grand entrance music.

Henri faces the audience, strikes a pose and pauses for applause.

As long as it takes.

Then he turns to face Lucianne:

Lucianne, is it?

LUCIANNE

Yes, monsieur.

HENRI

Take my coat.

LUCIANNE

Oui, monsieur.

Lucianne takes the coat and cane. Henri should remove at least five or six articles of clothing and still look overdressed.

Hortense looks at him in silence.

Lucianne leaves.

HENRI

Is my mother up?

HORTENSE

I'll go fetch her, Monsieur--

He gestures for her to stay.

HENRI

No. Stay... I would so like to surprise her...

Henri and Hortense look at each other for a moment. Then they run into each other's arms and kiss passionately.

HORTENSE

Oh, Henri... Henri...

HENRI

Hortense... My love, my little flower...

*They kiss. He takes her hands and kisses the tips of her fingers.
They share a long look.*

HORTENSE

I've felt empty without you, Henri... You've been gone for/ so long...

HENRI

Shh... I hear someone.

HORTENSE

Lucianne is my friend/ she'll keep our secret.

HENRI

No... No... There is something I must tell you, Hortense... You must know.

HORTENSE

I have something to/ tell you as well.

HENRI

I'm married. I have a wife.

Shock!

Dramatic music.

Hortense backs away.

Lights out.

~~~

*Transition music and lights:*

*Stagehands emerge dressed like french servants and move a few things around. A plate with finger food and chocolates is set. The furniture is shifted a bit. Nothing major. It should be obvious that the stage hands are looking for spike marks on the floor.*

*The stagehands leave.*

*The actors playing Henri, Pauline, Louise, Lucianne and Hortense enter and take their positions. They remain frozen mid grand gesture, waiting for the light cue.*

~~~

Lights up on the living-room.

Henri and Pauline are sitting together. She fans herself constantly and smiles too much. Her laugh should get on our nerves pretty quickly.

Across from them sits Louise DesChamps, Henri's mother. She pops chocolates into her mouth. Pauline and Louise both have slight British accents.

Hortense and Lucianne are pouring wine. Dead face.

HENRI (CONT'D)

So I told them... I said... We are *not* talking about the poor, Monsieur LaChance... Such topics should be reserved for the senate! For the senate! ha ha ha!

LOUISE

Oh, the poor bore me. As do the *bourgeoisie* and the upper classes... Everyone bores me so.

She eats a chocolate.

Henri gets up and walks towards the fireplace.

HENRI

My dear mother, having been away for so long, I do believe I've been inexcusably neglectful in my duties as a son... Are you well?

Pauline springs up. She's also loud.

PAULINE

Yes, *belle-mère*, do tell!

Louise stares at Pauline with obvious distaste.

LOUISE

Oh... I've been.

She shares a look with Lucianne.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Otherwise entertained

Lucianne blushes. Hortense scolds.

Henri reaches the fireplace and is about to turn when he discovers a small red object: What's a clown nose doing onstage? He picks up the nose and it honks loudly, so he quickly pockets it and turns to look at the covered portrait. He's back in character.

HENRI

My dear father... He had such life... Such passion!
I find it almost impossible to believe *
I find it * * *
I find * * *
A terrible shadow * * * *

Pauline laughs nervously

Henri restarts.

My dear father... It's so sad * * *

LOUISE

Oh, darling... You must *hate* the veil that covers his portrait...

PAULINE

And miss him terribly? Maybe... Every day of your wretched life?

HENRI

Indeed! I *hate* it! The veil! My dear father had *a lot* of life... Uh, covering his memory seems like an insult.

PAULINE

Oh, Henri, you have such passion!

Hortense lowers her head.

HENRI

* *

PAULINE

Oh, the desperate musings of a grieving son... You're a true poet, Henri... A true poet!

Pauline laughs again.

HENRI

LOUISE

Oh... Well, my darling son, perhaps you should...

+++

Finish your wine...

Hortense runs to pour the wine that they skipped over.

PAULINE

Or not, my dear, husband... you really shouldn't drink, ha ha ha... Why don't we... Talk about our plans for the future...? Or the beauty of country life--

+++

LOUISE

UNVEIL THE PORTRAIT!

PAULINE

The... portrait? Now?

Henri turns to look at the covered portrait and walks to it. Pauline walks behind him.

Louise signals Lucianne to approach her.

LOUISE

(A whisper:)

Lucianne... You must deliver this letter to my young lover, to Jerome--

LUCIANNE

(A whisper:)

But madame--

HENRI

I must uncover the portrait of my father!

Louise gives the letter to Lucianne.

PAULINE

Yes, my love!

LOUISE

Are you certain?

HENRI

**

Yes! I am!

Henri unveils a portrait of Jean Luc DesChamps. Elegant and refined... But the eyes are bleeding!

Lightning and thunder. Go for it.

Louise and Pauline scream.

HENRI (CONT'D)

What is this?

LUCIANNE

(Aside, British accent:)

Your trust/ will be
your ultimate
downfall, Louise
DesChamps!

LOUISE

(Aside:)

No, Jean Luc,/ forgive
me! Forgive my sins!

HENRI

(Loud, over their speeches:)

My father's portrait! What does this mean?!

Hortense faints.

They hold a dramatic pose as the curtain falls and music soars. Lucianne also holds a dramatic pose, though she should have been offstage by now.

[Actually, the curtain only falls for the Champs du Péché audience. We can still see everyone onstage, but in a "curtain down" effect.]

~~~

*Everyone holds for one more second, and then relax at the same time. All accents are now neutral.*

*Stagehands walk in to do the changeover. They work around the actors.*

JOHN (HENRI)

What the fuck?

ROSE (LUCIANNE)

What happened?

JOHN

I don't know... I blanked.

ABIGAIL (LOUISE)

I think I skipped like ten minutes.

PAULINE (JEN)

The whole "moving to the country" part... My monologue--

MARGE (HORTENSE)

The wine--

ABIGAIL

*(To Rose:)*

Well, at least I gave you the letter--

ROSE

I didn't have time to do my aside--

MARGE

Weren't you supposed to leave with the letter?

ROSE

I was trying to say my fucking line--

JEN

Rose... Language.

ABIGAIL

What a mess...

JOHN

Guys... I'm really sorry. I don't know what happened.

*Billy (Jerome) walks in.*

BILLY (JEROME)  
First act's over? Already?

ABIGAIL  
John forgot his lines.

JOHN  
Shit!

*The Stage Manager's voice is heard through the  
loudspeakers.*

RYAN'S VOICE  
John?

JOHN  
Ryan, I'm really sorry...

RYAN'S VOICE  
Are you ready to go on for the Second Act? Is this something we need to worry  
about?

JOHN  
No... I'm fine. I just need to focus. I *know* the part.

RYAN'S VOICE  
*I trust that you can do it, John... but we/ need to know if--*

JOHN  
I'll do it. Trust me, Ryan. Everyone. I'll be fine.

ABIGAIL  
(*Sighs:*)  
I'll go change.

RYAN'S VOICE  
Fifteen minutes, everyone.

ALL  
Thank you, fifteen.

*They start to leave.*

BILLY  
Who's John's understudy?

ROSE  
Shh/ don't--

JOHN  
Why are you asking that?

MARGE  
I think it was that Clown.

BILLY  
Oh. Right. Him.

JOHN  
Hey! Hey!

BILLY  
Too bad Ryan fired him.

*Marge looks at John: He had Ryan fire him.*

*Billy looks at Marge: Really?*

ABIGAIL  
Oh... No, we *really* don't want him back.

*Marge, Abigail, Jen and Billy are gone.*

JOHN  
I don't need an understudy! You hear me?!

ROSE  
John. It's okay.

JOHN  
I'm John Strone!

ROSE  
They know that.

*John sits in a chair one of the stagehand was about to strike.*

Honey...

*She looks at the stagehand.*

*The stagehand backs away offstage.*

JOHN

I really don't know what happened... We've been doing this stupid play for so long--

ROSE

You just got/ distracted--

JOHN

I *never* forget my lines. I'm *proud* of my frigging memory. You know me. Everyone calls me--

ROSE

"Off-Book John".

JOHN

"Off-Book by the first rehearsal, John!"  
I mean: *Long Day's Journey into Night*... That was really, really long!

ROSE

You're just tired.

*He sighs. Frustrated.*

John.

*He puts his hand in his pocket, searching for the Clown nose.*

JOHN

Where the hell's that nose?

ROSE

What?

*He looks at Rose.*

JOHN

Don't you need to change?

ROSE

The maid?

JOHN

Oh. Right.  
Rose...?  
I could use a blowjob.

(John...!)

ROSE

*She looks around.*

JOHN

What? It helps me relax!

ROSE

Well... Not right now.

JOHN

Please?

ROSE

No. Behave.

JOHN

Mkay...  
I guess I should... change.  
Do you have a script?

ROSE

No... I don't think so... It's been/ such a long time.

JOHN

I'll just ask Ryan.

ROSE

Right.  
//  
John?  
//  
That kiss today. With Marge. It was long.

JOHN

Really?

ROSE

Very long.

JOHN

Hm. I didn't notice.  
She tastes like an ashtray.

*John leaves.*

*Rose picks up the chair and hands it to a Stagehand who was hovering right outside. He's smiling.*

ROSE

Oh, you *wish* I'd blow you.

*The stagehand quickly turns and leaves with the chair.*

*Marge enters.*

MARGE

Want to share a cigarette?

ROSE

Yes! Great idea!

MARGE

How's John?

ROSE

He's okay. Just tired of doing the play.

MARGE

Well... We're all tired of this stupid play--

ROSE

And those fucking accents--

MARGE

I know... It's ridiculous! They can call it deconstruction, or social commentary, or whatever the hell they want, but you know what it is? Racist.

ROSE

Yeah... Who wants to be French?

MARGE

//  
You want to practice, sometime?

ROSE

What for?

MARGE

No. Just.

Smoke? ROSE

Smoke! Yes! MARGE

*They leave.*

~~~

Billy and John's dressing room.

Billy masturbates.

He has a white corset tied around his head. He sniffs it, bites it, licks it. He caresses the soft fabric as he touches his chest.

BILLY
Salty salty salty sweat... Fuck, ohgod ohgod ohgod...

He comes.

Breathes hard. Smiles. Relaxes.

A knock on the door.

RYAN
Five minutes.

BILLY
Uh. Yeah.
Thank you five...

He smells the corset again. Deep.

~~~

*Jen and Abigail's dressing room.*

*Abigail is listening to music.*

*Jen is just too sweet. Ugh.*

JEN  
Oh no!

What? ABIGAIL

Where's my corset? JEN

What?? ABIGAIL

*Jen turns down the music.*

My corset... It was here five minutes ago-- JEN

This one's mine. ABIGAIL

Is it? JEN

Well, I can't see if-- ABIGAIL

Turn around, please? JEN

*Jen checks.*

Yes... It's yours. Oh, jeeppers!

*A knock on the door.*

What?! ABIGAIL

Four minutes. RYAN (OFF)

Oh no no no... JEN

*Another knock.*

*Thank you four!* ABIGAIL AND JEN

Abby?  
BILLY (OFF)

Yes?  
ABIGAIL

It's Billy.  
Can I come in?  
BILLY (OFF)

*Abigail looks at Jen: What does he want?*

*Jen shrugs.*

Sure.  
ABIGAIL

*Billy enters. Corset in hand.*

I found this corset--  
BILLY

Oh my lord, thanks, Billy!  
I've been looking all over for it.  
JEN

Oh. It's...  
It's... yours?  
BILLY

Thank you thank you thank you!  
JEN

*Jen starts to put the corset on.*

*Billy looks sick.*

Ok.  
Uh. Ok. I'll see you onstage.  
BILLY

Jen, you're doing it all wrong...  
ABIGAIL

Oh... Please help me!  
JEN

Abby? BILLY

Turn around, breathe in. ABIGAIL

I'll see you onstage? BILLY

//  
Sure, Billy. ABIGAIL

*Billy leaves.*

Abby... He liiikes you. JEN  
When you kiss onstage he gets all flustered.

He's acting. ABIGAIL

That's not acting. I know acting. JEN

*Abigail shrugs and turns the volume up.*

*We hear a low sensual song.*

*Jen smiles.*

He's too young. I could be his mother. ABIGAIL

*Jen keeps smiling.*

What?

~~~

Lights up in the Champs living room. Later that night.

Music: Vivaldi, or something like that.

Hortense is clearing the last cinders from the dying fire. She cries in silence. Distraught. How can Henri be married?

Monsieur DesChamps' painting is covered with the black veil again. Suddenly, the veil falls, and the face is illuminated. The painted eyes seems to be staring at her!

Hortense gasps.

Lights flicker as we hear a deep recorded voice.

VOICE

Remember me.

Hortense screams!

Lights up as Henri runs into the room. The painting looks normal again. Now we can see that the bleeding eyes are just red brush strokes.

HENRI

What happened?

HORTENSE

It was... A voice... I thought I heard--

HENRI

Whom?

HORTENSE

It's nothing... My imagination must be running wild.

She realizes that they are alone.

Henri... How can you be married? I thought--

HENRI

I yearned to tell you, Hortense, *mon petit fleur*, but * *
But * * *
My father * *

HORTENSE

You mean... Your father thrust his entire affair upon you? He made an addendum to his will?

HENRI

Yes! I had to marry a girl, a good girl * *

HORTENSE

With impeccable social standing? Is that what you're saying?

HENRI

Or I would lose it all. His fortune. And it had to happen before my twenty-fifth birthday!

HORTENSE

So you married Pauline... I see... It was a financial arrangement. It was business.

HENRI

Uh huh.

HORTENSE

Do you love her?

Henri, tell me the truth...

Do you love the woman that calls herself your wife?

HENRI

I only love you... *

My dear *

Hortense!

He holds out his hand.

Hold my * *

HORTENSE

Your hand?

HENRI

Hold my hand... I solemnly swear my undying love to you!

They hold hands.

Dramatic music.

They kiss.

HORTENSE

Henri, I must tell you--

+++

HENRI

You're pregnant?

HORTENSE

//

HENRI

I'm sorry... you were saying something, my dear...?

HORTENSE

Yes... Yes... I must tell you... The knowledge that you had married someone else... It made me feel as if my life, my very soul, were slipping away... And only one thing allowed me to keep my sanity, one truth kept me anchored to this bare, despoiled, shallow place we call our home... Henri DesChamps, my love, my *raison d'être*... I'm carrying the fruit of our love!

HENRI

You're pregnant?!

HORTENSE

Yes...

Henri is frozen in place.

Hortense cries in pain and runs away.

HENRI

Hortense? HORTENSE!!

Henri follows her.

Transition music

~~~

*[The stage right curtain opens as lights dim on the Champs living-room. We can now see and hear backstage right while Les Champs du Péché is performed in shadows.]*

~~~

Backstage right.

Henri (John) walks in from Champs.

Billy is waiting to go on.

MARGE
(*Whispers:*)
Shh... John... Be quiet!

LUCIANNE (OFF)
(*Switches to bad
British accent:*)
You startled me... What
are you doing here?

JOHN
Do you have a script?

JEROME (OFF)
I came to meet Henri
DesChamps.

MARGE
(*Whispers, looking
through her bag:*)
Maybe in my dressing
room...

LUCIANNE (OFF)
No, no you musn't...

JOHN
I need to borrow it, this
is ridiculous. I don't--

LUCIANNE (OFF)
Read this letter from
madame Louise--

MARGE
Shhh....

JOHN
Okay okay... Like anyone cares about this part...

JEROME (OFF)
Oh, my sweet Lucianne.

John and Marge walk out.

~~~

*[The stage right curtain closes as the stage left curtain  
opens.]*

~~~

Backstage left. A few minutes later.

*A stagehand walks in with a small bench and sets it
offstage, ready for the transition. He looks up when a
shadow moves in the background. Was that a clown?*

We hear Champs:

LUCIANNE (OFF)

Dear God... Will I be punished for these sins? Have I fallen from grace forever?

Lightning and thunder in Champs.

Lucianne screams.

VOICE (OFF)

(Echoing:)

...Revenge...

The same shadow moves in the background. The stagehand takes out a small flashlight.

LUCIANNE (OFF)

(French accent:)

Who is that?

A light change in Champs.

Abigail walks by in a hurry, trying to take off her wig and unzipping her dress. She is followed by another stagehand holding a costume and a different wig.

ABIGAIL

Shit! Shit! Shit!
Hurry!

Abigail exits.

The stagehand's flashlight shines briefly on a Clown, but he scrambles away.

VOICE

(Echoing:)

....Revenge...

Lucianne screams.

Lucianne (Rose) runs in from Champs.

The stagehand screams.

ROSE

Shhh... What are you doing?

Transition music.

A cue light goes off.

The stagehand picks up the bench.

~~~

*[The stage left curtain closes].*

~~~

The Champs living-room.

Transition music and lights.

The stagehand enters carrying the bench, he can't remember his spike mark. He looks at the floor. Looks up. Tries to orient himself. Finally, he sets the bench and leaves.

A moment.

Another stagehand walks in, he (or she) is also dressed like a French servant, but he (or she, you get my drift) is wearing a wireless headset with flashing green and red lights. He picks up the bench and sets it in the right place, all the way across the stage.

Transition ends.

~~~

*Henri enters and sits on the bench. He then notices that he is carrying a script and quickly throws it offstage.*

*Lights up.*

*It is raining heavily and thunder rumbles in the distance.*

*Jerome enters. He doesn't even try the British accent, or the French.*

JEROME

Monsieur DesChamps?

HENRI

Yes?

JEROME

Henri. May I call you Henri?

HENRI

Who are you?

JEROME

I'm Jerome D'Argent... I live across the moor.

HENRI

D'Argent? If I recall, my mother has a childhood friend... Madame Eloise?

JEROME

She's my mother.

HENRI

Ah... Jerome, I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance. Though I believe \*  
I believe this \* \* \*

JEROME

Perhaps... You are wondering... What's the reason for my visit?

HENRI

Oh. Yes... May I ask the reason for your visit?

JEROME

Indeed, I'm here to see you...  
There is something/ you must know--

*Louise enters in a hurry.*

LOUISE

Ah, there you are my son, my precious son... I trust Monsieur D'Argent has kept you entertained?

JEROME

Hello, Louise--

HENRI

You call my mother by her given name?

*Louise laughs.*

LOUISE

Oh... Ha ha ha my son... Times are changing! Not *everyone* has your impeccable manners... Jerome, you should learn a thing or two from my dear, dear son, who *is your own age* and tends to follow the most strict rules of society and decorum...

JEROME

We must speak--

LOUISE

Oh, nonsense! Speech is boring... Where is your pretty wife, my son? You musn't leave her alone in the country, she's so used to city comforts--

HENRI

I believe she's with Lucianne--

LOUISE

Fetch her, darling! Fetch her at once!

HENRI

\*\*

LOUISE

You must be wondering if I'm feeling alright... And my answer is:

*(Back to her text:)*

Why yes, Henri! I'm just... So happy with my darling Pauline... She's like the daughter I never had, and you can't blame me for wanting to spend more time with her... Her laughter just fills my heart with joy!

*Hortense enters, unseen.*

And... You love her too? Is that right?

HENRI

\*\*

LOUISE

Just nod your head, darling.

*Henri nods.*

*Hortense turns and flees. She's clearly distraught.*

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Will you be a good son and fetch her for me?

HENRI

... So... I should go, then, mother?

LOUISE

Yes, darling! Fetch her ! Fetch!

*Henri leaves in a hurry.*

Good boy...

*Jerome picks up a small music box. Opens it. The sound of the music box fills the room.*

*Louise turns to him.*

LOUISE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Put that down!

Not that...

*Points at the painting.*

Not his family heirloom!

*Jerome closes the music box.*

*The music stops.*

JEROME

I must tell your son!

He must know that we love each other...

LOUISE

No, Jerome/ not yet!

JEROME

When?

LOUISE

Not on the anniversary of his father's death!

*They look at the painting.*

*Louise quickly picks up the veil and covers the painting. She turns to find Jerome already too close.*

JEROME

I can't wait anymore. No more, my darling Louise!  
My love for you must flourish! It will not be silenced--!

LOUISE

But it must!

*Jerome kisses Louise. She resists for a moment, then kisses him back.*

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Kiss me, Jerome, kiss me... I'm yours...

*Suddenly, we see Pauline hiding behind a curtain: She has witnessed everything.*

Oh, my darling Jerome, you have given my life new meaning...

*They kiss again. Very theatrical. And then a bit too long. Louise tries to back away, but Jerome grabs her from behind and clamps her closer. The kiss goes on beyond comfort. She tries to deliver her lines:*

'is 'ust 'e our 'ecret... 'or now.

*Pauline leaves quietly.*

*Lights out.*

~~~

Abigail (Louise) pushes Billy (Jerome) away and exits. She's a bit woozy.

Stagehands walk in and do the changeover to transition music.

Jerome realizes that he has a noticeable erection in his very tight costume. He picks up an important prop and covers himself as he exits.

~~~

*[The stage right curtain opens as the stage is dimmed and action in Les Champs du Péché happens in shadows.]*

~ ~ ~

*Backstage right.*

*John is waiting to enter the scene. He paces nervously. There is a large red splotch on his costume: stage blood. He is reading the script, running the lines and going over the blocking.*

*We hear Les Champs du Péché.*

PAULINE (OFF)  
(*In French:*)

*Assassin!*

|                                                                                                         |                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>JEROME (OFF)<br/>Yes, I killed her... And I<br/>will kill you both<br/>unless you do as I say...</p> | <p>JOHN<br/>(<i>In monotone:</i>)<br/>"Let go of my mother".<br/>Blah blah blah "sword".</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

JEROME (OFF)  
You will bequeath your fortune to me...

|                                                               |                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>LOUISE (OFF)<br/>No... My son will not<br/>allow this.</p> | <p>JOHN<br/>(<i>In monotone:</i>)<br/>"You will pay for this<br/>with your life".</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

JEROME (OFF) (CONT'D)  
Your son is dead.

|                                    |                                                                        |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>LOUISE (OFF)<br/>You lie...</p> | <p>JOHN<br/><i>Something something<br/>something</i>"foolish man".</p> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|

PAULINE (OFF)  
No... Not my dear Henri...

*John mock fights as if holding a sword. Following a strict fight choreography.*

*Rose enters and looks at him.*

JEROME (OFF)

Did you really believe that I loved you? You stupid, stupid woman... I planned it all... I poisoned your husband a year ago--

LOUISE (OFF)

No!

JOHN

*(Going over blocking:)*

Painting. Turn. Stab.

*Makes a stabbing move.*

JEROME (OFF)

I ravaged his painting!

JOHN

Falls. *Blah blah blah*  
"dead".

JEROME (OFF)

And to think that I had to make love to you... Disgusting wench...

LOUISE (OFF)

God smite you!

*John looks at the floor.*

PAULINE (OFF)

Woe! My husband!  
Woe!

JOHN

*(In monotone:)*  
"Ahhh... My child, my  
child"

JEROME (OFF)

Now sign your fortune  
over to me... Or I will  
kill you both!

JOHN

*(In Monotone:)*  
"A father's honor has  
been restored".

LOUISE (OFF) (CONT'D)

*Jamais!*

ROSE

Last scene, honey.../ It's almost--

JOHN

Shh.  
Fuck!

*Rose backs away.*

Sign it now!

JEROME (OFF)

*A cue light goes off.*

*John picks up a prop sword and limps onstage.*

~~~

[The stage right curtain closes as the Champs living-room comes to life.]

~~~

*The Champs living-room.*

*Jerome is grabbing Louise's arm. She winces in pain.*

*Pauline screams.*

*Henri enters carrying a sword. His shirt is stained with blood and he is limping slightly.*

HENRI

Let go of my mother!

JEROME

Ah! Henri DesChamps! I see that my sword--

HENRI

You will pay for this with your life!

JEROME

You challenge me? You dare challenge me?

*Henri raises his sword.*

I will kill you once and for all, you foolish man!

*They fight. Very choreographed.*

*Henri is about to lose the fight when a beam of light hits the painting and distracts Jerome.*

*Stab! Henri kills Jerome.*

*Jerome falls to the ground.*

No... I have lost everything... I am dead...

*Jerome dies.*

*Henri turns to look at Hortense.*

HENRI

Ahh... My child, my child...

*He looks at the painting.*

A father's honor has been \* \* \*

*Louise and Pauline wait for his cue.*

A father's \* \* \*

PAULINE

...Honor has been--

HENRI

The... The rest is... Silence!

*Pauline and Louise look at him: What? After a beat, they approach him as lights slowly fade and the [invisible] curtain falls.*

~~~

The sound of applause from the Champs audience.

Jerome and Hortense jump up and join Henri, Louise and Pauline for the curtain call lineup. Lucianne enters from offstage and joins them.

The curtain rises and lights shift to curtain call.

Henri gets a standing ovation. He smiles and bows gracefully.

The curtain falls and applause dies away.

JOHN

Holy crap...

ROSE
That was--

JEN
Awful, that was just awful...

MARGE
Why did you quote Hamlet?

ROSE
Oh, that was so funny, he's been learning the lines for this summer stock--

JOHN
Rose, no.

ROSE
//

ABIGAIL
That was a fucking mess.

JEN
(Perky:)
I'm sure we'll do better tomorrow.

ABIGAIL
Jen?

JEN
Hm?

ABIGAIL
Bite me.

JEN
Oh, you... Ha ha ha...

Ryan walks in.

RYAN
Gather round, please... Gather round.

No one does.

JOHN

"A father's honor has been restored..."
Fuck!

BILLY

Hey... Uh. Abby--?

Abigail ignores him and takes off her prosthetic nose, we can see that she's still much older than everyone else, except for John. She leaves the nose on a table.

ABIGAIL

(To Ryan:)

Are we done here?

RYAN

No, we actually need to meet about/ this problem with John--

MARGE

Can we do it tomorrow?

JOHN

It won't happen again.

RYAN

Okay. So... Tomorrow? Could everyone come in a bit early?

MARGE

Sure.

ROSE

John and I will be here.

BILLY

Uh... Me too.

ABIGAIL

Fine. Tomorrow.

RYAN

Jen?

JEN

Of course, Ry-Ry!

JOHN
Guys, I'm really sorry.

ABIGAIL
Yeah yeah yeah...
(To Jen:)
Need a ride?

JEN
No... I'm...

RYAN
We have a meeting. About another show.

Everyone smiles and starts to leave. Shared looks: Jen and Ryan? Who would have guessed...

Billy is alone for a moment.

He picks up Abigail's prosthetic nose. Breathes it in.

He leaves.

~~~

*The stage is empty for a moment.*

*A stagehand walks in carrying a ghost light and sets it center stage. The other lights fade. The stagehand leaves.*

*The ghost light starts to flicker as we hear the recorded voice from the Play.*

VOICE  
Remember me.  
Remember me.  
Remember me.

*The ghost light goes off and we are left in the dark.*

*After a moment, the ghost light flickers on again. All curtains are now raised so we can see both stage and backstage.*

*A Clown is sitting onstage. Not a circus clown, but not a scary clown either. Somewhere in between.*

*Even with makeup, we can see that he looks a lot like 70's porn star Ron Jeremy.*

*He is the recorded voice.*

CLOWN AND VOICE

Remember me.

*Looks at the audience.*

CLOWN

Remember me?

*He gasps!*

Oh no... Did I just break the fourth wall?  
Is the magic of theatre... gone?  
Well, I do that... It's my thing.

*Lights up on him.*

So... Do you remember me?

No. Of course you don't.

It happens.

I get that look, that *I know you from somewhere* look all the time.

So now I dress like this.

All the time.

I'm not a fucking clown, you know?

Not that I have anything against--

Actually, I do. I hate clowns.

They freak me out.

Especially those stuffy *Cirque de Soleil* clowns? Stuck-up little fags that talk by honking a horn just to show that they're *multicultural*... Beyond language.

You know what's beyond language? Porn.

Cut to me, cut to her, drop trou, proceed to fuck.

*He takes out a horn.*

*Honks it.*

Ooohh... I'm french, I'm interesting, I talks *avec ze horn*...

*Honks the horn.*

*Fake french:*

Blah blah bleh du popo?

*Honk honk.*

Oooo... oui oui oui... Ma saucisse est dans la bouche de ta maman...

*Honk honk.*

Stats:

1,986 adult movies.

Top billing in 1,237.

*Special Appearance* in the rest.

My name alone onscreen every single time!

Every single time!

9.75 inches of pure thick man meat.

I can get to 10 if I pump.

You want some?

Wanna feel the icon between your legs?

I may be fat, and old, and pray to the Gods of Viagra... But...

You *must* remember me...

*He thrusts back and forth while honking the horn and doing a pretty good imitation of a woman shrieking in pleasure.*

I was cast as Jean Luc DesChamps... I was the dead father's ghost in the play that's not this play, but *is* the play...

You get it.

You're smart.

And then I didn't fit.

The Clown. The Pornstar.

The "Legend".

Didn't Fit.

That's what I was *famous* for!

*He looks at us, perfect British English:*

"Hence-banished is banish'd from the world,

And world's exile is death: then banished...

And something something British porridge Hedgehog."

They cut me from the play. They replaced *me* with light on a painting. And voice-over.

*Lights shines on the painting.*

VOICE

A wrong has been done... And I must seek/ revenge--

CLOWN

I've been dubbed many times, but never replaced.

*The clown walks to an offstage props table and rearranges the props. Hides the matches, pours salt in the water, etc.*

Look at me.  
It's gonna get messy.

*He picks up a prop knife and replaces it with another knife. A bigger one. It shines dangerously.*

*He looks at us:*

So...  
Remember.  
Me.

*Evil smile.*

Adieu.

~~~

The Clown invites us to witness the next scene:

Lights fade center stage and go up in Jen and Abigail's dressing room.

~~~

*Jen and Abigail's dressing room.*

*Ryan is semi-nude. Blindfolded.*

*Jen is dressed like a dominatrix, holding a whip.*

JEN

Take ten.

Thank you ten!  
RYAN

*She whips him.*

One!

They're walking all over you...  
JEN

No, it's--  
RYAN

*Whip.*

Two.

Abigail.  
JEN

*Whip.*

Three.  
RYAN

...and Rose, that no-talent bitch!  
JEN

*Whip.*

Four.  
RYAN

...and Marge.  
JEN

*Whip.*

Thank you thank you, five--  
RYAN

Bitch thinks she can understudy me!  
JEN

*Whip.*

Six! Mhmm... RYAN

Even that moron Billy. JEN

*Whip.*

Seven. RYAN

And John? John Strone the fucking STAR! JEN

Seven. RYAN

John Strone who could shit onstage and still get a standing ovation. JEN

Seven seven seven. RYAN

Oh... Sorry. JEN

Don't apologize-- RYAN

*Whip. Fake. Ryan screams.*

Eight.

Theater... CLOWN  
(*To himself:*)

*The Clown leaves, frustrated.*

John fucking Strone who made me skip my monologue, my *only* moment-- JEN

*Whip.*

Ni- RYAN

*Whip.*

JEN

The only moment worth *anything* in this fucking play!!

*Whip!!*

*Ryan screams.*

An actor... Does not... Forget... His lines!

*Ryan is in real pain now.*

I want him out. Dead.

*Whip!!*

*Ryan screams.*

*I'm so disappointed in you, slave...*

RYAN

Please don't say that, mistress... I'll do it--!

JEN

Did I say you could talk?

*She kneels beside him, teases him with the whip.*

Did I say... you could... talk?

*Ryan shakes his head.*

JEN (CONT'D)

Then shut. The fuck. Up.

*Ryan shakes in fear.*

Don't disappoint me again.

*She let's go of the whip. Smiles.*

*She presses her hands against Ryan's neck and starts to choke him.*

There's a reason we have blocking...  
And cues, lights... Music...

*The sound of the Varsouviana. Jen raises her head:  
Where is that coming from? She gets lost in the moment  
anyway.*

*Ryan struggles for breath.*

Music?

*Ryan starts to shake.*

Do you hear that?

*The music fades.*

*Ryan is about to pass out.*

Oh. Jeepers.

*She loosens her grip.*

*He breathes.*

RYAN

Please forgive me, mistress, I'll be good... I'll kill him!

*She picks up the whip.*

No stop stop/ stop--

JEN

What's the safe word?

RYAN

Stop stop/ stop--

JEN

Say it, bitch.

*She raises the whip.*

RYAN

Lights... Go!

*She stops.*

*Lights out.*

~~~

John and Billy's dressing room.

Rose and John.

John is dunking cookies in cold milk and eating them.

From this point on, John should react to any noise made by members of the audience, but still not be able to see them; It's like he's developed a new sense that he can't quite grasp.

JOHN

I don't believe it.

ROSE

What?

JOHN

The play. My performance. The whole thing.
I'm onstage, and...
Everything starts to feel so fake.

ROSE

Of course it's fake honey, it's a play.

John looks around.

JOHN

Where are we now?

ROSE

What? We're in your dressing room.
Are you okay?

JOHN

I don't know.

He picks up props. Inspects them. He reveals that everything is fake. Rose can't see that.

ROSE

Honey, don't worry so much about tonight--

JOHN

I was terrible, Rose--

ROSE

It wasn't/ that bad--

JOHN

I was... Unfocused. Those lines, they just... They kept *

ROSE

What?

JOHN

* (What?)
I don't know.

ROSE

Don't dwell on it, baby... Just jump back on the horse!

John looks at her.

Dunk.

Munch.

JOHN

Did you get that from a Hallmark card, or something--?

ROSE

John, don't be bitter.

JOHN

This doesn't *happen* to me...

ROSE

You'll be great tomorrow/ you'll see...

JOHN

How do you handle it?

ROSE

What?

JOHN
Being so bad.
So terrible. All the time.
How do you not give a shit?

ROSE
//

Dunk.

Munch.

JOHN
I should go...

ROSE
//

JOHN
Emily's being difficult... She keeps calling the theater, and--

ROSE
It's fine. Go.

JOHN
I can't handle any bad publicity now... My agent says a divorce would be very badly received. Maybe after the baby's born...

ROSE
//

JOHN
Okay.

Dunk.

Munch.

John leaves.

~ ~ ~

[All curtains close.]

~ ~ ~

In front of the curtains: A street in front of the theater.

The Clown is performing a magic trick. He's not very good.

The Clown pulls down his pants and shows the crowd his enormous penis. No frontal nudity is really necessary.

CLOWN

Ta-Da!

Applause.

Billy claps louder than everyone.

Applause dies down as the crowd moves away.

BILLY

Teach me.

CLOWN

Give me money.

Billy gives him money.

BILLY

That's all I have.

CLOWN

What do you want me to teach you?

BILLY

How to get women.

CLOWN

Ha!

The clown counts the money. Bills, bills, bills.

CLOWN (CONT'D)

For... Fifty?

You want *me* to teach you how to get women for fifty?

BILLY
One woman.
I just want her to notice me--

CLOWN
How's the play?

BILLY
//

CLOWN
You thought I wouldn't recognize you?

BILLY
It's... Okay...

CLOWN
Still running, huh?

BILLY
Yes, Mr--

CLOWN
Don't say it. Call me Clown.

BILLY
Mr. Clown.

CLOWN
Big Dong the Clown.

BILLY
Big Dong/ the--

CLOWN
That's the trick! That's how you get women!

BILLY
//

CLOWN
I'm kidding! No I'm not! I'm kidding! Maybe. Maybe not.
You got a good-sized penis?

BILLY
I don't know--

Oh. You know. CLOWN

Uh. I guess I'm okay. BILLY

Okay? CLOWN

Size wise. BILLY

Okay is not good. CLOWN

Above average? BILLY

Did Picasso ever say I'm an okay painter? Above average?
I'm really asking.
I don't know. CLOWN

I guess he didn't. BILLY

NO! He. Did. Not!
Say you're huge.
Like Picasso. CLOWN

// BILLY

Ginormous.
Like me. CLOWN

I'm... huge/ like-- BILLY

No you're not. CLOWN

// BILLY

Who's the woman?
CLOWN

Uh... She plays Louise/ DesChamps--
BILLY

You're friends?
CLOWN

No... We're not really/ friends.
BILLY

Co-Workers?
CLOWN

You could say that. Yeah.
BILLY

I used to fuck my co-workers. That was my job!
I was...
I was The Man.
CLOWN

Lights shift. The sound of the Varsouviana. Only the Clown can perceive these changes.

The Clown sighs and talks to the Play, which should not be confused with talking to the booth:

Don't do that.

Do what?
BILLY
(Confused:)

The music changes abruptly to 70's porn underscoring.

I was...
Mmh... No.
CLOWN
(Resumes:)

The music stops.

The Clown looks at Billy.

CLOWN (CONT'D)

Can we go back a few lines?

BILLY

Lines? What/ lines--?

CLOWN

Who's the woman?

BILLY

I just told you... She plays Louise/ DesChamps--

CLOWN

You're friends?

BILLY

No... We're not really/ friends.

CLOWN

Co-Workers?

BILLY

We just said all that--

CLOWN

I used to fuck my co-workers. That was my job!

I was...

I was The Man.

Lights change. The sound of 70's porn underscoring. The Clown does a few quick pelvis thrusts.

It was so... *Deep.*

The music stops.

The Clown reminisces.

BILLY

Excuse me... Mr. Big Dong the Clown?

CLOWN

Is she the bad one?

Huh?
BILLY

Plays the maid. Horrible accent.
CLOWN

No. I play her lover... She's--
BILLY

You play her lover?
CLOWN

Yes.
BILLY

The *old* one?
CLOWN

//
BILLY

You want to lick her wrinkles?
Get some geriatric action--
CLOWN

Billy blushes.

O-Kay... So... You kiss her onstage. Every day. Eight shows a week... But she doesn't notice you?
CLOWN (CONT'D)

No, not really... Well, Abigail's a star, so--
BILLY

Honestly? A *star* star?
CLOWN

I've been following her work since I was, like, five... She was so wonderful as Mrs. Lynde...
BILLY

He looks at the Clown: Right?

I don't know what you're talking about.
CLOWN

BILLY

Rachel Lynde, in *Anne of Green Gables. The Musical...* and... Oh... *Harold and Maude...* God, she can play eighty!

The Clown stares. Sighs.

He counts the money again.

CLOWN

Alright. This is what you do: Feel her up.

BILLY

What?

CLOWN

Right before you go on.
Slap her ass, or rub her wrinkled--

Honk. Honk.

...with your hand.

BILLY

Well, she'll be in costume, so--

CLOWN

Who cares? Go as close as you can.
Feel her up and then start the scene.
Act like nothing's happened.
In Character.

BILLY

She'll be mad.

CLOWN

No... She'll have to be your lover, and kiss you, and muah muah muah...
Seething on the inside and loving on the outside...
When the scene's over she'll probably slap you.
Take it smiling.

(To the audience:)

Make her think she's in control.

BILLY

And then--?

CLOWN

Do it again. Every time you have a scene.

BILLY

That's sexual harassment.

CLOWN

Yes... But it's *sexual*.

Just keep at it.

Give her that: "You know I have a big dick" smile... And then wait. She'll make the next move.

BILLY

Really?

CLOWN

No! What do you think this is? Some bullshit soft-core erotica--?

Pause. The Clown plots.

BILLY

So... I shouldn't touch her?

The Clown winks at the audience.

CLOWN

No... Do everything I just said.

BILLY

But if it's not gonna work--

CLOWN

Then you go back to stealing her underwear...

BILLY

How do you--?

CLOWN

You have that face.

BILLY

I'll do it.

Pause.

CLOWN

O-kay... You can exit now.

BILLY

Exit where? We're already outside...

CLOWN

Oh god... Just leave... Go be creepy somewhere else.

Billy exits. The Clown starts a new magic trick. A crowd gathers.

CLOWN (CONT'D)

(Sings:)

If I were a real performer
I would have a song and music
Right now
And I would sing a song
A song that goes on
And on yes on and on and on
There would be dancers
And bright lights.
La-La-La-La
But this isn't one of those plays
So fuck it.
La-La-La-La-La-La-La
So I'll just keep
Doing this overdone story
About how my life was great
And now it's pure shit
Shit shit
Like you didn't get it already...
I'll also keep switching the genres
So deal with it!
La-La-La
End...Act... One!

John walks in as lights fade slowly. He looks at the audience, terrified. The Clown smiles. Creepy.

Lights out.

END ACT ONE

-- To read more contact me at <http://www.gonzalorodriguezrisco.com> --