

A Crooked French Affair

A Play

by Kim E. Ruyle

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A Crooked French Affair

Cast of Characters

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 a bit older.

<u>PERRY (PERICLES)</u>	Male. An aspiring playwright and director. He lacks confidence but is enthusiastic about his writing. Perry directs his own 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. Agrees to play the part of Madame de Pompadour in the play-within-the-play.
<u>FAWN</u>	Female. Chair of the Board. Overly 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, confident.
<u>CHEYENNE</u>	Female. A serious but struggling method actor. Plays Queen Marie. Narcissistic and entitled.
<u>LOUIE</u>	Male. Ironically, plays King Louis XV. Initially, void of emotion 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.
TIME:	About now.
SETTING:	The stage of the Pity Falls Community Playhouse.
SET:	A community theatre stage. In the first scene, table, chairs, and a banner or sign, <i>Pity Falls Community Playhouse</i> . After the first scene, the banner disappears, and the stage becomes increasingly adorned with each successive scene to represent The Mars Room in the Palace of Versailles. However, the furnishings and décor should appear a bit makeshift, tacky even.

COSTUMES: The ornate costumes of the 18th-century French royal court used in the play-within-a-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 15th. 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.

PRODUCTION NOTES: The characters in the play-within-a-play are all historical figures. Images are available online to get an idea about costumes and set by searching:

- François Gigot de la Peyronie
- Louis XV
- Marie Adélaïde of Savoy
- Madame de Pompadour
- Mars Room Versailles

Feel free to be creative in setting up the theatre lobby for the performance, perhaps the poster of noblemen dueling with bent swords and/or (at an intermission after Scene 5) the line drawing of urinary tracts. Have fun with it!

RUNNING TIME: ~80 Minutes.

"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

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 each director. A banner hangs over the side of the table: *Pity Falls Community Playhouse*. The board members look 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!

Are you okay? FAWN

Not that kind – WILLY

You mean a computer virus? RUBY

Well... Yeah. WILLY

We never should have given you the responsibility – AVIS

What about Charles? Have you asked Charles to – RUBY

Charles? Guy with inverted nipples? JAZMIN

That's not – FAWN

Guys don't get inverted nipples. SERGIO

Sure, they do. JAZMIN

All eyes on Willy as he winces, groans, and places palms on his chest. A moment, and then...

Charles! The IT guy. RUBY

Sergio scribbles a note, passes it to Ruby with a sly grin. She glances at it but doesn't acknowledge.

Charles said – WILLY

Ohh. The IT guy. JAZMIN

What? What did he say?

RUBY

You know a Charles with inverted nipples?

SERGIO

To Jazmin.

Jazmin smiles and shrugs.

He said...

WILLY

He said! He said! Spit it out, damnit!

AVIS

Okay, let's keep it civil.

FAWN

Awkward pause. 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!

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.

Well... Yeah.

WILLY

And what? The app and all the data got –

RUBY

All of it, *what?! Corrupted?!*

AVIS

Awkward pause. Everyone glares at Willy.

Yes. Corrupted.

WILLY

Damn!

AVIS

Civility.

FAWN

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

AVIS

Clowns.

JAZMIN

And Charles can't recover the data?

RUBY

Awkward pause. Everyone glares at Willy.

No. He said the data is irretrievably –

WILLY

Are.

FAWN

What?

WILLY

It's plural. Data *are*.

FAWN

Okay. The data *are* irretrievably lost.

WILLY

Son of a bitch.

AVIS

Let's keep it professional.

FAWN

I thought we were amateurs.

JAZMIN

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

SERGIO

I guess I –

WILLY

Really screwed the pooch, Willy!

AVIS

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.

RUBY

AVIS
Damn!

SERGIO
Crap!

JAZMIN
Nooo!

FAWN
Yes.

Pause.

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

WILLY

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

FAWN

And solicit scripts all over again?!

AVIS

Well –

FAWN

Don't we have anything in hard copy?

RUBY

Pause, looking one to another.

Perry's wanting to pitch his script. JAZMIN

Perry? *That* Perry? SERGIO

The teacher?! AVIS

Junior high. RUBY

English. He teaches English. FAWN

No way we're working with – AVIS

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

He have inverted nipples, too? SERGIO

Sergio leans over and, grinning, whispers something to Ruby. Ruby snubs him with a glare.

He brought his script hoping he could pitch to – JAZMIN

Now?! He's here now? AVIS

Waiting in the green room. JAZMIN

With a script? Hard copy? RUBY

I can't! I won't! AVIS

What's going on? WILLY

Because of his wife?
SERGIO

Because of your husband?
JAZMIN

What?
FAWN

AVIS
Standing.
I won't be subjected to... You can continue the meeting without me.

Avis grabs her notepad and exits. Awkward pause.

You shouldn't have mentioned –
SERGIO

You started it! Asking about his wife.
JAZMIN

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

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

Her husband –
SERGIO

And Perry's wife.
JAZMIN

Pause.

Oh.
FAWN

Pause.

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

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

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 –

WILLY

Losers.

RUBY

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

SERGIO

What about Avis?

JAZMIN

She left.

It's up to us.

WILLY

Shall I bring him in?

JAZMIN

Pause, looking one to another.

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 enters followed by Perry.

JAZMIN

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 pauses at the Avis' chair.

PERRY

Are we missing someone?

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

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*?

All 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 15th of France and –

JAZMIN

Is there sex?

Sergio leans over and, grinning, whispers something to Ruby. Ruby recoils but otherwise ignores him.

No, we can't have –
FAWN

Sure, we can! Our patrons love sex!
JAZMIN

We can't –
FAWN

We *simulate* it!
JAZMIN

Stimulate?
WILLY

The sex. Broadway does it all the time.
JAZMIN

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

Sex!
JAZMIN

Stimulated.
WILLY

Simulated! Not *stimulated*.
JAZMIN

It's romantic. Nothing sexually explicit.
PERRY

Too bad.
SERGIO

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

What's the plot?
RUBY

Like I said, it's set in the French royal court of King Louis the 15th –
PERRY

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 help 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*.

Pause. Perry shudders, takes a big breath.

PERRY

Maybe I can just read the synopsis.

PERRY (CONT.)

Reading dramatically from the script.

Set in the French royal court of King Louis the 15th, 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.

JAZMIN

And funny! A romantic comedy.

WILLY

Hunching in distress.

It's not funny! It's painful!

Pause. 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!

Another pause as 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.

Pause as the directors look one to another.

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.

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.

Pause, looking to and indicating 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.

Awkward pause.

RUBY

Thank you for your submission. Please excuse us now.

Perry hesitates, wanting to say more, but finally nods, spins, and exits. A pause.

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.

Pause as Ruby studies the other directors who all seem to be shrugging as if no big deal.

RUBY (CONT.)

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?

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?

FAWN

Yes.

SERGIO

Yes!

JAZMIN

Yes!

WILLY

Yes.

RUBY

What the hell. The shit show must go on.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

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 and pauses to watch Perry. 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.

PERRY (CONT.)

Can we... Can *you* reach out? Tap your network? You're well connected.

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.

Pause.

PERRY

Okay. Thanks... I guess. But we need a couple more actors.

CHLOE

Can you do a rewrite? Maybe use doubling?

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. Awkward pause.

CHLOE

Avis. Hi.

AVIS

Chloe.

Pause. 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.

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.

AVIS (CONT.)

Hugo is going to shit his pants!

CHLOE

Wow! That was... That sounds fantastic!

PERRY

Catching the enthusiasms.

Yeah. It does.

Chloe spins and exits. Avis stops bouncing around
and looks at Perry who's staring at her, eyes wide
with wonder, mouth agape.

AVIS

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?

Pause. 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.

Pause.

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.

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

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.

Pause. 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...?

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?

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

Okay. Getting back to the play... In addition to the Queen –

CHEYENNE

(Aside.)

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!

PERRY

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

LOUIE

The King?

CHEYENNE

The Queen.

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

END OF SCENE