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The Altruist

A comedy set in France

Characters (3W, 5M)

Rosette	Maid
M. Henri Baroque	Master
M. Stabile	Brother-in-law
Mayor	Dignitary
Pristee	Daughter
Borwall	Son
Madame Christine	Wife
M. Chandler	Consultant

Setting

The drawing room of the esteemed Monsieur Henri Baroque

The Altruist

Scene Primus

A grand drawing room. A maid, Rosette, clears a tray and reluctantly speaks as M. Baroque continues to work. Rosette then tidies up the room.

ROSETTE. Monsieur? Now you've had coffee and been fed,
May we speak of your wife upstairs in bed?
Nothing I do seems to help her to rise
Though I've poked and pushed, but still her eyes
Do little more than roll round in her head.
Don't get me wrong, sir, the lady's not dead
But recovering from a drinking spree.
Could you check on her, please? ASAP?

BAROQUE. I'm busy. Leave.

ROSETTE. You clearly think that's my chore,
But I'm worried, sir, and I'll say what's more,
She might at her own hands give up the ghost.
You don't want to say, "My dear wife, she's toast."

BAROQUE. Y'hear me?

ROSETTE. Ah, you've matters more substantial,
Immersing yourself in a world financial.
But if you ignore both your wife and kids,
Then this whole household could go on the skids.
You don't want a family dysfunctional?

(buzzer sounds)

BAROQUE. That must be the mayor. He's punctual.
Rosette, would you mind, please, snapping it shut?
And don't give me an *if*, *and* or *but*.
And if you've time, would you answer the door?
Because, my dear, that's what I pay you for.

ROSETTE. I'll go, sir, but you'll see my words heeded.

BAROQUE. More work, less jabber, girl: that's what's needed.

(*Rosette grunts and leaves; Baroque has dialed his phone*)

BAROQUE. “Chandler, I’ll hire you. But promise no blunder.
You must get my family to knuckle under.
I’ll put my whole brood under your wing
If you promise I’ll snatch that big brass ring.”

(*Baroque hangs up. M. Stabille enters with the Mayor*)

ROSETTE. The Mayor’s arrived with your brother-in-law.

STABILLE. A chance visit, brother. Let me withdraw
For I’ve only come to see my sister.

BAROQUE. You stay right there and you listen, mister,
For I’ve news. Mister Mayor, a pleasure!

MAYOR. Monsieur Baroque, seeing you is *my* treasure.
To greet a man like you in any place,
Who’s done so much for the human race,
The privilege is always and ever mine.
Now, have you that check you said would sign?

BAROQUE. Right here.

MAYOR. I breathlessly say thanks a lot!

BAROQUE. Oh, one more thing I almost forgot:
For all the properties my company owns
I’m reducing interest rates on home loans.
And for your city’s poor, I’m slashing rents.

MAYOR. Can one really have such beneficence?
Great sir, you’re giving all your wealth away
Without a care there might come the day
When you find your own self a bit bereft
Because your kindness leaves you nothing left.

BAROQUE. It’s my temperament. I hate the miser.

MAYOR. From one whose goodness explodes like a geyser!

BAROQUE. No . . .

BAROQUE. The reason for my generosity?
The love of money's an atrocity.

STABILLE. You're one to tell me that money is bad
After the billions of francs that you've had?

BAROQUE. No, no, brother: not the money itself
But what we've acquired must become pelf
If we love money for its own cruel sake.

STABILLE. This is too much, will you give me a break?
You've something up your conniving sleeve
And if you won't tell me—well, I won't leave. (*sits stubbornly*)

BAROQUE. I suspect, Stabille, you mean what you say.

STABILLE. I'm waiting.

BAROQUE. Fine, your concerns I'll allay—
And tell you my news. (*beat*) I've made billions, yes.
And what is the measure of my success?
Of the world's richest men, I'm number three-fifty.
But having money's not all that nifty
For in time great wealth can make you bored.
See, there's nothing now I can't afford
And riches mean a trifle of what they did
When I was a poor and sniveling kid.
So I've decided to try something new,
Something so many rich men now pursue:
I'm going to make a political run
Because—well, brother—it plain looks like fun.

STABILLE. Wait. You're going in for that kind of life?
Does my sister know this, your lovely wife?

BAROQUE. Not yet.

STABILLE. Marriage is something you both share.

BAROQUE. She'll surely go along.

STABILLE. Brother, I declare
You better take time to think this through,
You'll live in a spotlight, you know that?

BAROQUE. Oh, pooh.

A man of my standing, what's to be feared?
You heard the mayor, am I not revered?

STABILLE. Because you've achieved so much in commerce
But in politics it could be the reverse.
It is the *people* one must represent
To be a success in government,
Giving to others from first to the last,
Which is very unlike your hedge fund past.
Only an idiot would get their kicks
By entering the world of politics.
Your giving's only a ploy to win votes.

BAROQUE. Well, so what? Every candidate promotes
Themselves and their interests as they can,
Look world-wide at any rich politician:
In Italy, they've got Berlusconi,
Rich as *Croesus*, but surely a phony,
With all that botox and a nip-and-tuck face,
Did Italians think him a national disgrace?
Thrice they voted him prime minister,
And all of them knew the man was sinister!
And what of that state of California
That has an intriguing kind of mania
For celebrities, and all of them rich,
Who ceaselessly make the populist pitch
That the only thing for which they give a damn
Is your average California man?
That big Arnold won despite his money.

STABILLE. This is a joke, you're trying to be funny.

BAROQUE. I'm not. I *am* an altruist, the mayor's right,
And for the public, I'll now my fight.
I'll give back to all—*so there*—that's my plan.

STABILLE. To be what? A Senator or Congressman?

BAROQUE. A job so lowly, why should I settle?
Hasn't this face grave, Presidential mettle?

STABILLE. Oh, stop it now, you're getting carried away.

BAROQUE. You know, brother, I wish you could stay—
But you can't. Would you mind using that door?

STABILLE. I'm telling you, Baroque, there's trouble in store.

BAROQUE. It really is time, now, for you to leave.

STABILLE. Brother, I advise you, don't be naïve.

BAROQUE. A gent I've hired for public relations
Is coming to do some evaluations
To put my family in a perfect light.

STABILLE. This is crazy.

BAROQUE. Hey, come for drinks tonight!

STABILLE. But—

BAROQUE. Bye!

(Stabille is pushed out the door)

BAROQUE. All this must be providential.
I do cut the cloth as Presidential.
I've been told my demeanor's regal
And nothing I've done's been too illegal.
Can it be other than Divine Providence
That you, Lord, have chosen me to lead France?
When rich men seek office, it's no a joke.
Meet your next president: Henri Baroque!

('La Marseillaise' plays as lights change)

- CHRISTINE. God! I can't wait till you're out of your teens.
Clam up. *I've a headache.* And get this clear:
Not ever once did I volunteer
The breed of boy for your marriage bed,
That was your father. What I'd wish instead
Is that you'd fetch for me that quart of gin?
Get a tumbler of ice and pour it all in?
Will you do that my darling, sweet Pristee?
- PRISTEE. That's Rosette's job.
- CHRISTINE. Now you listen to me:
I pushed you with pain through this aching womb,
At least you could get my gin 'cross the room
- PRISTEE. Old cow. I once thought you were the bomb,
Now I see I got a lush for a mom.
You're not an invalid, get off your big tail.
- CHRISTINE. You make a mother want to weep and wail!
The ingratitude. Son? Son? What d'you think?
Pour your mommy a widdow, widdow dwink?
- BORWALL. Mom, *not now.* I'm rewriting this program.
- CHRISTINE. Is there a child in the world who gives a damn?
I know now that it would have been smarter
To be a nun, not your maternal martyr.
Fine! I'll get up and get that you refuse.
Kids . . . won't even get a mommy her booze!
- ROSETTE. (*entering*) The master will shortly be coming down.
- CHRISTINE. Well, isn't it nice to see you aroun'?'
See how far you left my gin and my ice?
- ROSETTE. Madame, this'd be a good time to play nice
And forgo imbibing your daily sauce
For momentarily you'll see the boss
And someone new he's brought into your house.
- CHRISTINE. I don't take orders from you or that louse.
I'm having my drink, then playing solitaire.
So come here, Rosette, and pull up my chair.

ROSETTE. I'm telling you, mam, this isn't a joke.

CHRISTINE. Open the veranda so I can smoke.

ROSETTE. Too late, he's here! The master of the estate!

(*Baroque enters with M. Chandler, a political consultant*)

BAROQUE. Well, don't everyone here look freakin' great.
Didn't I tell you all to look proper?
Rosette, take her gin, and will you stop her
Till I've finished from drinking any more?

PRISTEE. Daddy, tell us what you called us here for!

CHRISTINE. Hey! She's got no right to take that from me.
I can send you back on the street, dearie.

PRISTEE. Daddy, I am leaving! I have a date.

BAROQUE. No, you are not. You are going to wait
Until I've finished our family meeting.

PRISTEE. I'm going now!

BAROQUE. Pristee, a good beating
Is, by law, something I can still inflict,
So don't tempt my being paternally strict.

CHRISTINE. Hey, big shot, you can't boss her around!

BAROQUE. No? Guess what? A new sheriff's in town,
And this one's adopted some right-wing views,
So let me give you all startling news:
I'm advised to show strength starting right now:
So sit down and shut up!

PRISTEE. Oh, daddy!

CHRISTINE. Well!

BORWALL. Wow!

BAROQUE. It worked. (*beat*) Now that I've your attention
I'll explain this meeting and also mention
That I've a new here friend to introduce
Who'll be living with us:

CHANDLER. Hi. Name's Bruce.

BAROQUE. The good monsieur's surname is Chandler
And he's here to act as my handler.

CHRISTINE. Huh? What does he handle?

BAROQUE. That *he* will explain.
I'm leaving for three days and can't remain.
Business first: if you have a credit card?
It's been voided. Next, holding cash is barred.
Third, the doors to this house to are locked
Till he says you may go, so don't concoct
A conniving scheme to try an escape,
For I have ten guards in excellent shape
Surrounding us on the perimeter.
Lastly: no calls, no texting . . . no twitter.
I wish you a pleasant but stern *adieu*.
Rosette, follow me.

ROSETTE. I come, master. Whew!

(*Baroque exits followed by Rosette*)

CHRISTINE. Well, at least she left the bottle behind.

CHANDLER. Madame, excuse me, I'm sure you won't mind
If I remove that devilish alcohol (*snatches bottle*)
For soon you'll find you won't need it at all.

CHRISTINE. Hey!

CHANDLER. And you—*son*—that computer, I'll remove.
Imagine how much your mind will improve (*snatches laptop*)
When all you have is a pencil and pad.

BORWALL. What are you doing? You can't take that. Dad!

CHANDLER. I know the joy it brings to paint toes (*snatches polish*)
But not with those colors—*girlie*—not those.

PRISTEE. Stop this! Hey! Just who do you think you are!

CHANDLER. Perhaps you might call me your family *Czar*
In charge of this household from A-to-Z
For complete control's been given to me
Till I make you finest family in France.
You like that idea?

CHRISTINE. Buddy, no chance.
Who *are* you? What're you *doing* you here?

CHANDLER. Of course, you don't know. So I'll make this clear:
To help a man under consideration
To be the leader of our fine nation:
Your father, children, and your better half.

CHRISTINE. Ha! Kids! This joker's out to make us *laugh*. (*all laugh*)
Your leg, by this guy, is being pulled
When he says that France, by your dad, will be ruled.

CHANDLER. Madame, how could you possibly suggest
That what I'm saying could be a jest?

CHRISTINE. Perhaps because my spouse, and their dad,
Is the biggest rake that France ever had?

CHILDREN. True.

CHANDLER. In politics, you needn't be good
But you should *appear* so—yes, that you should.

CHRISTINE. (*beat*) There has to be something here that I missed.
My husband, Henri, has always dismissed
Every government official as a dunce.
Now being president is what he wants?

CHANDLER. And will be. See, I've a crack political mind
And every candidate I get behind
Coasts easily through their election.
Now I've done my research, made my selection,
And find France will vote for Henri *en masse*
Because he has such big stones of brass.

CHRISTINE. And you'll help him?

CHANDLER. So will you for as his wife
I'll teach you to say your married life
Is perfect and will last through thick and thin.

CHRISTINE. I couldn't say that if high on gin
And dopey and stupid and out of my mind.

CHANDLER. Likewise, dear girl, you'll stay that you find
Esteem for your father in ample supply.

PRISTEE. You're telling me, then, you want me to lie?
The man is an oaf, a cad and a jerk.

CHANDLER. I see that you will be some piece of work.
And you, lad, will say dad hasn't a flaw.

BORWALL. Is this moron talking of our papa?
He's an orangutan, a total goon.

CHANDLER. That opinion, you rascal, will change quite soon.

BORWALL. Never.

PRISTEE. No!

CHRISTINE. See? It can't done, sir handler.

CHANDLER. I wish you'd call me Bruce, or Chandler.
And you're wrong for I know it will be done
And I think you'll find the process quite fun,
For I'll be living in this domicile,
Instructing you. Your first lesson is . . . *smile*
Even when things are not going your way.

CHRISTINE. This is a stunt, right?

BAROQUE. What's wrong, son?

BORWALL. He won't let me hold my mouse!
Now my Facebook account is so out of date.
Three days, daddy—*please, please*—I can't wait.

BAROQUE. All this will sense when you've come of age.

BORWALL. Now he makes me hold a book and turn the page.
Daddy, *it hurts*. Look, I'm weak, I'm puny.

BAROQUE. Give it time, son.

BORWALL. I am going *loony*.
A good father'd let me back on-line,
So say these word, please: "Go on, son, it's fine."

BAROQUE. We must trust our handler in this affair
To make the choices for this billionaire.

BORWALL. Okay . . . I see that the answer's no.
Then excuse me. Just one sound as I go.

(*Borwall screams, running from the room*)

ROSETTE. That behavior, admit, sir, it's most strange.

BAROQUE. Has my daughter had a similar change?

ROSETTE. *Worse*. She no longer wears those clothes called chic.
You'd think she dressed up in a homeless boutique.
She depressed and wanders in baggy sacks,
She's even stopped her insulting attacks.
Sir, there she is, lord . . .

(*Pristee has entered*)

PRISTEE. Daddy, you've returned.

BAROQUE. That's something, daughter, you've surely yearned?

PRISTEE. I yearn to lie down and never to rise.

BAROQUE. Why say that, Pristee?

PRISTEE. Because of your *lies*.
You told me I was your sweetest princess
And could have anything: new car, new dress,
Anything. You seemed sincere but your subterfuge
In saying you love me is, like, *so huge*.

BAROQUE. I do love you but I'm doing what's best.

PRISTEE. May I, then, put your love to the test?
Let me go outside? Let me party?

BAROQUE. But wouldn't doing that be foolhardy?
We must learn to handle the public glare.

PRISTEE. Then it's over for me, *mon terrible père*. (*walking off*)
I've hardly the strength now to get in bed.
If you're president, daddy . . . I'm dead.

(*Pristee moans and exits*)

BAROQUE. It's remarkable how that girl has changed.

ROSETTE. Wait until you see your wife: she's deranged.

BAROQUE. What's that?

ROSETTE. She asked me for a carving knife
Saying she'd use it to take your life,
And that she'd do France such a favor
That wives everywhere would emulate her.

BAROQUE. Rosette, my wife was showing her humor!
You know her.

(*Madame burst in the door brandishing two daggers high overhead*)

CHRISTINE. You're home. It wasn't a rumor.

BAROQUE. Chris, what's in your hands?

- BAROQUE. I am bored right out of my mind.
After twenty-five years, what do I find?
The sweet girl I married is only a sot.
I say this to God now: hey, thanks a lot!
- CHRISTINE. You drove me to drink, you blowhard bully.
When we married, I loved you fully.
But you turned your back completely on me
Because your new love was filthy money.
- BAROQUE. Filthy? How much has passed through your pure hands
Since the day we swapped those wedding bands?
Billions! You spend my money even when drunk.
But my money's filthy . . .
- CHRISTINE. Listen, you skunk:
You vowed devotion and I'd be divine.
And I believed all that: hook, sinker and line.
- BAROQUE. I was devoted to you all the way.
- CHRISTINE. Who can believe anything you say?
Your devotion's only been to your work.
- BAROQUE. Because I began as a shipping clerk!
Poor and broke without a sou in my pants,
Probably the poorest kid in all France.
But I climbed high and it's now my intent
To be the leader of our government.
- CHRISTINE. And you're making all of us go along?
- BAROQUE. File for divorce if you think it's wrong.
- CHRISTINE. *I'm Catholic* and so live under a curse.
Eternally tied, for better or worse.
- BAROQUE. And with all that I gave, that was so bad?
- CHRISTINE. I want to go back to the life that I had
When both of us were incredibly poor,
For then what you gave me was worth much more.

STABILLE. This can't be worth a political run?

BAROQUE. Y'gotta be kidding, it's just getting fun.

STABILLE. I beg you, Henri, come to your senses
Before you've unknown consequences.

BAROQUE. Never! My handler now says two-thirds of France
Will vote for me under his guidance.

STABILLE. Who is this new man? I've not heard his name.

BAROQUE. *Bruce Chandler*. And here's his claim to fame.
He's never once lost by using this rule:
To win elections, be ruthless, vicious, cruel.

(*M. Chandler enters at the door*)

BAROQUE. Here he is! *Bruce*. Meet my brother-in-law.

CHANDLER. Delighted.

STABILLE. A pleasure. I must withdraw.
To tend to my sister.

BAROQUE. Relax, Stabile,
And join me under that presidential seal.

STABILLE. I still maintain that this is a mistake.

BAROQUE. I'll be president; right, Bruce?

CHANDLER. Piece of cake.

(*Stabile exits*)

BAROQUE. My family's come and I've seen their progress.

CHANDLER. Then you know, sir, I'm a brilliant success?
Now, your signature. So the press don't squawk,
On this paper, I'll need your John Hancock.

BAROQUE. What's this?

CHANDLER.

Yes.

BAROQUE.

Oh, man.

CHANDLER. Just think of the most pleasant thing in your life.
I've got it, of course, think of your wife.

BAROQUE. (*beat*) Let me try something a bit more sunny.
Ah! I'm swimming in a big pool of money!

CHANDLER. That's it! Hold fast to that grin, keep it wide,
While I tell you something you've been denied:
All the legislation you've said you want.

BAROQUE. That is bullcrap!

CHANDLER. No, no, stay nonchalant!
A president gets his revenge with his brain.
You'll find lots of ways to make others feel pain.

BAROQUE. Right. I'll have the power. I keep my smile.

CHANDLER. Hold it there, sir, while I add something vile:
The Chinese leader has called you a hog,
A gutless soufflé, and a spineless dog.

BAROQUE. I've been called spineless? A human soufflé?
I'll rip out his throat without delay!

CHANDLER. No! Nothing can get on a President's nerves.

BAROQUE. But here's what an A-hole like that deserves
A crack in the puss, a kick in the crotch.

CHANDLER. But what you do the whole country will watch.
You must stay calm for people are like sheep,
And never should wake them from their sleep.
They want everything left just as it is.

BAROQUE. You're saying our people don't know what gives?

CHANDLER. Oh, a few: the cultured and intelligent.
But of the masses, that's just ten percent.
You must never cater to those voters
—The book readers and theatre-goers—
Too smart! See, politics is an acting game
And your goal must always be to remain
Acting like the leader—being the fox—
And that's how you'll win the ballot box.

BAROQUE. I guess you're saying I should be a liar?

CHANDLER. And promise voters anything they desire.
For every veteran politician
Knows he's simply lying magician.
And also you're to show a devout façade
That makes voters think you converse with God.
Do that and your victory's the bag.
Monsieur, your lapel!

BAROQUE. What's wrong?

CHANDLER. There's no flag!

BAROQUE. Doesn't wearing that here seem psychotic?

CHANDLER. You want people to think you're not patriotic? (*puts pin on lapel*)
Now, I'll be in the War Room down the hall
On a very important conference call.
The mayor's yet to pick his candidate
And his endorsement carries massive weight.
The mayor's a man we must try to seduce.
Perhaps I'll invite him here . . .

BAROQUE. One question, Bruce?
May I, for a short while, drop this big grin?

CHANDLER. Boy, you make me question if you really want to win.
(*Chandler exits as lights fade*)

Scene Quartus

Borwall and Pristee are laid out, lifeless. Madame faces downcenter.

BORWALL. Mama, mama, I can't take any more.
Please plug in something and do it before
They cart me off and have me committed.

CHRISTINE. Borwall—you dolt—stop acting nitwitted.
To think this idiot is of my blood.
Why, God, why? Why is my son the dud?

PRISTEE. Mama, I'm ready to receive last rites.
It's my End of Days, as well as my Nights.
Everything's dark, the world is a blur.

CHRISTINE. And please tell me why, sir, you give me *her*?
She got the brain of an empty balloon.
Morons for kids and a husband-baboon.

(Rosette enters at the door)

ROSETTE. Your handler's coming and wants all to behave.

CHRISTINE. Will you please tell that detestable knave
That if he won't let me leave my abode,
I'll strangle to death that degraded toad.

ROSETTE. Sadly, madam, it is not your decision
So don't waste time with futile derision.
You must perform all he will circumscribe.

CHRISTINE. Why didn't I think of this before? *A bribe!*
Rosette, you can be rich. See this diamond?
All my jewelry? Take anything you're fond.
Or the sweet lingerie in my chiffonier.
Take it all, but let us out!

ROSETTE. Too late. He's here.

(M. Chandler enters at the door)

CHANDLER. I've come to see how all of you fare.

CHRISTINE. Oh, cut the crap. We know you don't care.
We want to be let out of our own house.

CHANDLER. That's something you should take up with your spouse.
You have habits that stand in victory's way
And till they're cured, you'll be here day after day.

CHRISTINE. I hate you, Chandler.

BORWALL. Mister, over here.

CHANDLER. Remember now, my boy, make your speech clear,
Feel some real warmth, and look me in the eye.

BORWALL. I can't, mister, I can't.

CHANDLER. Now stop it, don't cry.

BORWALL. You're a bully, a heathen, you're so mean.

CHANDLER. But what I'm *not* is a computer screen.
Touch me. Doesn't that feel a little nice?

BORWALL. Not so good as a handheld device.
And your big face is almost like 3-D,
But it won't swipe away—I'll go crazy!

CHANDLER. It's the *human* that you'll learn to cherish
As all of your digital thoughts soon perish. (*Borwall weeps*)

PRISTEE. Sir? Sir?

CHANDLER. I'm here, dear.

PRISTEE. I have been good, right?
Never insulting, always contrite?

CHANDLER. You still harbor thoughts of spending money
And showing yourself off.

PRISTEE. Funny! Funny!
Not me. All I want is to be demure.

CHANDLER. Really, Pristee? You're absolutely sure?

PRISTEE. Yes. So give me any stipulation
And I won't bow to a single temptation.
Let me go and I'll do all that you say.

CHANDLER. You mean that?

PRISTEE. I do, sir.

CHANDLER. Well, then, okay.
You may leave.

PRISTEE. Really?

CHANDLER. Yes, go.

PRISTEE. Awesome. Great!
I get to leave this jail.

CHANDLER. See you at eight.

PRISTEE. What?

CHANDLER. Come home at eight for that's your curfew.
So at half-past seven, say *adieu*
And depart from your rendezvous with friends.

PRISTEE. Seven-thirty? That's when my evening ends?

CHANDLER. You'll need milk, here's ten francs for a glass.

PRISTEE. Milk? Get a life, bozo.

CHANDLER. Now why this sass?

PRISTEE. I'll drink Red Bull with plate of nachos,
Now give me a credit card for decent clothes.

CHANDLER. I love your outfit.

PRISTEE. Give me the plastic.
Come on, clown!

CHANDLER. Now I've news not so fantastic.
Where went all your newfound civility
And all that humble femininity?

PRISTEE. Let me out *now* . . . !

CHANDLER. Dear, I have a firm directive
And now I see your progress is defective.
You'll stay.

PRISTEE. Jerk! You can't keep me in this cage!

CHANDLER. Everything I'm doing is sound and sage
And I promise will bring the result
Of turning you into a polished adult.

PRISTEE. Mommy! Hold me in your arms. I'm *dying* . . .

CHRISTINE. Barbarian! You leave children crying?
You demon. You miscreant in our midst!

CHANDLER. A better description is *altruist*.

CHRISTINE. You?

CHANDLER. When handling the utterly depraved
And making sure that each of you is saved,
Yes. (pause) I need to make something very clear
So it's time to address everyone here:
All that I'm doing is for your own good,
And all that I ask is you do what you should
To be decent, normal, and respected.
Pristee, I swear that you'll be rejected
In life if you act like a savage bitch,
And you'll end like *maman* here, a drunken witch.
And, boy, you need to become socialized
Or you'll find you'll be completely despised
By anyone with a beating heart.

Then there is *you*, madame, where do I start?
We must listen to the raves and rants
Of a woman of no significance,
Who's lucky she doesn't live down with the dregs;
And maybe if she got up on her legs
And off her big can occasionally
—Not that often, just once or twice daily—
She might finally see how far in arrears
She is to a man who, for twenty-five years,
Has covered a debt she will never repay.
Why, with you, would a man like Henri stay?
Why submit to your loutish behavior?
Don't you see your husband is your savior?
Yet still you despise him for all he's done—
This when his election could now be won
By a landslide if you all got in line
And *you* gave up your gin, vodka and wine.
(*beat*) Your full cooperation is vital
For you to achieve the esteemed title
Of First Lady. For by picking up the lance
You can help to save the entire of France.
On the Baroque bandwagon, there's still room
But the perfect wife is the role you'd assume.
Well? (*pause*) You won't. Watching you, here's what I find:
Your husband's among the world's most maligned.
A wife with no sense of French esprit!

ROSETTE. (*in time*) Would anyone care for a cup of tea?

CHRISTINE. Boy, you really are the master of spin.
You know what it means to help that man win?
I don't, my good sir, mean to shake you up,
But I know the game and I know the makeup
Of wives pursuing that First Lady post.
And when he's sworn in, what do they do most?
Wear a smile that stays frozen on their face
While standing behind their husband's place
In receiving lines. Then they'll correspond
With thousands of fools, of which they're not fond,
Who meekly seek a recommendation
On raising children in our 'troubled' nation.

Then there are those state dinners to plan
With important countries like . . . Absurdistan.
You dine with a man in a cone-shaped hat
Pretending you enjoy hearing him chat
On subjects like the value of his goats—
While those from his country clear their throats
And hack up phlegm in a nearby spittoon.
Then you're to say, "Are you going so soon?
I hope that our meeting wasn't just chance
And that I'll see you again here in France."
Finally, she escapes for her one relief
And hides in her room like a shameful thief
At last lighting up her craved cigarette.
While puffing away, she's just one regret:
Why did I marry? Now I'm in politics
And all day long I only take my licks
In a game without an up or a down.
What is that on your face, monsieur, a frown?
Are you not hearing the words you'd like?
You're waiting to hear me say: *Take A Hike.*
(*smiles*) I won't. You've crossed me and raised my dander,
And now I'll prove that your words are slander.
I've decided to pick up the gauntlet
And play this charade, but don't you forget
That payback time will come at my calling,
And on that day, you'll come to me crawling.
So meet the perfect wife! Calm, kind, perky—

CHANDLER. All that's fine but can you go cold turkey?

CHRISTINE. Done.

CHANDLER. Can you shake hands and keep smiling for days?

CHRISTINE. "Honored to meet you," is my favorite phrase.

CHANDLER. And to Henri, you'll always take a back seat?

CHRISTINE. From this little lamb, not one little bleat.

CHANDLER. You swear on your life you'll help him to win?

CHRISTINE. A disobedient wife, sir, that's a sin!

CHANDLER. Good god!

CHRISTINE. Children, you'll now do all I say.

BORWALL. No, mama, no.

PRISTEE. We've never had to obey.

CHRISTINE. If you don't, I will beat you with a stick.
I'm French but from Alsace: that's Germanic.

(M. Baroque enters in haste)

BAROQUE. Bruce, with the mayor I just finished my chat
And I'm sure I'll make that dope my placemat.
But his endorsement, he's still yet to choose,

CHANDLER. If he picks you, there's no way you can lose.

BAROQUE. Right. So I just asked him here for dinner.

CHANDLER. When?

BAROQUE. Two days.

CHANDLER. Now you'll never be a winner!
On the mayor you must make a good impression
For His Honor has, in his possession,
A block of over three million of votes.
You know the values the mayor promotes?
Family values. The traditional kind.
You just put your victory in a bind
For they'll never pass his stern inspection.

BAROQUE. Because of them, I'll lose this election?

CHANDLER. They're not ready! But don't throw in the towel,
I'll think of something.

BAROQUE. You people are foul!
Who raised you to such an improper state?

PRISTEE. You did. But if you're giving up, great!
Now things can go back to just as they were:
Borwall gets his laptop, mommy liquor,
I'll get a new dress and go out on a date!

BORWALL. Yippee! We're free! My net book!

CHRISTINE. Now wait. *Wait.*
This election isn't yours to lose
And to give up, I completely refuse.
I'll make this happen in only two days,
And your kids, that mayor, will so amaze
That he'll certainly crown our perfection
As the French ideal, and his affection
For the candidate, and family Baroque,
Will make you president.

BAROQUE. This is a joke,
Right? You're being cruel now all hope's vanished?

CHRISTINE. No, love. All ill behavior's been banished.
For you, I will now prove the perfect mate,
And to serve you in every way, I can't wait.
You are my lord and my perfect master.

BAROQUE. Why do I sense impending disaster?
How could you change in such a short time?
It makes no sense, there's no reason, no . . . *rhyme.*
For years I've suffered your nagging and snipes,
Now you tell me a zebra's changed its stripes?

CHRISTINE. My turn is true and forever, Henri.
This cold heart has had its epiphany.
May I serve you?

BAROQUE. Oh, know how this does soun'?
Like our wedding day when you wore that white gown,
And we walked the aisle. Is it true, Christine?
You've returned? Is this really what you mean?

CHRISTINE. I'm back to the girl with whom you went steady.

BAROQUE. God! God! Now I feel tanned, rested and ready.
Yes! Yes! I shall rise to the occasion,
Being moved by such loving persuasion.
Chandler, off to the War Room, let us go.
I need to be briefed on issues to show
I've a firm diplomatic maturity.

CHANDLER. Then let's start with homeland security!

BAROQUE. (*at the door*) To say I love you, never let me forget.

CHRISTINE. In all that you do, I shall aid and abet.

BAROQUE. God, there's a wife. There's a good, French wife.
With abundant blessing's, you see I'm rife?
Okay, smack into shape these two sardine:
That's the best way to serve me now, Christine.
(*on exit*) Every Frenchman should have a wife like that.
Finally she'll give me some tit . . . for tat.

(*Baroque and Chandler exit*)

BORWALL. Mommy? Do you hate us?

CHRISTINE. Why say that, dear?

BORWALL. Because of the pain you'll cause me, I fear.
I'm *scared*.

CHRISTINE. No, son.

PRISTEE. Mommy, you looked possessed.
You're going to hurt us!

CHRISTINE. Now stop that jest.
The love that I have for you overflows,
So what I shall give you, I'll now disclose.

PRISTEE. A beating?

BORWALL. The stick?

Scene Quintus

As Stabille paces, Rosette enters with a tray of champagne and other drinks.

ROSETTE. Dinner is over so they'll be here soon.

STABILLE. Good, then my chance visit is opportune.

ROSETTE. Chance? Monsieur, you say it's *by chance* you came?

STABILLE. Alright, it's to watch this confidence game!
Baroque now has the mayor in his house,
Hoping he's impressed by his kids and spouse.
I positive things couldn't have gone worse
So tell what's happened in there most perverse?
Insults? Contempt? Scornful conversation?
Give me tonight's most ghastly quotation!

ROSETTE. Monsieur, there's been none.

STABILLE. What?

ROSETTE. None all night long.
If you think the evening's gone poorly, you're wrong.
If fact, I don't think things could've gone better
For everything in there's been by the letter.
But here's the thing I really don't get:
How'd those kids learn perfect etiquette?
They both smiled and only spoke up when asked,
Said *please* and *thank you* as each dish passed;
Their courtesy wowed His Honor all night.

STABILLE. But he and my sister must have fought, right?
They surely went at it like dog and cat.

ROSETTE. Nope, like young lovers, not even one spat.

STABILLE. *What?*

ROSETTE. Here they come now for post-dinner drinks.

STABILLE. I'll get to the bottom of this high jinks.

(*Baroque enters with the Mayor, Christine, Borwall and Pristee*)

BAROQUE. In here, Mayor, my venerated sir.
Drinks are prepared so we can confer
On all information you'll need from me.

MAYOR. Thank you, sir.

BAROQUE. Brother, is that you I see?

STABILLE. While passing through the neighborhood
I thought a chance visit now might be good.

BAROQUE. Passing through by chance? Oh, I'll bet you were.

STABILLE. A pleasure to see you again, Mayor!
Greetings, sister, and dear niece and nephew.

MAYOR. The pleasure is mine, good sir, to see you.

STABILLE. I've never seen you all looking so fine.
I understand that you've come here to dine?

MAYOR. Our dining was just a silly pretense.
Oh, why not admit that I sit on the fence
About the candidate that I'll endorse,
So the real reason that I've come, of course,
Is to prod into monsieur's social views.

BAROQUE. He's here to see if it's me he'll choose.
How kind.

MAYOR. Kindness, Henri, that's your domain,
For no other Frenchman's quite as humane.

BAROQUE. Gosh.

MAYOR. Still, in a world that's harshly political,
You must understand that I be critical.

BAROQUE. May justice, Mayor, be blind your choice
And whomever you choose, I'll surely rejoice,
As long as the values they put on display
Are *liberté, égalité, fraternité!*

MAYOR. There's a higher ideal at which you've impressed
For your family's passed the difficult test
Of being completely, wonderfully *French*.

BAROQUE. Well! Does Honor have a thirst I can quench?
Rosette! Relax all. A glass of champagne?

MAYOR. If you're pouring, monsieur, I won't complain.
Ladies first.

CHRISTINE. I'll pass, sir.

MAYOR. Are you French, madame?
A President's wife mustn't close her palm
When our national drink is presented.
Turn this down and you could be resented.
Drink, please! And do these fine children partake?

PRISTEE. Sure!

BAROQUE. No! They can't. They're on a homework break.

MAYOR. And they're studious, too. Am I surprised?
Of these marvelous children, I've surmised
They are perfect, the ideal in all ways,
Which brings to mind that delightful phrase:
"Good children should be seen and not heard."

BORWALL. Honest, Your Honor, I am not a nerd.

MAYOR. No, son?

BORWALL. I think computers are boring.
One should avoid them.

MAYOR. Yes, those adoring
Those blasted machines are simpletons, son.

BORWALL. I find warm conversation really, really fun.

MAYOR. That's so cultivated of you, my lad.

BORWALL. I want to grow up to be like my dad.

MAYOR. Superb! We've still boys in France of this sort?

BAROQUE. Now, have you a question about the court,
Or our congress' pending legislation?

PRISTEE. Mayor?

MAYOR. My dear?

PRISTEE. I love education.

MAYOR. Do you?

PRISTEE. If you've time I'd love to discuss
Geology, physics or calculus.

MAYOR. Incredible that a girl of this age
Has thoughts so profound, so weighty and sage.

BAROQUE. And here's my position on Women's Choice—

MAYOR. Let me say, madam, you've cause to rejoice
Because it's difficult raising a child,
But your handiwork shows and I'm beguiled.

BAROQUE. On tariffs, here's my evaluation—

CHRISTINE. I'm humbled by your consideration.
And you're right, I'm the one who's done all this.
Let me give each of these angels a kiss.

MAYOR. Family life is my greatest passion.
How did you do it?

CHRISTINE. By being old-fashion.
Raising children—*it's true*—takes a village.
Together we must prevent the pillage
Of our children's goodness and innocence.

BAROQUE. Here's how I'll handle national defense—

CHRISTINE. I'd do this for any child within reach
For every Frenchwoman must love to teach
The tender ones who will come cross our path.

(*Baroque snorts and chortles*)

MAYOR. Is that amusing, sir? Why do you laugh?

BAROQUE. Laugh? Oh. Me? A joyful exclamation.
Now, I'll give you a concise summation
Of my sober plan to lower our tax.

MAYOR. Monsieur, we can wait on these simple facts.
I toast this family's flawless French style!

BAROQUE. At budgeting, I shall be versatile.

MAYOR. In time.

BAROQUE. I'm no lap dog the hard right,
But I'll show the world that this dog can bite.
A president must be strict and firm
And never be called a gutless French worm,
Nor a big pansy on the global stage!

MAYOR. If they called you that, then what? You'd feel rage?

BAROQUE. If every I were called that epithet
I'd stealthily make them feel regret
For disrespecting this land's highest post.

MAYOR. What'd happen to them then, sir?

BAROQUE. They'd be toast.
I shall restore our great honor and pride!

MAYOR. Well, back to your beautiful, charming bride.

BAROQUE. Sir, government spending's out of control,
Like throwing money down a big, black hole.

MAYOR. Right—

BAROQUE. Here's my campaign motto: *Hope and Change*.

MAYOR. I've heard that before.

BAROQUE. You have? How strange.

MAYOR. Sir—

BAROQUE. Ask for my views on corporations,
Illegal immigrants and deportations.
Quiz me, sir, prod me to find out my stance.
I've got your answers and *Vive la France!*

MAYOR. Such enthusiasm leaves me breathless.

BAROQUE. I'm sure it does. Please, go on, nonetheless.

MAYOR. Alright, monsieur, here's something I'll confide . . .

BAROQUE. You'll back me?

MAYOR. All you've said seems a bromide.

BAROQUE. A what?

MAYOR. Your words seem to come from a can.
I hope you don't mind talking man-to-man?

BAROQUE. What's that mean?

MAYOR. That you don't seem sincere
And say things you think others want to hear.

BAROQUE. Whoa, I think, Mayor, you're a bit confused.

MAYOR. Please forgive me if you're wrongly accused,
But all I'm hearing is empty chatter.
You've yet to say you think *people* matter.

BAROQUE. Did you forget my public donation?

MAYOR. But what's your goal of your representation?
It's not gifts, but family, we all should boast
For that's what every Frenchman values most.

BAROQUE. What you're saying, Mayor, doesn't make sense.

- MAYOR. Because, sir, you lack in experience.
- BAROQUE. I have experience and it's in spades.
- MAYOR. At making money, which you've done for decades.
But a public calling is far higher
Than being a stock seller and buyer.
- BAROQUE. So you must think I'm a dope, then? A cad?
- MAYOR. I didn't say that.
- CHRISTINE. Henri.
- PRISTEE. Father.
- BORWALL. Dad.
- MAYOR. Now you're stretching all that I'm saying.
My interest in you, I'm not betraying,
Only lending knowledge for you to win.
Monsieur, you need to grow a thicker skin.
- BAROQUE. I see. Well, perhaps you've other advice?
- MAYOR. Since you asked, well, here's your primary vice:
I noticed it in this social setting
For at dinner I saw you forgetting
The stately grace that we Frenchmen require.
- BAROQUE. What'd I forget there, if I may inquire?
- MAYOR. All you did through the meal was fidget.
Our leader can't be a social midget.
And no elbows down while others converse!
- BAROQUE. *Midget?*
- MAYOR. These two can teach you book and verse
On manners—for *they* know how to behave.
And an etiquette lesson, to you, they gave!

BAROQUE. *Them?*

PRISTEE. Mayor, I know I'm far from perfect
But I'm warmed to know I've earned your respect.

BAROQUE. You're joking?

BORWALL. Sister, we've pleased an adult.
That makes me want to—oh, yippee—exult.

MAYOR. Fantastic!

BAROQUE. Fantastic is exactly the word.
To hear this *bullcrap*, my god, it's absurd.

MAYOR. Excuse me?

BAROQUE. Bullcrap! I should be like them?

MAYOR. What?

BAROQUE. So it's honesty that I'm to condemn,
Is that what you mean?

MAYOR. Sir?

BAROQUE. Throw out *honesty*,
Be a total and fatuous phony
Like these two who have you over a barrel.

CHRISTINE. Dear, calm down, or this night you'll imperil.

STABILLE. My brother, sir, is brash on occasion
But some think his a charming abrasion.

MAYOR. I'll admit it's alarming, this outburst.

BAROQUE. To watch this masquerade, I must be cursed.
Listening to this old decrepit hack
Who in a moment'd stick a knife in your back.

MAYOR. This acrimony, sir, comes from where?

BAROQUE. I'll tell you, sir: *from being a billionaire*.
I got there by doing things my own way,
Not listening to some old dufus say
I'm a fidgety bromide and a boar,
A vulgar fool who's manners he'll ignore.

MAYOR. Lord in heaven, this man is unstable.

CHRISTINE. He's peppy.

BAROQUE. God, elbows on the table!
They're close because I use them for swinging.
And this big mouth, sir, is for mud-slinging,
And calling things exactly as they are.

MAYOR. I think it's time that you order my car.

BAROQUE. Wait, I need to add that you philistines
Wouldn't add up to a hill of beans
If you had to find some work on your own.

MAYOR. A what?

BAROQUE. In my circles, that's how you're known:
Philistine. A government freeloader
Who makes his living off every voter
Who pays his salary—and for doing what?

MAYOR. Good Lord in heaven, this man is a nut.

BAROQUE. Is this hard to hear from one who does good?

MAYOR. Do you mean *you*, sir?

BAROQUE. Now you've understood.
It's the wealthy like me who pay all the tax
So that men like you can live off our backs.
I give, you take. What I give, you bestow.
Am I not an Altruist? I'd say so.
My manners! These slurs, you clown, will not stand
Against one of the richest men in our land.
For your endorsement, I no longer care.
I'm done. Go on. There's the door. Right there.

MAYOR. If you're finished, I'd like to make a point,
Since we have a president to anoint?
My three million votes will not go to you.

BAROQUE. *Oh?*

MAYOR. But the cause is not your point of view
On the domestic matters I've addressed
For I've a more relevant acid test:
I could never support a man who's a snake
—A dissembler and a corporate fake—
Who manipulates markets up and down
To make his billions. You think *I'm* the clown?
We call you *scat* on an ethical level.

BAROQUE. Not your benefactor?

MAYOR. You're the devil.
That's a far more appropriate handle
For another greedy hedge fund vandal.

BAROQUE. Why take my money if you think I'm bad?

MAYOR. That you don't know the reason, sir, is sad.
I help the poor by opening your wallet.

BAROQUE. You're a liar, then?

MAYOR. Whatever you call it.
A man thinks he's important when he's rich,
But most are like you, a son-of-a— .
I shall now proceed to bring your downfall.
Tickled you invited me for this call.

(*The Mayor exits*)

BAROQUE. Boy, he's arrogant. And so conceited.

STABILLE. I'll check, in his car, he's safely seated. (*exits with Rosette*)

CHRISTINE. I'm sorry, dear, we must throw in the towel.
But I won't grumble and I won't scowl.
I still love you. Children, you feel the same?

BORWALL. Father, I'm clearly the one you should blame.
Your praises I should have sung much higher
And perhaps have worn some better attire.

CHRISTINE. Daughter?

PRISTEE. I'm sorry, dad, I've fallen short
In giving genealogic support.

CHRISTINE. Nothing's changed in way we feel about you.
We feel exactly like before.

BORWALL. True.

PRISTEE. True.

BAROQUE. I've got to tell Chandler this awful news.
I'm sure won't like it.

(*Baroque exits*)

CHRISTINE. Now gimme my booze!
It's time for us finally to celebrate!
Didn't I tell you he'd take the bait?

PRISTEE. Mommy, you're so wonderfully full of deceit,
You're just assured our daddy's defeat!

BORWALL. Now I can again be a normal teen
Whose face is pressed to a computer screen!

CHRISTINE. And I get my reason for living again:
Chocolate, champagne, vodka, wine and gin.

BORWALL. You've shown us you love us with this great gift.

CHRISTINE. My dears . . .

(*Stabille enters*)

STABILLE. The Mayor's gone. Boy, was he miffed.
He's off to announce his endorsement
Won't be for Henri for our president.
He'll pick the guy who sits across the aisle.

BORWALL. Wahoo!

PRISTEE. Yippee!

CHRISTINE. Dear, brother!

STABILLE. You all smile?
You sought the mayor your conduct to laud
But now I suspect you all were a fraud?

CHRISTINE. Don't ask us why, just join our festive mood:
A toast to the bonehead! Boy, is he screwed!

(*Baroque stands at the door with Chandler*)

BAROQUE. You said *screwed*. And *bonehead*. Whom do you mean?

CHRISTINE. The Mayor, of course, gets my bitter spleen.
A traitor like that deserves berating.

BAROQUE. Yeah? So tell me why you're celebrating?

CHRISTINE. Because . . . if he backed you . . . what could be worse?
The Mayor's endorsement is really a curse.
Everyone knows he's an oaf and a fool
So to spit at that jackass—that's my rule.
We are toasting that demon's departure
Though we're sad, your defeat, it did insure.

BORWALL. We're not happy. But in a way we are.

PRISTEE. We're happy, right. But not really.

BAROQUE. Bizarre.

CHANDLER. No, no, Baroque. She may have something here.
We're told the mayor's a man we must fear
But what if, like her, things turned on their side
And conventional wisdom's not applied?
When given a lemon, make lemonade.
Her disgust for the mayor we should not evade
But embrace it. Let's tag him a public whore
Who ceaselessly spends our taxes galore!

BAROQUE. I think I understand you.

The Altruist will go plan his campaign.
Brother, I'm hiring you—and don't complain
For you're getting a lofty position:
CFO. You'll manage cash disposition.
Only kin can be trusted with a post that high.
Will you take it, sir?

STABILLE. I am your ally,
And do accept, my dear brother and friend,
For now I must see how all this will end.

BAROQUE. Family, carry on. Great days are in store!
(Baroque and Chandler exit)

PRISTEE. Mommy, I hurt so . . .

BORWALL. And my head's so sore . . .

CHRISTINE. Shaddup.

STABILLE. This outcome's unexpected.
Sister, will you become one respected?

CHRISTINE. Of course . . . For if France is so asinine
As to vote for Henri, I think that's fine.
Then we all can attest when he was in power,
France never had a lower hour.

STABILLE. Don't be cynical for this I'll assert:
From bad, to good, any man can convert.
And I'll help Henri change if he should win.

CHRISTINE. If you can do that, brother, please begin!
I must heal these children from their cruel blow.
I love you, darlings. Brother, hurry, go!

(lights fade)

Scene Sextus

Baroque paces in the drawing room. Chandler enters waving papers.

CHANDLER. Just one week to go till the election!
Look: my polling's made a timely detection:
See: our ads cut his approval rating.
This poll finds him dim, cocky and grating.
With one more round, you go over the top!

BAROQUE. Bruce . . .

CHANDLER. Yes, sir?

BAROQUE. My brother says we should stop.

CHANDLER. What?

BAROQUE. All these ads.

CHANDLER. Why?

BAROQUE. Half my fortune's spent.

CHANDLER. You still have another fifty-percent,
We'll spend that.

BAROQUE. I don't know.

CHANDLER. What do you mean?

BAROQUE. You've blown five-billion and what have we seen?
Half of the wealth I have has been drained
And it's only four points, in this race, I've gained.

CHANDLER. So what?

BAROQUE. I'd win by a landslide, you swore.

CHANDLER. You're two points behind now!

BAROQUE. You said it'd be more!

CHANDLER. Gosh! If you don't spend what you have in the bank
This whole election goes right in the tank.
And here's one more thing, dummy, you neglect:
Negative ads have a *cumulative* effect.
Right now you appear to be in a scrum
But what's on your side is *momentum*.

(*Stabile enters*)

BAROQUE. Here's my brother. Let's see what news he brings.

CHANDLER. Baroque tells me you've cut the purse strings.
You won't give me more money to spend?

STABILLE. I told him that *spending* we have to *suspend*.
I can't write a blank check for all of your ads.
There's no money left.

CHANDLER. But Baroque has scads!

STABILLE. But the rest of his wealth's in that *blind trust*,
And before borrowing more it's a must
I get that money back.

CHANDLER. He's losing votes!

STABILLE. But his debt is billions in promissory notes!
We're lucky creditors have lent him cash
Knowing he's rich with a sizable stash.

BAROQUE. So where's my dough?

CHANDLER. They're retuning it now.
So borrow more!

STABILLE. That I will not allow.
Not unless I have Henri's permission.

CHANDLER. Sir: do you or do you not have ambition?
You said you wanted that ring made of brass
But now it looks like you've run out of gas.
It's *there*—*right there*—in front of your face.
Reach up! Grab the damn thing! And win this race!

BAROQUE. I don't know.

CHANDLER. If you don't give me that loot,
It's impossible to win this race!

BAROQUE. Shoot . . .

CHANDLER. Sir, why do you stop your life's greatest rise?
The cloak of president's just your size
And on you, all of France will soon dote.
Please, please, just one more promissory note!

BAROQUE. You have already spent half of my wealth.

CHANDLER. Because my concern is our country's health!

BAROQUE. If I lose I won't be President Baroque
But a laughingstock and national joke.

CHANDLER. I thought you said you wanted some thrills!

BAROQUE. Not homelessness and bankruptcy chills!

CHANDLER. But you'll surely be our top dog at last,
Not a hedge fund thief with a checkered past
And a man called an off-shore tax cheater.
You, Henri Baroque, will be our leader
And enter a loyal fraternity
Of Napoleons for all eternity!
You're portrait will soon hang in Versailles.
You'd rather your tombstone read *thug* when you die?

STABILLE. Henri, what's wrong? You have doubts?

BAROQUE. Lots of late,
With deep anxieties that won't abate.

STABILLE. You must follow your heart if you're troubled.

CHANDLER. With money, sir, your votes will be doubled!

BAROQUE. Borrow the rest, though the thought makes me sick.

STABILLE. Five billion more?

BAROQUE. Yes, for we both know the past is debris.
When people like us come to reach middle age
We must forgive, forget and turn the page.

CHRISTINE. Then we'll be like we were when young and poor,
Though I'm glad we're not like that anymore.

BAROQUE. Poor?

CHRISTINE. Of course.

BAROQUE. What if I had no money?

CHRISTINE. What a silly notion.

BAROQUE. No, really, honey,
Would you decide to again be my spouse
If I were poor as a country church mouse?

CHRISTINE. You've a ten-billion in your account!

BAROQUE. What if I didn't have any amount?
What if I were broke—like in our youth,
Would you marry me, Christine? Please, the truth.

CHRISTINE. I would jump to marry you instantly
If you were to behave as constantly
As the day we met and as you are now.
But would you marry me, monsieur?

BAROQUE. And how.
Those sacred vows I would jump to reprise
With the beautiful girl before my eyes.
Money, who needs it? It's love is our cash.

CHRISTINE. Goodness. Uh-oh. I'm having a hot flash.
Of those, I guess I am still capable.

BAROQUE. I've a passion—too—feels inescapable.
I'm moved to show my love in an old way.

CHRISTINE. But your rally, my dear, do we go or stay?

BAROQUE. I still have the faculty to devour
The woman I love in half an hour.

CHRISTINE. Let's go!

BAROQUE. Ah! I've got all those calls to make.
What about the press?

CHRISTINE. Let them eat cake.

(Borwall and Pristee appear at the door)

BORWALL. Dear parents, I have a patriotic speech
I wrote for the rally, and I beseech
You let me give my message to the crowd.

PRISTEE. Dear parents, may I also speak aloud?
I promise I wouldn't be a bother
For my speech honors mother and father.
May we, please, speak?

CHRISTINE. Sure. But wait in the car.
We'll be there soon, the rally's not far.
Go practice those speeches again and again
And write them out, oh, fifty times with a pen.

PRISTEE. I love it! I get to obey!

BORWALL. We love you, dear parents. Oh, yippee! Hurray!

(Borwall and Pristee exit)

BAROQUE. I can't believe how you got them to change.
How did you do it?

CHRISTINE. The answer's not strange.
I recalled all threats should be set aside
And loving patience always applied.
That lesson, how did I ever ignore?

BAROQUE. We'll answer after we go next door.

(Henri and Christine exit as lights fade)

Scene Septimus

Stabille waits. Rosette enters with tray.

STABILLE. Well?

ROSETTE. His acceptance speech, he's practicing,
To appeal to both the left and right wing.
Chandler wants him to show humility
With an authoritative ability.

STABILLE. Chandler's that sure the election is won?

ROSETTE. Of course he is! He's got the numbers run.

STABILLE. But the lead Henri has isn't immense.
In my opinion, it makes more sense
To wait until the voting's concluded.

ROSETTE. In our joy, why won't you be included?
Baroque has won!

STABILLE. I can't claim the nation
Till we get the *final* tabulation.
Who knows what's out there that still could go wrong?

ROSETTE. Have you heard your nephew's victory song?
Borwall!

(Borwall appears at the door, Rosette joins his singing)

BORWALL. *(singing)* Henri Baroque! Man of Glory!
Lead dear France, with all of your majesty!

BORWALL. Will the bourgeoisie find that inspirational?

STABILLE. Borwall, try to be dispensational
To them. Who knows what that song will inspire?

BORWALL. Well, this one's not going down to the wire.
Dad won the Lorraine and the Côte d'Azur.

STABILLE. Did he take Auvergne?

ROSETTE. Boy, there's no telling.
They have a staff.

BORWALL. But you should hear father boast
About the one person whom he trusts most:
You.

ROSETTE. Isn't it funny that recently
Your dad's treated us good and decently?

BORWALL. There's only one good person here alive:
You, Aunt Rosette.

ROSETTE. Borwall, gimme high five.
I love you.

(Baroque and Chandler enter)

CHANDLER. We'll start with a violin,
Playing so sweetly when you are sworn in.
Then a thundering and brassy expanse
Will break into, "Pomp and Circumstance!"

BAROQUE. We'll see. Rosette, would you please get me ice?

CHANDLER. Have I given you one bad bit of advice? *(addresses Rosette)*
Rosette, get madam and little Pristee,
We need a photo-op. Now listen, Henri—

BAROQUE. *Stop.* I need time to digest my conquest.

CHANDLER. No time, monsieur, we are completely pressed.

BAROQUE. Bruce, you are right again, ideally.
But I'd like time with my son. Really.

CHANDLER. *(beat)* Fine, but when a few more votes get counted
Your vote total can't be surmounted.
The networks expect you, those cameras don't blink.
Hurry, *au revoir!*

(Chandler leaves)

ROSETTE. Will you receive him, sir?

BAROQUE. What the hell is it?
Why would he come here on election night?

ROSETTE. Will you receive him, sir?

BAROQUE. Oh. Oh, of course. Right.

(Rosette exits)

BORWALL. I'll leave. This must be a private matter.

BAROQUE. Why'd he come now?

BORWALL. Doubtless to flatter
And give a heartfelt congratulation
To the great man who'll be leading our nation.
(beat) Father, there is something that I'd like known:
I'm a chip off the old block and your clone.
I leave you to show my true love, father.

(Borwall exits, the Mayor enters)

MAYOR. Monsieur, I hope I'm not a bother?
I know very well what these nights are like:
Your heart races, the pulse begins to spike
As you watch thousands of votes trickle in
And you start to wonder: "Did I lose or win?"

BAROQUE. Haven't you seen things are going quite well?
I'm up by a point.

MAYOR. Still, it's hard to foretell
Who'll win till *all* of the voting's announced
And our congress has the victor pronounced.

BAROQUE. I see. And why aren't you with the man you backed?
Shouldn't you be with him, weighing the impact
He gained when you endorsed his campaign?
Oh, you backed the wrong horse.

MAYOR. I wouldn't ordain
Yourself our president yet, monsieur.
We have only ten thousand votes fewer.
And more votes are being calculated.

BAROQUE. My pollster says all your hopes have faded.
And he is a man who's never been wrong.

MAYOR. Is that true, monsieur?

BAROQUE. Sir, I can't be kept long.
I've presidential responsibilities.
So get to the point. I mean, if you please.

MAYOR. Very well said. Yes, yes, I'll cut to the chase,
For it does appear that you've won this race—
I mean if the untoward doesn't occur
And there's always a chance of that, monsieur.
If fact, it might be wise to make this bet:
That what I'm saying is really a threat.

BAROQUE. Threat?

MAYOR. See, plots can have an unforeseen twist,
Like this one: I control the city's voting list.
And sometimes—it happens—votes can get flipped
So a winner might be cruelly stripped
Of more votes than he could ever believe,
If you catch my drift.

BAROQUE. Is that up your sleeve?
From me, you'd steal this election?

MAYOR. I would.
I'd have to, sir, for the public good.
So this hour I'll move my man to the top
As the world sees the votes you get stop.
I think pundits call it a late-evening *surge*.

BAROQUE. You can't tell me you're serious, you scourge.
What, the man you backed couldn't compete
So to win this election you'd steal and cheat?

MAYOR. *Competition?* That must be more of your spin.
Tell me how many billions did you spent to win?
Was it one? Five? Ten? Or was it far more?
So you could place ads calling me a whore
And tear me apart with your filthy lies,
Innuendo, deceit and all I despise?
Competition! Sir, my man took the high road
And never once broke an ethical code:
We never lied. Not once. We have ideals!

BAROQUE. He lectures on ethics, then my votes he steals!

MAYOR. Our side stuck to the truth and the facts
No matter how mendacious your attacks!

BAROQUE. Can't you admit you're a liberal thief
Who don't give a damn about any belief?

MAYOR. (*beat*) Sir, time's now short and you're blowing hot air.
But you're right in this, that I don't play fair.
Like you. But I didn't come to *moralize*.

BAROQUE. Then why are you here?

MAYOR. For a compromise.

BAROQUE. Oh?

MAYOR. The cunning of your ugly campaign
Put a wedge in France and split it in twain,
So the only way to heal the divide
Is for all of us to work side-by-side.
Now, I propose we govern down the middle
So no man has to play second fiddle.
We'll let you win if my man's your . . . *left* arm.
And to our policies you won't do harm.
And you'll go now and declare your intent
To make my candidate your . . . Vice President.
And with this bipartisan coalition
You'll announce to the world it's your mission
To end all political lies and sins
And work together—so all of France wins!

BAROQUE. My Vice President is to be your man?

MAYOR. Yes. Isn't that an altruistic plan?

BAROQUE. Perhaps. But before I make this decision
I should tell you of a billionaire's vision:
One only gets rich by doing as *they* chose.
I see you're desperate and I'm not gonna lose.
It's a bluff. Mayor, you should learn when to fold.
Your influence—you cheat—you oversold.
Good night. Next time we meet, remember to bow.

MAYOR. You think I'm lying to you?

BAROQUE. Holy cow,
You're still here?

MAYOR. Sir, there's nothing more foolish
Then picking the wrong time to act mulish.

BAROQUE. Hear me? *Good night.*

MAYOR. (*with cell phone*) *Excuse moi*, quick call.
"He will not participate. No, not at all.
So wind things up and begin the transfer." (*hangs up*)

BAROQUE. I don't believe this.

MAYOR. Good evening, monsieur.

BAROQUE. Mayor, if you ever need a job, just ask.
I've something, I think, you're up for the task:
In my Department of Sanitation.
See you at my swearing in.

MAYOR. Damnation,
Are you about to be cut down to size.

CHRISTINE. (*entering*) Mayor, you're here now? Well, what a surprise.

MAYOR. A congratulatory interview.
Sorry to be brief, madame. Adieu.

(*the Mayor exits*)

CHRISTINE. He came here at this hour? Isn't that odd?

BAROQUE. Not when you're a hopeless, insolent clod.

CHRISTINE. Tell me why he came?

BAROQUE. To beg a favor.
But he found Henri Baroque won't waiver
In all things this upright man does and says.

CHRISTINE. Don't lower your standards, dear.

BAROQUE. Not this Prez.
Oh, look at you! Dressed in blue, red and white.

CHRISTINE. You really think that this outfit is right?
Chandler declares that it's patriotic.
But where's our French style?

BAROQUE. You look hypnotic.
And aren't I the man you should always please?

CHRISTINE. You are. You're my big presidential squeeze.
(*tickling*) Stop! Oh, Chandler wants the family for photos.
The kids are already there, I suppose.

(*Pristee enters*)

PRISTEE. No, no—dear parents—your daughter is here.

BAROQUE. Where've you been?

PRISTEE. Working as a volunteer.
With my free time, I help the destitute
For now doing good's my only pursuit.
Like dad.

BAROQUE. She only does what I taught her!
Could a president have a finer daughter?

CHRISTINE. Let's have pictures taken, then greet our throng.
To the press room all.

(*Chandler enters with his PDA*)

CHANDLER. Stop, stop! Something's wrong.
There's no one here that I want to frighten
But the race has just begun to tighten.

BAROQUE. What?

CHANDLER. The race! I'm sure you're the man chosen
But suddenly all of your votes seem frozen.

BAROQUE. What's this?

CHANDLER. You're not getting any more votes!
Oh, a few trickle in, but this connotes
A contest that's become too close to call.

BAROQUE. You mean I won't win?

CHANDLER. No, no, not at all.
You *could* win. It's a possibility.

BAROQUE. Chandler, explain!

CHANDLER. Here's the reality:
Your chance of winning is going to hell
Because of an unforeseen voting groundswell
From a huge block of votes that's come from Paris. (*Pahr-EE*)
See the total on my PDA? See?
No! He got more! What had been neck-and-neck
Is turning into a Baroque train wreck!

BAROQUE. You said that if I spent all that I had
I'd be our next president.

CHRISTINE. What? Henri!

PRISTEE. Dad!

CHRISTINE. You spent everything we have on this race?

BAROQUE. I think I recall, you said it's the case
That if I were as poor as the day we met
You couldn't love me more.

STABILLE. No! (*aghast*) Still, it's far worse, my news.

BAROQUE. It can't be worse than telling me I'll lose.

STABILLE. I would never, dear brother, take that bet
For my news is . . . you're ten-billion in debt!

BAROQUE. I know. It'll be paid by the blind trust.

STABILLE. Not when you learn the whole thing is a bust:
The trust Chandler picked for you in New York
Was run by a man who didn't eat pork.
Bernie Madoff was that swindler's name
And at finances, he played a shell game.
He stole money, even from his friends!
Henri, can't you guess how this story ends?
The Madoff blind trust was a Ponzi scheme
And to think you'll be repaid is a dream.
You're broke, but still owe ten-billion to banks.
So you'll go to debtor's prison!

BAROQUE. Wow. Thanks.
Really glad I got that information.

STABILLE. That you just suffered financial castration?

BAROQUE. Thanks.

CHRISTINE. Wait, you mean that we're not only broke
But still owe ten-billion? God, it's a joke.
We have just tasted our cosmic requital
Because God understand you're a little
Nothing; a piddling and petulant fool;
An ass, a hubris-filled, arrogant and cruel
Zero; a pompous and haughty egotist
Who describes himself as an altruist
Because he thinks his money makes him good.
Y'know what God did? Exactly what He should:
Knocked Henri Baroque off his tall tower
So now he'll have to beg, scrape and cower.
You thought God wanted you to lead France?
He wanted to give you a kick in the pants!

BAROQUE. Why don't you tell me how you really feel?
No, you are wrong. God and I made a deal.
I promised Him now I'd do only good
And the Guy upstairs there, He understood.
The fault is the mayor and his crony,
Who cheated me in this race.

CHRISTINE. Oh, baloney!
This is payback time for the billionaire,
This is measure for measure—

BAROQUE. Now that's not fair!
I *am* a changed man.

CHRISTINE. Well, who here would know?
You're family will be living on skid row.
You should be hung for all you've produced.
Look at us: to paupers, your family's reduced.
Well, your end is now easy to predict:
Not a benefactor, but a filthy convict
Who'll be in jail till his end's finally come.
Meet Henri Baroque: not president, but bum!

BAROQUE. (*moved*) Yes. Yes, I see you're right. It's true, Christine.
I *am* an A-hole: difficult and mean,
Unpleasant, cheap, irritable and cross . . .
And if this country had made me their boss
My constitution would have seen no change.
When you realize you're awful, it's strange.
When you discover you're life's made of greed,
When you don't give a damn as others bleed
And wallow in misery as you walk past,
When you don't help the forlorn and downcast
After God has given you lavish riches,
Then you're just one of those sons-a-bitches
Who ought to be escorted straight to Hell.
I *am* a despicable person. Well . . .
With all my feeling, I apologize.
The Holy Father's cut me down to size.
So on my knees, Sir, I beg a new start.
Please help away this miserly heart

And replenish my soul with rectitude
Showing only kindness toward my loving brood.
And though I may end up in the Bastille,
I promise you, Lord, I'll daily kneel
And ask you to make me a better man
For now I'm Your servant, a part of Your plan. (*weeps*)

PRISTEE. Father, your contrition has me so moved,
I know a way your sorrow can be soothed.
Recall my beloved Burgundy boy
Whose company I would nightly enjoy?
And party with like a manic?
Well, that boy's had a panic attack
Because I won't see him anymore.
Now every day he shows up at our door
And begs me to run away and elope.
But daily I tell him, "You're a creep, *nope!*
You're too lowly for a good girl like me."
But the point is, father, his family tree
Is the richest in the whole of our land:
He's worth something like a-hundred-billion grand.
I could elope with him without a pre-nup,
And he's such a fool, I know he'd say, "Yup."
Then later I'd divorce to get half his estate.
Fifty-billion. Then to you I'd come straight
And I would give you all his family's dough.
But if this is morally wrong, say *no.*

BAROQUE. (*in time*) Question: for this fine lad, do you have love?

PRISTEE. Not really. But sometimes, you know, kind of?

BAROQUE. I'll ask Holy Father. He'll be our guide.
(*prays*) He says, "Do it, girl! "Let the knot be tied!"

PRISTEE. I obey for I must do as I should!

BAROQUE. You're the altruist, daughter, the one most good! (*cheers*)
Wait, I'm still broken, degraded, I'm crushed.
I'll be rich again but my good name's flushed.
Forever I'll be called the *also-ran*

And my tombstone will read, 'Here lies the man
Who ended his life debased in a loss,
This is Henri Baroque, The National Dross.'
Bruce?

CHANDLER. Henri, all wars have a losing side.
First time I have lost, I'll drink till I've died!

BAROQUE. God, you can help. I'll get back on my knees.
You made me rich, Lord, now I beg you, *please*,
Help me to win and I vow I'll be good.

CHRISTINE. Henri, dear, His ways are misunderstood.
His plans for you are clearly otherwise.

BAROQUE. No! I can't lose! I'll go cry out my eyes!
You can't leave me with all this egg on my face.
I *will* be your altruist!

(*Borwall enters with a laptop*)

BORWALL. Okay, first place.
I've moved you ahead, you're now in the lead.
And with one click more here, I shall proceed
To give your total ten-thousand votes more.

BAROQUE. What? What's this?

BORWALL. Daddy, I hope you're not sore.
I hacked into the Paris database (*Pahr-EE*)
For all their returns, you know, just in case,
There was the slimmest chance you might have lost.
You know: we Baroques win at any cost?
Now when a vote is given to your foe,
My program's changed totals to make it show
You're getting two votes to his every one.
That'll go on till all the voting's done.

CHANDLER. It's true. My PDA says you're winning!

BORWALL. Father, what's wrong? Why are you not grinning?

BAROQUE. You cheated. You did not follow our laws.

BORWALL. I said I'm your clone, so did it because—

BAROQUE. Does God like people who steal, cheat and lie!
Should the leader of France simply standby
While one of His Ten Commandments is broken?
Is that who we are?

BORWALL. Father, you've spoken.
I must always do everything you say.
With a click, those phony votes go away.

BAROQUE. *Stop. No.* The question was rhetorical.
Let's not everyone get sophomorical.
In matters like this, we need ask the Devine. (*prays*)

CHRISTINE. What did He tell you?

BAROQUE. Those votes are all mine!
At least if you've the ability
For complete deniability.

BORWALL. They could never track my computer code.

BAROQUE. Then God says give me a big mother load.
Continue to make the votes I get mount
Till I'm well outside the chance for recount!

ALL. Yea!

BAROQUE. *Here's* the altruist, my chip off the block!

BORWALL. I love you, dear father.

BAROQUE. And look at this flock.
Behind their patriarch, this family's stood.
Now we shall conquer all France with our good!

(*Rosette enters*)

ROSETTE. Sir, a crowd outside is chanting your name.
They want you to come.

BAROQUE. Rosette, I proclaim
You are my special government envoy
In charge of domesticity. Enjoy! (*kisses*)

ROSETTE. Well!

CHANDLER. Sir, you must go to greet your supporters,
While I whip up something for those reporters.
Yahoo! My winning steak remains intact!

BAROQUE. I shall make my first legislative act
Naming a dazzling holiday for you.
Now don't worry, brother. You'll get one too.

STABILILE. Integrity, Henri. Just stick with that word.

BAROQUE. Your counsel, dear friend, shall ever be heard.
Go! Go!

ALL. Liberté!

(*all exit except Henri and Christine, who waits behind*)

BAROQUE. Wife? What? Will you come?

CHRISTINE. Oh, Henri.

BAROQUE. What's wrong?

CHRISTINE. I called you a bum.

BAROQUE. Forget it.

CHRISTINE. But what fills me with appall
Is that you *are*. You haven't changed at all.

BAROQUE. Didn't you see me confessing my sins?
The Lord did, so made me the one who wins.

CHRISTINE. I suppose that He decided, to boot,
To give you back more than double your loot?

BAROQUE. Sure! The good man always gets God's blessing.

CHRISTINE. Hearing you say that is so depressing.

BAROQUE. Why?

CHRISTINE. *Are you good, Henri? Will you be so?
Will you think of others for once? Yes or no?*

BAROQUE. I am different. I am better. I'm good.
And I promise I'll now do all I should
So people will say that Henri Baroque
Put first in his heart the common folk.
I also vow I'll be good to my crutch
For that's always given me Midas touch.

CHRISTINE. What's that?

BAROQUE. *The girl who still takes away my breath
And whom I shall love till the day of my death.*

CHRISTINE. Who against this Henri Baroque has a chance?
Not me, surely, and now not even France.
I love him so. I do. I really do.

BAROQUE. Then let's greet our people, love. After you.

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