

Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest you read the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

LA DISPUTE

by
MARIVAUX

Translated from the French
by
TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER



The Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

***** NOTICE *****

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY
311 Washington St., Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

©MCMLXXXIX by
TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER
Translated from the works of
PIERRE CARLET DE CHAMBLAIN DE MARIVAUX
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(LA DISPUTE)

Cover design by Susan Carle

ISBN 0-87129-126-6

LA DISPUTE

**A Play in One Act
For Five Men and Five Women, Extras**

CHARACTERS

HERMIANE

THE PRINCE

MESROU

CARISE

EGLE

AZOR

ADINE

MESRIN

MESLIS

DINA

COURTIERS (non-speaking parts—optional)

The action takes place in the country.

LA DISPUTE was performed on BBC Radio 3 in 1987.
The cast was as follows:

HERMIANE Maggie McCarthy
THE PRINCE Ronald Herdman
MESROU Alton Kumalo
CARISE Valerie Murray
EGLÉ Maureen O'Brien
AZOR Gary Cady
ADINE Jane Leonard
MESRIN James Macpherson

DIRECTOR David Johnston
MUSIC Gordon Langford

LA DISPUTE

SCENE ONE

THE PRINCE, HERMIANE, CARISE, MESROU.

HERMIANE. Where are you taking me, Your Highness?

This country looks wild and isolated and I see no signs of the entertainment you promised me.

THE PRINCE (*laughing*). Everything will be ready.

HERMIANE. I don't understand. What is that strange building over there? What is the meaning of those extraordinarily high walls around it? Where are we going?

THE PRINCE. We are going to watch an unusual spectacle, Hermiane. Remember the question we discussed last night: you maintained against the whole of my court that it was not your sex but ours which had first been unfaithful in love.

HERMIANE. Yes, Your Highness, and I still maintain it. The first unfaithfulness could only have been committed by someone who was bold enough to blush at nothing. Now, ever since the beginning of this corrupt world, women have been—and still are—naturally timid and reserved. How then could they be the first to fall into a pattern of vicious behaviour that requires such daring, such libertine feelings and such insolence? No, Your Highness, it doesn't make sense.

THE PRINCE. Indeed, Hermiane, it doesn't make sense to me either and you needn't argue with me on that sub-

ject. I share your feelings against everyone else, as you know.

HERMIANE. Yes, but I'm afraid that is only out of gallantry, Your Highness.

THE PRINCE. Gallantry? I haven't noticed it, Hermiane. It is true that I love you and perhaps that fact helped to convince me you were right, but this has happened in such a subtle way I've not been aware of it. I have no respect for the hearts of men: deal with them as you will. I'm certain a man's heart is indeed more unfaithful than a woman's. Mine alone must be excepted from this rule and that is only because it is you who are the object of my love. If it were anyone else it would no longer be so.

HERMIANE. Your words betray irony, Your Highness.

THE PRINCE. Then I shall be punished soon enough. You will soon have the means to silence me if you find I don't agree with you.

HERMIANE. What do you mean?

THE PRINCE. We must look to Nature for our answers. Surely only Nature can decide once and for all who was the first to be unfaithful and I'm certain her decision will prove us right.

HERMIANE. Please explain yourself.

THE PRINCE. There is only one way to know whether the two of us are right in believing that it was a man who was responsible for the first unfaithfulness: and that is to be there at the beginning of the world.

HERMIANE. Quite. But we weren't.

THE PRINCE. No, but we will be. We will soon watch men and women exactly as they were at the beginning.

Ah, here we are. Carise, Mesrou, is everything ready?

CARISE/MESROU. Yes, Your Highness.

THE PRINCE. Hermiane, the world and its first loves are about to appear before us exactly as they were, or at least as they must have been. The events may not be precisely the same, but the characters will be. You are about to see hearts in the same state they were at the beginning of the world and souls as fresh as in those first days, or even more fresh. Carise, Mesrou, you may go now. Warn us when you are about to begin.

CARISE/MESROU. Yes, your Highness.

THE PRINCE. Come this way, Hermiane.

SCENE TWO

HERMIANE, THE PRINCE.

HERMIANE. You've excited my curiosity, Your Highness.

THE PRINCE. I'll explain. Some eighteen or nineteen years ago the dispute we had yesterday took place at my father's court. It lasted a long time and became heated. My father disagreed with our view, Hermiane, but he was a man of science and decided to make a foolproof experiment. He found four newborn babies and had them taken to this forest. Two of them were of your sex and two of mine. He gave each one of them extensive grounds and built separate houses for them in which they still live. In that way, none ever met any of the others and they know only Mesrou and his sister Carise who brought them up and still care for them. My father chose black people as their guardians so that they'd be even more surprised when they met each

other. Today, for the first time, these young people will be given the freedom to leave their enclosures and meet one another. They speak our language and we can listen to their conversation, which will be the same as it was in the beginning of the world. The first loves are about to begin, Hermiane. Let us watch what happens. (*Sound of trumpets.*) There's the fanfare. Our young people are about to appear. This gallery runs along the whole building; we'll watch them unseen and listen.

SCENE THREE

CARISE, EGLE.

CARISE. Don't be afraid, Eglé. Follow me.

EGLE. Oh, Carise, where are we going?

CARISE. Look: here are grounds you've never seen before. You can walk through them without danger.

EGLE. What do I see, Carise? So many new worlds!

CARISE. No, it's always the same world. You didn't know how big it was.

EGLE. Look at all these countries, these dwellings. I feel very small in such a wide space. I like it, but it frightens me as well. (*She looks and stops by a stream.*) Oh, look, Carise. What's this water rolling on the ground. I've never seen such a thing happen in my world.

CARISE. That's called a stream.

EGLE (*looking*). Carise, come here, quickly. Look. There's something living in the stream. It looks like a person. It seems to be as surprised by me as I am by it.

CARISE (*laughing*). It's yourself you're seeing. All streams do that.

EGLE. That's me? There? That's my face?

CARISE. Yes.

EGLE. But do you know that it's very beautiful. Yes, it is a most enchanting object. If only I'd known that before!

CARISE. It's true that you are beautiful, Eglé.

EGLE. Beautiful? I'm absolutely ravishing. What a delightful discovery. Look, the stream repeats all of my expressions and there's not one I don't like. You and Mesrou must have been very happy to look at me all these years. I could spend my whole life looking at myself. Oh, I'm going to love myself very much from now on.

CARISE. I have to attend to something in your house, Eglé, do you mind staying alone?

EGLE. No, no, I won't be bored as long as the stream stays with me.

SCENE FOUR

EGLE is alone for a moment, then AZOR appears, facing her.

EGLE. I'm so beautiful I'll never tire of looking at myself. (*She sees AZOR. Frightened.*) Oh. What's this? Another person just like me. No, no, don't come any closer. (*To herself.*) The person laughs. The person seems to be admiring me. (*To AZOR.*) Wait, please. Don't move. (*To herself.*) And yet, the person looks at me with such a gentle expression. (*To AZOR.*) Can you speak?

AZOR. Yes. It was the pleasure of seeing you that had made me speechless.

EGLE. The person hears me and answers me in a very pleasant manner.

AZOR. You enchant me.

EGLE. Good.

AZOR. You delight me.

EGLE. I like you too.

AZOR. Why then do you forbid me to come any closer?

EGLE. I'm no longer forbidding you with as much conviction as before.

AZOR. Then I'll come closer.

EGLE. Yes, I would enjoy that. No, wait. I'm so agitated.

AZOR. I obey you because I'm yours.

EGLE. The person obeys me! Well then, come a little closer. You can't really be mine if you stay so far away. Ah, yes. It's you. (*To herself.*) The person's very well put together. Do you know, you're almost as beautiful as I am.

AZOR. Being so close to you is making me die of happiness. I want to give myself to you. I don't know what I feel, I don't know how to say it.

EGLE. That's how I feel.

AZOR. I'm happy. I'm fainting.

EGLE. I'm sighing.

AZOR. It doesn't matter how close I am to you, I still can't see enough of you.

EGLE. That's what I think too. But I don't know how we can see more of each other. It's impossible for us to be any closer.

AZOR. My heart wants your hands.

EGLE. Here: take my hands. My heart gives them to you. Are you any happier now?

AZOR. Yes, but not more at peace.

EGLE. Nor am I, we're alike in all things.

AZOR. Oh, no, there's such a difference between us. The whole of me can't even compare with your eyes. They're so soft.

EGLE. But yours are lively.

AZOR. You're so pretty, so delicate.

EGLE. Yes, but I assure you it wouldn't suit you to be as pretty as I am. I wouldn't want you to be any different from the way you are. It's another kind of perfection. I don't deny mine, but you must keep yours.

AZOR. I won't change then.

EGLE. Ah, tell me, where were you before I knew you?

AZOR. In a world of my own. But I won't ever go back there since you don't live there and I want to have your hands with me forever. I can no longer manage without them, nor can my mouth deprive itself of kissing them.

EGLE. And my hands can no longer be deprived of the kisses of your mouth. Shh. I hear a noise. These must be the people from my world. Hide behind this tree or they'll be frightened. I'll call you.

AZOR. But I can't see you from behind that tree.

EGLE. All you need do is look into that water. My face is there, you'll see it.

SCENE FIVE

MESROU, CARISE, EGLE.

EGLE. He's only just gone and I'm already suffering. Ah, Carise.

CARISE. You seem troubled Eglé, what's the matter?

MESROU. Her eyes are softer than usual today.

EGLE. Carise, Mesrou, I have very important news: you believe there are only three of us in this world, but you're wrong: there are four of us. I've acquired an object that was holding my hand a few moments ago.

CARISE. Holding your hand? Why didn't you call for help?

EGLE. Help against what, Carise? Against the pleasure it gave me? I was very pleased to have my hand held. It was being held with my consent. This person kissed my hand all the time and I want to call the person back so it can kiss my hand again and give me and itself all that pleasure.

MESROU. I know who it is. I believe I saw him hiding behind the tree. This object is called a man, Eglé, and his name is Azor. We already know him.

EGLE. Azor? That's Azor? What a lovely name. Dear Azor, dear man. He'll come back soon.

CARISE. I'm not surprised he loves you and that you love him. You were made for each other.

EGLE. Quite. We guessed as much ourselves. *(She calls.)* Azor, my Azor, come here quickly, come here, dear man.

SCENE SIX

CARISE, EGLE, MESROU, AZOR.

AZOR. Carise, Mesrou, you're here. These are friends of mine.

EGLE *(cheerfully)*. They've just told me. They've also declared you were made on purpose for me and I'm made

on purpose for you. That's why we love each other so much. I'm your Eglé, and you're my Azor.

MESROU. One is the man, the other the woman.

EGLE. Here's my hand, Azor. It'll make up for your having had to hide. (*To CARISE and MESROU.*) That's what he was doing with my hand before. You see there wasn't any need to call for help, was there?

CARISE. Children, I've told you already that your destiny is to be enchanted by one another.

EGLE (*holding AZOR's hand*). That's obvious.

CARISE. But if you want to love each other forever, you'll have to observe one rule.

EGLE. Yes, I know. To be always in each other's company.

CARISE. No: the opposite. You must occasionally deprive yourselves of the happiness of seeing each other.

EGLE. How now?

AZOR. What?

CARISE. Yes. If you don't observe this rule you'll soon see this happiness diminish and you'll become indifferent to one another.

EGLE (*laughing*). Indifferent! My Azor indifferent? Hahaha. What an amusing thought. Hahaha.

AZOR (*laughing*). How little Carise knows.

MESROU. Don't laugh at Carise, she's giving you excellent advice. It's only by doing what she suggests, that is, by separating occasionally, that Carise and I have continued to love each other.

EGLE. Yes, that might work for you. You're both so black you must have run away in terror the first time you saw each other. Hahaha.

AZOR. The best the two of you could hope for was to learn to tolerate each other.

EGLE. And if you saw each other all the time you'd be repelled because you have nothing beautiful to show each other. I know that I love you, but I never miss you when I don't see you. I don't need your presence at all. Now why is that? It's because you don't please me. But Azor and I are enchanted with each other. He's so handsome and I'm so lovely, so appealing, we're transported every time we look at each other.

AZOR. Let me have your hand again, Eglé. You see how much I suffer when I can't hold her hand. And when I'm holding it I want to die if I can't kiss it, and when I've kissed it I still want to die. And that's only her hand.

EGLE. The man is right and I feel everything he's described in the same way. That's what's happened to us and when you talk about our happiness you do it without understanding anything about it. Even we who feel this happiness don't understand it. It's—infinite.

MESROU. We're only asking you to separate for two or three hours a day.

EGLE. No. We can't manage a minute.

MESROU. What a pity.

EGLE. You're beginning to irritate me, Mesrou. What will happen if Azor and I see too much of each other? Will we become ugly? Will we stop being enchanting?

CARISE. No, but you'll stop feeling that you are.

EGLE. How can we possibly stop feeling something that we are?

AZOR. Eglé will always be my Eglé.

EGLE. And Azor always my Azor.

MESROU. Yes, we understand that, but you don't know what might happen. Suppose I were to become as hand-

some as Azor or that Carise were suddenly as beautiful as Eglé.

EGLE. Why should we care about that?

CARISE. If you'd had a surfeit of seeing each other, you might be tempted to leave one another and to love us.

EGLE. Why should we be tempted? Does one leave what one loves? What sort of thinking is that? Azor and I love each other, that's all there is to it. You may become as beautiful as you wish, what does it matter to us? That will be your concern. We already have ours.

AZOR. Carise and Mesrou will never understand. They would have to be in our place to know what has happened.

MESROU. As you wish.

AZOR. My love is my life, Mesrou.

EGLE. Have you heard that, Carise? His life. How can he leave me? He has to live, and so do I.

AZOR. Yes, my life. Ah, how is it possible to be so beautiful, to have such beautiful eyes, such a beautiful mouth, to have everything so beautiful?

EGLE. I love it when he admires me.

MESROU. He does adore you.

AZOR. Yes, Mesrou, you've said that very well. I adore. Mesrou finally understands me. Eglé, I adore you.

EGLE (*gasping*). Adore me, Azor, but let me breathe a little. Ah, that's better.

CARISE. I'm delighted to see so much tenderness between you, but you will not preserve it unless you listen to us. You must make an effort to be wise, Eglé, give this portrait to Azor. It will make your absence easier for him to bear.

EGLE. What's this? Ah, it's me. Yes, I recognise myself. It's a much better image of me than the one in the