

La Femme de Paris

A play in One Act

Written by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

STEVE An American visiting Paris for the first time. He is in his thirties.

ODILE A beautiful French woman in her twenties.

WAITER A man in his late thirties.

JEAN A hard looking Frenchman in his early forties.

SETTING: A small cafe located down a narrow Paris street.

AT RISE: The set is in total darkness. A small spot comes up slowly illuminating both ODILE and JEAN. They are not in the cafe, but somewhere else in Paris (an apartment?).

ODILE

Salaud. Je déteste. J'espère que tu crèves. (You pig. I hate you. I hope you die.)

JEAN

Salope. Salope. Je ne veux plus jamais t'revoir. (Bitch. Bitch. I don't want to see you again, ever.)

ODILE

Ça m'est égal! (Leave. See if I care.)

(Blackout. As the lights come up again, the sound of street noises can be heard. The WAITER enters and starts cleaning an empty cafe table and chairs, and sweeps the floor around it. STEVE enters, carrying a copy of the New York Times and a paperback book of French phrases.)

STEVE

Taxi, taxi. (Pause) Damn, I haven't been here twelve hours and I already miss New York.

(STEVE walks a bit further, and sees the outdoor cafe. As the waiter finishes cleaning, STEVE enters the cafe and sits at an empty table. The waiter approaches.)

WAITER

Bon jour.

STEVE

Yeah, hi. You probably don't speak English, right?

WAITER

Monsieur?

STEVE

Oh, great.

(STEVE looks through his
phrase book.)

Parlez-vous English?

WAITER

Non, Monsieur.

STEVE

Right.

(He looks at the phrase book
for a moment and gives up.)

Ah, oh, just some coffee. (pause) You know, coffee, black.

WAITER

Oui.

STEVE

Thanks.

(The WAITER exits to get the
coffee and STEVE picks up his
paper and begins to read.
The WAITER enters with the
coffee and places it down on
the table.)

WAITER

Autre chose, Monsieur? (Will there be anything else?)

(STEVE looks through the
phrase books once again.)

STEVE

Huh?

WAITER

Désirez-vous autre chose, Monsieur? (Will there be anything else?)

STEVE

(as if he has it figured out)

Oh, thank you very much.

WAITER

(exasperated)

Oui.

(The WAITER exits, and ODILE enters and crosses to the cafe and sits at a table near STEVE, who looks up from the paper, but quickly returns, pretending not to notice ODILE. She sits alone for a moment, the WAITER returns and crosses to her table.)

WAITER

Bon jour. Vous désirez quelque chose? (Hello. May I help you?)

ODILE

Non. J'attends quelqu'un. (No. I am waiting for someone.)

WAITER

Bien.

(The WAITER begins to walk away.)

ODILE

Monsieur.

WAITER

Oui?

ODILE

J'ai changé d'avis. Un verre de vin rouge, s'il-vous-pliat.
(I have changed my mind. A glass of red wine.)

WAITER

D'accord. (Very well.)

(The WAITER exits. ODILE sits looking at STEVE who now has to try harder to ignore ODILE. ODILE opens her purse and takes out a pack of cigarettes.)

ODILE

Pardon, Monsieur.

(STEVE does not look up.)

ODILE

Pardon!

(STEVE finally looks up.)

STEVE

Huh?

ODILE

Je pourrais avoir votre cendrier? (Could you pass me your ashtray?)

(HE stares at her for a moment then goes for his phrase book.)

ODILE

Monsieur?

STEVE

(looking up)

What? (pause) Ah, no parlez-vous French.

ODILE

I should have known.

STEVE

(relieved)

You speak English.

ODILE

Oui. And you do not speak French.

STEVE

No, not really. Sorry.

ODILE

Pass me your ashtray, if you do not mind.

STEVE

No, not at all.

(STEVE crosses to ODILE and hands her the ashtray.)

ODILE

Merci.

STEVE

Sure.

(STEVE goes back to the table and begins to read. The WAITER returns with the glass of wine and puts it down on the table.)

WAITER

Vous allez manger quand votre copain arrive? (Will you want anything to eat when your friend arrives?)

ODILE

Oui, probablement. (Yes, probably.)

(The WAITER busies himself at another table and then exits. ODILE looks in her purse for a match. She doesn't have one.)

ODILE

Pardon.

(STEVE looks up again.)

STEVE

Yes?

ODILE

Do you have a match?

STEVE

No...

ODILE

Merde.

(SHE starts looking through
her purse again.)

STEVE

...but I do have a lighter. Will that do?

ODILE

Oui.

(ODILE and STEVE rise and
cross to each other. STEVE
lights the cigarette. They
stare at each other for a
moment.)

ODILE

Merci.

(STEVE goes back to his paper
once again. ODILE smokes her
cigarette and stares at
STEVE.)

ODILE

May I ask you something?

(STEVE looks up from the
paper.)

STEVE

Sure.

(ODILE nervously stares at STEVE.)

STEVE

Well, what?

ODILE

Would you mind if I joined you?

STEVE

(excitedly)

You mean, sit here, with me at my table?

ODILE

Oui. If you do not mind.

STEVE

No, not at all. That's fine with me. I was kind of thinking of asking you to join me anyway. We're both alone.

(ODILE crosses to STEVE'S table.)

Please have a seat.

(ODILE sits and the two stare at each other for a moment. ODILE finally breaks off the stare.)

ODILE

I am feeling sort of lonely.

STEVE

I'm sorry.

ODILE

There is nothing for you to be sorry about. It is not your fault.

STEVE

Yes, I suppose that's true. (pause) It's kind of exciting to meet someone who speaks English so well. Even though I've been here less than a day, I was beginning to think I'd never have a decent conversation with anyone.

ODILE

Then we will talk, if that will make you happy.

STEVE

Yes, yes it would. (Pause) I guess I should introduce myself, my name is...

ODILE

No names.

STEVE

Excuse me?

ODILE

I said, no names, please.

STEVE

Sure. Okay.

ODILE

I do not expect you to understand, but I feel more comfortable this way. I am sorry.

STEVE

Hey, it's all right. I'm just happy you wanted to join me. I was feeling kind of lonely, too.

ODILE

Paris is like that, you know. So much to do. So many people, pushing, running, going here, going there. And you can still feel very alone.

STEVE

No, that has nothing to do with it. I'm lonely because I was supposed to meet a friend here, in Paris, not the cafe, but she had to cancel out at the last minute. Flew all the way here from New York to meet her, and she doesn't show. When I check into the hotel there's a note: "Sorry, can't make it. I'll call you tonight." So now I'm stuck.

ODILE

I do not care about all of that. That is your personal business. I think you should keep it that way.

STEVE

I'm sorry if it bothered you. I was just trying to explain why I was lonely.

ODILE

You are lonely because your friend failed to come to Paris?

STEVE

Yes.

ODILE

I do not think so.

STEVE

You don't?

ODILE

No. Loneliness is not that easy to explain. I have been lonely at parties filled with my friends. I have been lonely lying in the arms of my lover. And there have been times when loneliness was the farthest thing from my mind, even though I sat alone on a barren mountain top. You are not lonely because your friend is not here with you in Paris. It is much more complex than that.

STEVE

Hey, there is nothing complex about this. It's simple. I'm lonely because I don't know a soul here in Paris.

ODILE

You Americans, always looking for the simple solution. I am fat because I eat too much. I am unhappy because my lover left me. If I were only thinner, or stronger, or richer, or more beautiful. On and on you Americans go. You are not lonely because of what is out here. You are lonely because of what is in there, in your heart.

STEVE

Look, I don't know your name, I don't know who you are, so I'm not real interested in your insights on loneliness. Okay?

ODILE

Whatever you say.

STEVE

Can we change the subject?

ODILE

Yes, maybe that would be better. (Pause) What would you like to talk about?

STEVE

How 'bout you tell me something about who you are?

ODILE

No, I do not think that is a good idea.

STEVE

You're making this very difficult, you know.

(The WAITER enter and crosses to a table and straightens the table cloth and rearranges the chairs.)

ODILE

Yes, I am sorry. (Pause) I am feeling hungry, maybe it would be good to order some food.

STEVE

Yeah, that's a very good idea. I'm starved.

ODILE

But I have no money.

STEVE

You have no money?

ODILE

No.

STEVE

None?

ODILE

No, I said.

STEVE

How were you going to pay for that wine?

ODILE

I do not know. I would have thought of something. There is always a way.

STEVE

I see. (Pause) How does this sound, you order and I'll pay. If I order, who knows what I'll wind up getting. Squid on rye, probably.

ODILE

I will pay you back.

STEVE

Forget it. It would be my pleasure to treat you to some food. Order whatever you think would be good, but no squid.

ODILE

But I feel...

STEVE

Order, please.

ODILE

Oui. (Pause) Monsieur!

(The WAITER crosses to the table.)

WAITER

Mademoiselle.

ODILE

Une bouteille de vin rouge, du fromage, des fruits et du pain, s'il-vous-plait. (A bottle of red wine, cheese, some fruit, and bread. Please.)

WAITER

Tres bien.

(The WAITER exits.)

STEVE

What are we having?

ODILE

Fruit, cheese, bread, and a good wine. Will that make you happy?

STEVE

Sure, sounds great. Back in New York I eat too many burgers, so that sounds really good.

ODILE

What is a burger?

STEVE

You know, a hamburger. McDonalds.

ODILE

I do not eat such things.

STEVE

I guess not. Doesn't seem like the type of cuisine you'd be interested in.

ODILE

Yes. Vile, disgusting American food.

STEVE

I hear McDonalds are going up all over the place.

ODILE

I have seen them here and it makes me sad.

STEVE

Well, I'm sorry. We all can't have the pleasure of sitting in small cafes everyday drinking wine, eating cheese. Sometimes you just have to eat and run.

ODILE

I do not eat and run. You cannot take pleasure in something that you do quickly. Life is much too short not to savor each moment. Eating and running is one of the reasons you Americans are so neurotic. Everything must be done in a hurry. There is always the next thing to move on to. I think you are the kind of man who has everything planned out in advance. Where are you going after you leave this cafe? The Louvre, the Eiffel Tower? You probably have it all written down in one of those little books with the calendars inside. What do you call them?

STEVE

Daytimers.

ODILE

Yes, whatever. Every moment planned out so you can never really enjoy what you are doing now. You are probably worried that you are missing something by sitting here with me and talking.

STEVE

No, I am not worried that I am missing something. I'm very happy to be here with you, talking with you. But, I must confess, I do have every moment planned out. Last night I sat in my hotel room and worked out a complete schedule. But it wasn't until you just brought it up, that I realized I had left it in my room this morning. I got up and left the hotel and started walking around, kind of aimlessly. It's not really like me to do that.

(The WAITER enters with a bottle of wine and a wine glass. He pours a glass of wine for STEVE and exits.)

ODILE

Then Paris is already having an effect on you. That might be good, it might be bad.

STEVE

It does feel different here. But, I don't want to miss anything. I want to see it all. This is my first visit here, and who knows when I'll come back.

ODILE

Yes, I could tell.

STEVE

Tell what?

ODILE

That this was your first visit.

STEVE

You could?

ODILE

It was very obvious. Before I even talked to you.

STEVE

Shit, I hate that. I like to feel that I somehow fit in.
(Pause) How could you tell?

ODILE

When you are in New York, can you not tell who the visitors are? When you are sitting in some small cafe, and a person walks in, can you not tell that the person is not a native, even without all of the trappings of a visitor: camera, map, you know?

STEVE

Well, I, ah, yes, of course. One can always tell who the visitors are, usually. But, there are those who seem to fit in wherever they go. You know what I mean?

ODILE

Oui.

STEVE

If they're in the mountains, it seems as if they were born there. If they're in some small village, they seem at home there too. I don't know why, but I always feel like a visitor, even at home. So, I guess, it's no wonder I look like a visitor here in Paris.

(They sit in silence for a moment and ODILE takes out a cigarette.)

ODILE

Would you care for a cigarette?

STEVE

No, no thank you. I don't smoke. I'm a runner, sort of. Smoking would destroy me.

ODILE

Why the lighter?

STEVE

Habit, I guess. Used to smoke. Long time ago.

(STEVE lights ODILE's
cigarette.)

ODILE

I do not think I would like to be an American.

STEVE

Why?

ODILE

You are always running, lifting, worrying. All to try and avoid the inevitable.

STEVE

Yes. I'm not sure it does any good, but we try. My grandmother was an alcoholic, ate fatty foods her whole life, survived cancer in her 60s, and still lived to be 94. We're probably going to die when we're going to die and whatever we do isn't going to change the outcome.

(The WAITER enters carrying a
platter with the food.)

WAITER

Monsieur, mademoiselle.

STEVE

Oh, finally. I never thought I'd see food again. Hey, that looks great.

(The WAITER puts the platter
down on the table.)

WAITER

Vous voulez autre chose? (Would you care for anything else?)

ODILE

Non, merci.

(The WAITER exits. STEVE digs
into the food.)

ODILE

Well? Is it good?

STEVE

Oh, yes, yes, this is very good. You have no idea how
hungry I was. It seemed that every restaurant I went into,
no one could speak English. I thought I was going to be the
first American tourist to die of starvation in Paris.

ODILE

Then it is good that I came along when I did. I saved your
life.

STEVE

I bought you food, you saved my life. A fair exchange,
don't you think?

ODILE

Oui.

STEVE

I have to admit, it feels very strange. Maybe it's my
American way, but I feel like if we're going to sit here and
eat and talk, we should at least know each other's names.

ODILE

I said before, no names. It is better that way.

STEVE

What's better?

ODILE

When names are exchanged, things can get complicated, assumptions can be made. If we don't exchange names, we know that we will sit here and talk for awhile and then never see each other again. It is better that way, at least for me.

(STEVE puts his food down and thinks for a moment. He gets up, reaches for his wallet, and pulls out some money.)

STEVE

If it will make you feel better, I can go to another cafe. There are plenty along this street.

(ODILE rises.)

ODILE

No, that would not be necessary. Please stay. Just no names, that is all I ask.

(STEVE thinks it over.)

STEVE

All right, if that's the way you want it.

ODILE

Merci.

(They both sit.)

STEVE

I don't want to impose upon you. If you feel more comfortable this way, it's all right with me, I really don't care.

ODILE

But you do care, I saw it in your eyes. When I stopped you from introducing yourself, a flash of disappointment crossed your face. I know what you were thinking.

STEVE

What?

ODILE

That we would sit here and talk for a while, get to know each other, and then you would ask me to spend time with you while you visit Paris. Is not that what you were thinking?

STEVE

Well, I suppose those things did cross my mind. You're very attractive, in an aloof sort of way, but those are the kinds of women I'm attracted to.

ODILE

You see how quickly things can get complicated. That's precisely why I do not want to know your name. Paris is a very quirky type of city. You can be walking down a boulevard, and before you know it, you are in love. That cannot happen between us. It is impossible.

STEVE

I think you're attractive, all right, but I'm not ready to fall in love with anyone at the moment.

ODILE

We are always ready to fall in love. That is the problem with men and women. It happens when we least expect it. We are both attracted to each other, so it could happen between us, just like that.

STEVE

You're attracted to me?

ODILE

Of course. Would I have invited myself to sit with you if I were not attracted to you? I think not.

STEVE

I don't get this. You're attracted to me. I'm attracted to you, but we can't even know each other's names. This makes no sense.

ODILE

I can not explain it. Sometimes you have to accept things the way they are.

STEVE

Then don't tell me your name. But tell me something about who you are. I'm not blind you know. I can see that you look very sad. Just tell me part of your story. I'll tell you about mine.

ODILE

You are falling in love with me.

STEVE

I am not.

ODILE

Yes, you are. I can see it in your eyes. The look of concern about my plight. The caring in your voice.

STEVE

So what the hell is wrong with caring about someone, even someone you don't know? You're sitting alone in this beautiful outdoor cafe, you look sad, you have no money, is it wrong for me to wonder about your life? It doesn't mean I'm in love with you.

ODILE

But that is next. It happens all of the time.

STEVE

Is that what you do? Come to little cafes, sit by yourself, meet men so that they can fall in love with you?

ODILE

No, I am not that kind of person. But when you live in Paris, you see it all of the time.

(The WAITER enters and crosses to the table. He pours more wine into each glass.)

WAITER

Il y aura-t-il autre chose? (Is there anything else I can get you?)

ODILE

(To waiter.)

Non.

(The waiter exits.)

STEVE

You think Paris is the only city in the world where people fall in love? I've fallen in love in many places, New York, Philadelphia, and even in Chicago, in the winter. So you see, there is nothing that unique about Paris when it comes to falling in love.

ODILE

You are so naive. Falling in love in Paris is like nothing you have ever experienced.

STEVE

Oh, is that right?

ODILE

Yes, yes it is. The difference between love in Paris and love anywhere else is like the difference between a full moon on a warm white sandy beach, and a small street light on a cold darkened promenade. If you have never been in love in Paris, then you know nothing of love.

(He laughs.)

ODILE

What is so funny?

STEVE

Oh, no, no, ah...that's one of the reason I came to Paris, to fall in love. My friend and I were going to see if some spark would ignite. I think she got cold feet, so she came up with some lame excuse about having to go to San Francisco on business.

ODILE

Maybe it is for the best. At least you are now free to find your love wherever it may be.

STEVE

Yes, I guess you're right.

ODILE

But it is sad.

STEVE

What?

ODILE

I feel something very strong between us. Something pulling. But it cannot be and that is sad.

(JEAN enters right and stares
at ODILE and STEVE.)

STEVE

I'm feeling that way too.

ODILE

You think I do not know that? The moment our eyes met I could sense a certain passion between us. There is a part of me inside that wants to explode and say everything. My name, who I am, what my life is about. And I want to know that about you, but...

JEAN

Odile!

(ODILE sits frozen in her chair as JEAN moves closer.)

STEVE

What's the matter.

JEAN

Odile!

(ODILE jumps to her feet.)

ODILE

Ne m'approche pas. (Stay away from me.)

(STEVE jumps up as JEAN approaches.)

STEVE

Who is this guy?

(ODILE ignores STEVE.)

JEAN

Je t'ai cherché partout. (I have been looking for you everywhere.)

ODILE

Je m'en fous. (I do not care.)

(JEAN moves closer to ODILE and grabs her by the arm.)

JEAN

Viens! (Come.)

STEVE

Leave her alone.

(ODILE pulls away and STEVE jumps in and pushes JEAN. JEAN grabs STEVE and pushes him down into the chair.)

ODILE

(To STEVE)

Please, this is not your problem.

(To JEAN)

Laisse-le tranquille. J'viens avec toi. (Leave him alone. I will come with you.)

STEVE

You don't need to go with him.

ODILE

I know. I am sorry.

(ODILE walks away from the table with JEAN following.)

JEAN

Espèce de salope. Je vais t'apprendre un peu. Attends d'être à la maison. (You bitch. I will teach you for this. Wait until we get home.)

STEVE

Odile!

(ODILE turns toward STEVE and moves toward him.)

STEVE

Steve. My name is Steve.

(ODILE and STEVE stare at each other for a moment. JEAN begins to move toward STEVE, but ODILE stops him.)

ODILE

Idiot! Tu es emmerdant. Laisse-le tranquille.

JEAN

Ta gueule. Je m'en fou.

(STEVE stares after ODILE as
she and JEAN exit.)

STEVE

Holy shit.

(STEVE slowly sits down. The
WAITER approaches, fills
STEVE's glass with wine.)

WAITER

She is very beautiful, but in much trouble, no?

(The WAITER sits.)

STEVE

Yes, it certainly seems that way. (Pause) Damn, I feel
like I should do something. Go after her.

WAITER

No, my friend, that would not be good. It would make things
much worse. Trust me. It is best to leave things as they
are.

STEVE

I suppose you're right. But I'm going to worry about
whether she's okay.

WAITER

Yes, yes you will.

STEVE

(pounding table)

Damn.

WAITER

She will be back.

STEVE

Yeah, right.

WAITER

She comes here often.

STEVE

Really?

WAITER

Oh, yes. She sits by herself and orders a glass of wine. Always leaves without paying. (Pause) I take the money from my pocket. I pay.

STEVE

(laughing)

There's always a way.

WAITER

Oui.

STEVE

Hey, I thought you didn't speak English?

WAITER

Usually I do not speak English. But I think the time is good for me to speak English now.

STEVE

Thanks.

(The two sit in silence for a moment. The WAITER picks up ODILE's glass of wine.)

WAITER

To love, my friend.

STEVE

Oui.

(The two men clink their glasses and drink. The song, *Je M'Ennuie* begins to play. The WAITER slowly rises and crosses to one of the other tables and begins to clean it with his cloth. STEVE picks up his New York Times, looks at it for a moment, and then stares out toward the audience. The lights slowly fade to BLACKOUT.)

The End.