

ERIK

A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

By

John Patrick Bray

Suggested by *The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston
Leroux

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

Copyright (c) 2015 By John Patrick Bray

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to licensing@nextstagepress.net

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

“Tonight, I gave you my soul, and I am dead.”

– Christine from *The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux.

“It is conventional to call monster any blending of dissonant elements.

I call monster every original inexhaustible beauty.”

- Alfred Jarry, author of *Ubu Roi*.

This script is dedicated to Neal Bell, who taught me to write bravely and unapologetically, and Michael M., who sold me a Lon Chaney *Phantom of the Opera* action figure in second grade for fifty cents (in 1984). The fifth graders were selling baked goods. He ended up with cookies and donuts, and I ended up with a lifelong obsession. To this day, the figure still glows in the dark.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

CHARACTERS

Barker

Madam Giry

Erik (Various Puppets)

Christine

Meg

Josef

Raoul

Detective

Author's Notes

The title character, *ERIK*, should be played by puppets. My approach to *ERIK* is one which embraces complete theatricality (movement, lyrical dialogue, and the aforementioned puppetry). Additionally, BARKER and MADAM GIRY should feel free to “work the crowd” prior to the start of the play. For the RSPC production (directed by Jerrod Bogard), the set (designed by Jak Prince) featured a small puppet show stage with curtains. The curtains were pulled back, revealing the Perfect Baby, Erik Puppet, the moment after Christine and Raoul consummated, etc. This is also where Erik Puppet sat while Christine unmasked him. The action then moved onto the main playing area where Barker and Madam Giry would interact with the characters, escort folks off stage when they died, etc. This worked very effectively.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

PRODUCTION HISTORY

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET received an Actors Equity Association-Approved Staged-Reading with EndTimes Bunker on November 18, 2012 at the 133rd St. Arts Center. The reading was directed by Jerrod Bogard, moderated by Matthew Kreiner, and featured the following cast:

Barker.....Sky Seals*
Madam Giry.....Judy Merrick
Christine.....Lea McKenna-Garcia
Raoul.....Alessandro Colla
Detective.....Andrew Harriss
Josef.....Leal Vona
Meg.....Sarah Ziegler*
Artistic Director, EndTimes Productions.....Russell Dobular

* Actors appeared courtesy of Actors' Equity Association.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET received a staged-reading with Rising Sun Performance Company at Hostelling International in NYC on November 17, 2013. The reading was directed by Jerrod Bogard and featured the following cast:

Barker.....Leal Vona
Madam Giry.....Samantha DeSimone
Christine...Samantha Coppola
Raoul.....Alessandro Colla
Detective...Brandon Harris
Josef.....Bryn Packard
Meg.....Sarah Ziegler*
Assistant Director.....Perna Bhatia

*Actors appeared courtesy of Actors' Equity Association.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET made its world premiere as part of FRIGID New York at The Kraine Theatre on February 19, 2015. It was produced by Rising Sun Performance Company and directed by Jerrod Bogard, and featured the following cast and creative team:

Barker.....Yair Ben-Dor
Madam Giry.....Destiny Marie Shegstad
Christine.....Montana Lampert Hoover
Raoul.....Bryn Packard
Detective.....Matt Pepitone
Josef.....Christopher Behan
Meg.....Samantha DeSimone
ERIK (puppet design and performance).....Kervin Peralta

Production Stage Manager.....David Pilchman
Light & Set Design, Technical Director.....Jak Prince
Shadow Puppetry.....Broderick Ballantyne
Costume Design.....Antonio Consuegra
Assistant Costume Design.....Ashleigh Herndon
Sound Design.....Ian Wehrle
Producer & Founding Artistic Director, Rising Sun Performance Company.....
Akia Squitieri

Special thanks to Erez Ziv, Emily Owens, Horse TRADE Theatre Group, Gregory Bray, Nadine May Lewis Bray, Danielle Bienvenue Bray (and Danny and Sadie!), Salli Squitieri Butterfield, Judd Lear Silverman, and Timothy Evers. Additional thanks to all who contributed to our online campaign, to all who were involved with the extension, and to our brave repeat audience members who made the extension possible.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

The HOUSE is open. A CARNIVAL BARKER, hereafter referred to as “Barker,” is discovered on stage (see NOTE in front matter). There is a sign that reads HUMAN ODDITIES. A cage is on stage. We cannot see the lower half, only the upper portion. It is not a large cage. There is a red drape running around the frame, as if miniature curtains to a miniature stage. Barker looks over the audience and sneers.

BARKER. I know what you’re here for. No, you’ve come to the right place. There are no mistakes on your program. You are here to see human oddities. It is our obsession with beauty. Our need for perfect shine of the skin; perfect shine of the hair; perfect laugh at the perfect moment that brings us to these, nature’s deformities. If we did not have an obsession with beauty, well, then...I’d be out of a job. The first is without a doubt one that will simply wet your pallet for what awaits you inside. Ladies and gentlemen! THE PERFECT BABY! (*PERFECT BABY PUPPET grabs the cage and lifts itself up quickly. It looks like a coconut, with sharp front teeth and a shiny blue button eye. It begins to sing. NOTE: its singing should be in a high, crystal clear soprano.*)

PERFECT BABY. (*Singing*) FOLLOW/ THE PATH YOU’RE GIVEN
FOLLOW/ THE LIFE YOU’RE GIVEN/FOLLOW/FOLLOW/LOVE (*It shoots back down.*)

BARKER. If you want the full song, of course, we have it inside as well. (*Beat.*) What’s the matter? Never seen a child in a cage before? Sure you have. You’ve had parents, haven’t you? You’ve been in cages. You might even be in one now. Someone ought to check the door. (*Beat.*) And now, ladies and gentlemen, the most grotesque of all creatures, the most hideous disposition, and if you have a heart condition please be warned to step back! I now give you the most monstrous of all creations: my wife. MADAM GIRY! (*MADAM GIRY enters carrying a bag of apples. She scowls at the crowd.*)

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

MADAM GIRY. You'll be sorry you came. You'll wish you hadn't. (*Sighs. Matter-of-factly.*) Go back. Go back. Bleh. Ooogala. Scary stuff. (*Beat.*) Boo. Well, you had your chance. (*Beat.*) I really wouldn't have brought children here. Didn't you read the sign? Well, we have your money now. It's up to you. (*Beat.*) Follow me and give the small ones the apples. Helps keep them alive. Here. (*She approaches Perfect Baby's cage.*) Want an apple? (*Perfect Baby reaches up and hands her a dead frog.*) What is -? OH! Dreadful creature. (*She kicks the cage.*) No apples for you! (*Perfect Baby leaps up and shakes the cage.*) Fine, fine. No good scaring away the customers. (*She goes to hand Perfect Baby the apple. Barker takes it, and bites into it. Perfect Baby looks really sad.*) Aw, poor monster. Someday, we'll get you outta here. Even if I gotta flush you down the sewer.

BARKER. Shut it, you. It ain't going nowhere. (*He throws the rest of the apple into PB'S cage. The PB gets excited, and retreats to the floor of its cage, just singing. Barker smiles at the crowd.*) Ugly little thing, ain't it?

MADAM GIRY. But what a voice! It makes me wonder if there is a God. Must be a devil. Look at it. (*Beat.*) Beautiful voice, distorted body. Perhaps he was conceived by both. (*Beat.*)

BARKER. Come on, folks. More ugliness to gratify your appetite awaits. (*Lights change. The humming continues.*) First creature: the wretched soul of a girl. (*PB's humming echoes for a minute, then disappears. CHRISTINE, a young woman with a deep, yet beautiful voice stands center stage in a trance.*)

ERIKS'/PB'S VOICE. (*Sings.*) FOLLOW/FOLLOW/MY VOICE (*For an instance we can see ERIK PUPPET – older, darker than PB - standing in the frame of a mirror, but he steps away into the dark.*)

CHRISTINE. (*Voice over.*) I know it is you. You draped me in your red scarf as a child as we huddled by a nimble fire. The smell of flesh; rotting animal flesh. The likes I never knew could exist. Hell had erupted into tiny cold crystals that lined our tiny room. The rattling in your chest sounded like woodpeckers. I knew you would leave me. I would have no beacon to guide me through the years. That is when you told me. (*Beat. She parts her lips and speaks out loud.*) One day, you'd return. (*Enter RAOUL, a lavishly dressed and handsome Count.*)

RAOUL. You are right. I have returned!

CHRISTINE. Oh, Raoul! (*She embraces him.*) Where have you been all these years?

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

RAOUL. Both these years!

CHRISTINE. I was but a girl!

RAOUL. And you taught me what it is to be a man.

CHRISTINE. And what is it? To be a man?

RAOUL. Well...to leave!

CHRISTINE. Leave?

RAOUL. Explore! To find himself, so he can bring...himself back to the one he loves. Oh, my little puppet.

CHRISTINE. Stop! (*He does.*) Too much talking. Could you *sing* it to me?

RAOUL. Sing?

CHRISTINE. Like the voice. The voice I just heard.

RAOUL. You're hearing voices?

CHRISTINE. Yes. Tell me it was yours! And I will be...yours!

RAOUL. Uh... (*He clears his throat. He tries to sing. The sound is like that of a goose being stretched, or a manatee having an orgasm.*)

CHRISTINE. Oh, no, that isn't! It's not...it isn't you.

RAOUL. Darling, what are you talking about?

CHRISTINE. My father said he'd send someone. He said I would know. He said...I...I need a moment.

RAOUL. Christine, be gentle with me. I am but a tender man who has traveled many miles to see you. True, some may chalk it up to coincidence that I was in my box seat here at the opera, listening to the beauty of...whatever the hell we were listening to-

CHRISTINE. You heard me sing?

RAOUL. -when suddenly I recognized my one, my only...my first, I mean! Technically not my first, but one who has stood out in my memory! And I thought "is it my Christine?" How did you come to be singing lead?

CHRISTINE. I have been training myself.

RAOUL. And Señora Piangi? Is she not Prima Donna? Why wasn't she singing lead?

CHRISTINE. She had a frog in her throat.

RAOUL. Perhaps some tea.

CHRISTINE. No. She woke up from a nap. And someone had put a frog in her...in her mouth. She swallowed it.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

RAOUL. Good lord!

CHRISTINE. She's alive, she couldn't go on. And like I said. I've been training. And the voice...the voice tells me...

RAOUL. The voice? You're hearing voices?

CHRISTINE. (*Beat.*) Do you remember my father?

RAOUL. The man with a tuning fork at my backside. Who knew a tuning fork could be used as a weapon?

CHRISTINE. (*Beat.*) When he lay on his deathbed, he told me that he would return. I told him that the dead do not return. I told him that the dead do not return. When they leave, they are but a husk. Not even a whisper of a soul, a splash of blood. Dried fruit. But he told me...he said that he would send...an angel. To sing to me. All of the songs he used to sing.

RAOUL. Rustic folk songs. Sentimental tales of ghosts and highwaymen. (*Beat. Christine has grown quiet.*) I apologize. It is just that he left...an impression. (*Reaches to his backside.*) But not as deep as the impression that you made on my heart. Please...let me be close to you. (*He holds her. Drops a hand on her breast. It is more clumsy than sexual.*)

CHRISTINE. Go. Please. I will join you in a moment.

RAOUL. Certainly. (*He removes his hand. He bows, and exits. He stops to say something, but decides against it. Exit Raoul. The humming begins again. Christine looks towards a mirror.*)

CHRISTINE. (*Sings.*) Follow...follow...follow...(*Lights change.*)

BARKER. The next horror: MORAL DECAY! (*Lights change. JOSEF and his wife, MEG, enter. Meg is beautiful and pale. Josef is older, and also pale.*)

JOSEF. Do you see this, my wretched wife?

MEG. Wretched, am I?

JOSEF. As long as you're saddled up with that fat opera star, you are wretched.

MEG. He appreciates my youth. He buys me things.

JOSEF. I see. But what is the price you pay? (*Beat.*) Is it fair that I am forced time and again to wake up with scars all over my manhood? The jumpin' consumption? Tell-tale signs of your infidelities to a piggy, pig, pig, piggy-

MEG. Piggy, he may be! But, Señor Piangi is more than a mere stagehand! He creates the art around here.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

JOSEF. Does he now? And me? A mere stagehand? My wife, for shame. Find me something more artistic than the hammer, and more beautiful than a good, hemp rope.

MEG. Piangi can teach me to sing.

JOSEF. I'm sure.

MEG. And he will never leave me.

JOSEF. Is that so?

MEG. Yes. Because he isn't mine. And since he isn't mine to possess, I am not his to leave. You one day, my old husband, will die. Perhaps of the very plague that Piangi has given us both.

JOSEF. Thanks again, I say.

MEG. And I am your wretched wife. If only because being so young a wife makes me wretched. *(Beat.)* Aw, when I see your prune-ish forehead get all squeezed up because of that big, bushy eyebrow of yours, my heart can't help but melt. Kiss me. *(He leans in.)* And watch the tongue, I've got something on it.

JOSEF. What?

MEG. I don't know. It just blistered. *(He pulls back from her. A moment. Horror and sadness.)* What is it you wanted me for? *(He produces a handkerchief. He opens it, conspiratorially. Inside, there is a dead frog.)*

JOSEF. Another dead frog. That makes three. One in Ms. Christine's dresser, one in the Senora's mouth, and now this. And let's not also forget the six rats in the storage room last week, all strung up like marionettes. What does this mean?

MEG. We are above a sewer. Beauty built upon filth. Is it truly a wonder that this pestilence should plague us so?

JOSEF. Plaguing is one thing, but to see the rats in strings like that. Do you think it was group suicide? Or...

MEG. Or?

JOSEF. It's him!

MEG. Who?

JOSEF. *(Teasing.)* The phantom – *(She quickly covers his mouth.)*

MEG. Don't say it!

JOSEF. Why not?

MEG. It scares me so.

JOSEF. How so? It ain't real.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

MEG. It is real. As real as the cuts on our loins. (She begins coughing.)

JOSEF. Meg? Are you all right?

MEG. (*Twilighting.*) Someday, I will be a real opera star.

JOSEF. Meg, your fever is acting up again. (*She dances and plays like she's an Opera Star.*) Bloody wonderful. Can I expect such wonderful brain fevers, too? (*She takes his handkerchief, dropping the frog, to wipe her brow. She unfolds it. It is actually lady's underwear.*)

MEG. A frog in Ms. Christine's dresser, you say. You've been stealing her underthings again. (*Josef grabs at it.*) The Phantom punishes the wicked, Josef.

JOSEF. Is he God, now?

MEG. Whatever you cannot see but still believe in...having blind faith in anything makes it God. (*Raoul enters.*)

RAOUL. I demand an explanation! (*Meg and Josef both conceal the undergarment.*)

JOSEF. I was gonna give 'em back!

RAOUL. Back? I mean Christine. She...she disappeared! She was in her room. She asked me to wait outside a moment. I did. I returned, she had vanished. I know there is something afoot, and I demand an answer! Satisfy me! (*Josef and Meg look at each other. A beat.*)

MEG. He's real!

JOSEF. Stringing up dead rats in the closet is only the beginning!

RAOUL. Rats?

JOSEF. Rats and frogs, Mr. Nouveau Riche. Rats and frogs. (*Smiling, leans in on Raoul.*) How did you make your money?

RAOUL. I beg your pardon, sir?

JOSEF. Nothing sir, nothing. It's just...please kiss my wife! (*Lights change. Barker steps forward. Wet sounds in the air. Dripping. Barker opens a curtain revealing a sewer.*)

BARKER. And what other terrible things await you down here? Dear audience, let us feast our eyes on something truly freakish. The beautiful young girl, in a place that is meant only as a way of dealing with the rest of the human waste. Turn your attention to the GIRL IN THE SEWER. (*Lights up on Christine. She is laying on the stage, half-awake, half-dazed. She sits up with a start.*)

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

CHRISTINE. Where am I? I must have fallen... (*A sound...the scurry of a rat, perhaps.*) Hello? (*Beat.*) I have traveled through the mirror. The sound of your voice, and my reflection. Such temptations to step through. (*There is the sound of a high, sweet humming. Like that of a little girl.*) I know it is you. Who else would sing to me in such a comforting voice? Who else would leave little dead roses outside my door? I have always hated full-bloomed roses; seeing their petals swell up, as if filled with blood. Give them to me withered, give them to me with crisp petals that have brushed a lovers lips, and still carry the memory. (*She approaches a curtain, and pulls it back. Reveal: lights up on Erik Puppet. He is masked and playing an organ. Christine sees him and reacts.*) I know...that music. It is a song that someone sang to me long ago in my dreams. (*Erik Puppet turns lightly toward Christine. She regards him. A beat.*) Maybe not...quite like this...but I must know. It is you, isn't it? (*Erik Puppet plays the organ once more. Christine approaches him.*) Father...I have loved you as a girl could love a father. To sit in your lap. Feel the warmth of your belly. The heave of your chest. The smell of a stale pipe. The promise of tomorrow in your chuckle. Looking into your eyes, knowing that you will become a memory. Wrapped in a gentle blanket of mist coming from your pipe. (*She taps Erik's shoulder. He turns.*) Let me see you. (*She removes his mask. Erik is ugly. A more grotesque Perfect Baby – burnt husk, twinkling gem eyes. Perhaps he is just a skeleton, nothing more. It chatters its teeth at her. She doesn't scream or faint.*) All that remains is a husk. (*Beat.*) Is it you, father? (*Erik Puppet chatters its teeth.*) If it is you, you are still...if it isn't you, then you are an agent of his. He told me I would know. (*Beat.*) You won't leave me, will you? (*Erik Puppet rises from the organ. She faints. Erik Puppet looms over her. He gathers a blanket and puts it over her. Barker pulls a curtain over the scene.*)

BARKER. Rats and frogs, ladies and gentlemen. Rats and frogs. (*Lights change. He exits. A silhouette of a body drops: an overweight man is hanging by the neck. His shadow against the rear wall. Lights change. Meg and Josef enter.*)

JOSEF. Meg? Why are you crying? Why are the police here?

MEG. It is our Piangi. He has been murdered.

JOSEF. Murdered?

MEG. Do you see? Do you see how all of your talk of evil invites it?

JOSEF. Right. He's spreading syphilis and I'm the one inviting evil. (*She turns Josef to the audience. He looks above them and sees "the body."*)

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

OFF-STAGE VOICE (BARKER). Cut him down, boys. (*“The body” drops. The silhouette is gone.*)

JOSEF. Cut him down? That’s...that’s my rope! The devil used my rope!

MEG. He was strangled. Hanging from the ceiling. Twisting. Twisting so slowly. Like a pendant. A beautiful...gift. (*DETECTIVE approaches them. He wears a cape. He is very melodramatic.*)

DETECTIVE. Excuse me.

JOSEF. Don’t look at me like that, sir.

DETECTIVE. Sir?

JOSEF. You think I did it – my rope. My wife. The man who cuckolded me, sir. Gave me...the disease. I can see it in your eye, you’ve come to arrest me.

DETECTIVE. My eye. It does not blink. It did not mean to offend you. I have no doubt of your innocence.

JOSEF. Oh. That’s good. Really good. Can’t blink, eh?

DETECTIVE. You saw this man that was hanged? Twisting, as you say?

MEG. Yes. Yes, he was hung.

JOSEF. Hanged. Just like them rats.

DETECTIVE. Rats? (*Beat.*) You found...hanging rats?

MEG. Yes. Who are you?

DETECTIVE. I am a man who crawls through the very underbelly of this city. I am... (*Detective takes a long drag of a cigarette.*)

JOSEF. Come off it, he’s a detective Meg. Look at him. The way he holds his cigarette, the smoke of mystery around his eye. The way he can’t blink. The way he knows that I’m innocent of murdering your suitor with my rope. Detective, through-and-through.

MEG. You are with the men cutting...cutting him...down..?

DETECTIVE. No, I am not the local police. I am...operating out of my own motives.

JOSEF. Oh. They know I’m innocent too, right? You all share a brain I mean?

MEG. Very glamorous work, I’m sure.

JOSEF. All right, don’t get any ideas with your ‘glamorous’ talk. Your lover’s dead, which means you’ll have to come home with me. It’s hell. But, I love you.

MEG. I wish I was dead. I love you, too.

DETECTIVE. Was it...an opera star he killed?

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

JOSEF. He who? Do you mean...the Phantom?

MEG. Don't say his name!

DETECTIVE. The phantom!

MEG. Don't say his name again! (*Detective mouths "Phantom?" Josef mouths "Phantom."*)

DETECTIVE. So...he's becoming infamous?

JOSEF. I'll say he is. The opera house will pay a pretty penny to whoever can stop him.

DETECTIVE. Are you certain?

JOSEF. Of course! Another scandal like this, and they'll be out of business.

DETECTIVE. And where can one find the managers of such an establishment?

JOSEF. They are useless. Broken men. This will cripple their minds. Freeze their blood.

DETECTIVE. Surely, a detective can be of help...where the police fail. But the managers are useless, you say. Whom shall I help?

MEG. Help me live again! (*She grabs onto Detective.*)

JOSEF. See?! Your glamorous talk!

DETECTIVE. I've taken too much of your time. (*He exits.*)

JOSEF. How did he get back here, anyway? Who's running this place? (*Beat.*)
Broken men.

MEG. I am going to tell Señora Piangi.

JOSEF. You are?

MEG. She has to know that her husband and I...

JOSEF. He's dead! And we'd be as good as hanged if you say anything. Motive, opportunity. Rope. MY rope. Good lord! Using a man's rope. That's the end of it. This is what civilization has brought us. My rope, my industry, soiled. Fitting, in a way, I suppose. I guess there's a certain irony to it. Maybe not irony. Poetic justice. His disease kills me. My rope kills him. Huh. It's all about position. It's his position inside you that kills me, and my position, a man dealing with rope, that kills him. (*Beat.*) It sounded ironical when I thought about it, but out loud...(*Beat.*) Huh. Maybe I am guilty.

MEG. I am dead to the world already. My heart has been strangled.

JOSEF. Well I ain't! And you're not confessing to anything. End of story.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

MEG. There she is. Talking to the other police. (*Beat.*) I feel so faint. If you love me, bring me a glass of water.

JOSEF. Are you kidding? (*Beat.*) All right, all right. But, don't go anywhere. (*Josef exits. Meg looks over her shoulder to make sure he can no longer see her, and then turns out to the audience. She steps forward, as if approaching someone. As she talks she follows that someone with her eyes.*)

MEG. (*To audience.*) Señora Piangi. I...wanted to tell you. You...you have covered your hands. Yes. I understand. The gloves are fashionable, and you are a woman of fashion. But, you wear them for more than fashion, don't you? And the mark on your neck? I have a mole. Right here. Just like you. Right here. (*Meg indicates a mole on her neck.*) Do you like it? Beautiful, isn't it? Some call it a beauty mark. A piece of flesh. Darkened, but not dead. Like a little piece of beautiful dried fruit. It's these little blemishes that make us beautiful, isn't it? The dried nature of moles and marks that make our more colorful pinkish areas pop in front of the eyes. I know that mine does. Mine also...well, it covers something. Something we both have in common. (*She removes the mole. There is a reddish blister beneath.*) I know there are blisters like this on your hands. I know by the mark on your neck. You see? We have this in common. It's as if we both have the same fading beauty. The same need to wear these tiny masks. I just wanted to tell you. You grieve. I grieve, too. (*She looks at the mole.*) We have that in common. (*Madam Giry crosses and plunks an apple in her hand.*)

MADAM GIRY. Keep moving. For crying out loud. You're scarred, I'm scarred. Some wear fake moles to cover them. Most wear suits and ties and go to work in the morning. Let's go. (*Lights shift to Christine, who is on stage alone.*)

CHRISTINE. There have been men, father. Men who have tried to make me believe that...that they were you. That they could replace you. Men such as Piangi, who enters my room and watches. He watches. No, studies me. As if every moment I'm alive were an illustration from a stolen picture book. He thinks I don't know. He is a living nightmare. Men such as Josef Bouquet. (*Erik Puppet enters, listening to Christine.*) A man of the hammer. He believes women are meant to be over-powered. Plucked in their youth when he is already so close to the end. Will it really make him younger to hold my personals? And of course Raoul. Who years ago...[took me]. Why has he returned now? When there's...this man, father. This man. What is his name? (*Erik Puppet swings up next to Christine. It chatters*

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

twice.) Erik? Did...did you say Erik? I know he sent you. (*She looks to the heavens.*) Thank you, father. (*Back to Erik.*) Why do I feel so weak? Is it the sewer? (*She touches Erik Puppet's face, and takes its hands. She notices something.*) There is blood on your hands...what has happened? Tell me...what has happened? (*Lights up on Josef, who enters, as if in a separate space. He is carrying a glass of water. He looks around.*)

JOSEF. Great. By 'don't go anywhere,' I suppose I meant 'disappear.' Or go running off to that prima donna to make us prime suspects. Merde. Merde. Merde. Merdy merde merde. Meg? Señora Piangi? Any wretched soul around? (*Beat.*) Suppose I should be careful what I ask in this place. Any soul around. What's this? (*He moves aside a piece of burlap.*)

CHRISTINE. Did you hurt yourself, my poor sweet Erik?

JOSEF. Someone's been playing with the anchors here. Sand every...(*Josef sees something. He picks it up. It is a dead frog.*) Dead frog? Is this one for me? Is someone leaving me gifts, now? (*He has a shocked expression. He turns around. There is a knife deep in his back.*)

CHRISTINE. Did you...did you kill...?

JOSEF. Well that...that's right sneaky, it is.

CHRISTINE. You...you're protecting me?

JOSEF. Crap, crap, crapity, crap, crap.

CHRISTINE. I understand. (*Beat.*) But the police are here. They're all looking for...(*Beat.*) I will protect *you* now.

JOSEF. Come out and face me like a...

CHRISTINE. I will be your guardian.

JOSEF. ...death.

CHRISTINE. I will be your angel. (*Josef falls over dead. Christine drops her dress, exposing her breasts. Blackout. Lights up quickly on Barker and Madam Giry.*)

BARKER. It's sad to see a man with a knife in his back because of a woman.

MADAM GIRY. It's sad to see a woman with a knife in her hands because of a man.

BARKER. Do you really think Josef Bouquet deserved that?

MADAM GIRY. It doesn't matter what I think. That's the whole point, isn't it?

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

BARKER. Hold onto your apples. Ladies and gentleman: A MAN WHO THINKS OF GOD. (*Lights change. Enter Raoul.*)

RAOUL. There is a plague upon us. My Christine is missing. Men are turning up dead. The creatures from the sewers are crawling about the earth, and dying. Wasn't there a passage in the bible? About frogs raining down from the heavens? Since when could it rain from inside. Perhaps if the world is raining frogs, from earth to sky, rather than sky to earth, it is a sign that something else is at work here. And yet, the reputation of this opera house is clean. So clean. It is because it is so majestic. Marble. Ivory. Looking at it makes me want to...chisel something. (*He examines his own soft hands.*) And yet...the easiest target for the devil in hell is a priest. Because if the priest falls, the devil wins. In this majestic house, land of strumpets on stage, true, but in the balconies - Counts, Dukes; patrons. All saints in their white ties and black capes. Powdered perfection. A devil must be exorcised, sent back into the bowels of the earth with the rats, the frogs...we must find the evil here. Before it destroys the reputation of us all. (*Lights change. Erik puppet is sitting in a chair, with its head tilted back. Its robe is open, revealing a large, muscular cock. Christine is reaching around for her clothes, with a sheet over her. She is shivering. She turns to Erik, who is presumably asleep. She continues looking for her clothes. Erik lifts his head and watches as she crawls around, gathering her things together. He sets his head back. Christine pauses and looks over at him. She turns back to her things. Erik chatters his teeth. Christine gasps and stands up.*)

CHRISTINE. I must go. They will miss me. (*Erik chatters his teeth.*) What you have done for me. Thank you. I must go. (*Christine moves to exit.*) How...how do I leave? (*Erik points upwards.*) How do I get there? (*Sounds of an opera overture begin.*)

ERIK. (*Gurgling voice/Sings.*) FOLLOW. (*Lights change to Barker and Madam Giry.*)

BARKER. Oh, perhaps that was too much.

MADAM GIRY. I didn't need to see its penis.

BARKER. Fear not for Christine, friends. This ghoul was not her first.

MADAM GIRY. She's had other ghouls.

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

BARKER. Follow us here, behind this curtain, an image from the past. A young woman, practically still a girl... (*He looks behind the curtain.*) Wait for it...wait for it...all right. Now we can show you –

MADAM GIRY. In the name of decency, you may see that the girl looks a little older than we've let on.

BARKER. Of course! Well, for goodness sakes, we're not child pornographers!

MADAM GIRY. No. They're in the pulpits. They're all in the streets, arresting the homeless. Running for public office. Wearing black capes and white ties while others, God's creatures, sneak into public facilities hoping for enough water to wash the dirt out of their hair, only to be beaten and left bleeding in the alleys.

BARKER. For that reason, we tell you the girl behind this curtain is quite young, though you will be able to tell she is not.

MADAM GIRY. Let us use our imaginations, and take you, to five minutes after the act of Man and Woman. (*Madam Giry pulls open a curtain. Christine is in bed with Raoul. She is lying down. Raoul is dressed, lacing up his boots. Christine should look a little broken.*)

CHRISTINE. That was...painful...

RAOUL. Uh-huh.

CHRISTINE. Was it painful for you?

RAOUL. Oh, um...no.

CHRISTINE. Do you like my feet?

RAOUL. Sure. They're...pretty.

CHRISTINE. Pretty?

RAOUL. Yes, pretty.

CHRISTINE. Pretty feet. (*Beat.*) Will you kiss them? (*Awkward pause.*)

RAOUL. Yes, yes. (*He gives a quick peck on her left foot. He turns away. She clears her throat and offers her right foot. He gives a quick peck. He turns away and continues to dress.*)

CHRISTINE. I love you. (*Beat.*) Will you return to me soon? (*Beat.*) My father is sick, you know. (*Beat.*) If he dies, I will have no one. At night, I pray to Jesus. I ask him to send me someone with a sweet voice, and warm, soft hands. (*Beat. Raoul looks at his own hands. Continues getting dressed.*) To hold me. Keep me close. Never leave me the way my father will one day. And do you know what Jesus says to me? He says...fear not, young woman. I will send the angel of music, on a fine

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

horse, with well-laced boots, and soft hands.” And when I ask, “Oh, who could this be? This angel?” Jesus opens his mouth, and a nest of frogs leap toward me. And I awaken here. (*Beat.*) Do you know who he was sending me? Raoul? (*She smiles at Raoul. He looks at her. It’s a pitiful look. He is almost moved. She reaches under the sheets and touches herself. She looks at her hands.*) Is there always so much blood?

RAOUL. No...

CHRISTINE. It’s supposed to be so beautiful.

RAOUL. No...the first time is usually...

CHRISTINE. Usually? So...so I’m not your first.

RAOUL. Well, no.

CHRISTINE. Oh.

RAOUL. (*Recovering.*) But you’re the first that I meant to do it with! Others were...uh...mistakes. Mistakes from a life, oh, Christine...what a terrible life. (*Beat. Finally breaking.*) Oh, my little puppet. Don’t cry. Puppets don’t cry. (*Drying her tears.*) You cannot understand what it is like. To have so much money. To have a title. To be in the public gaze. It means being denied...the important things. And never understanding where the real value of existence lays.

CHRISTINE. Are you going to say, it lays right here? (*She parts her legs. They smile. He lays on top of her. A knock at the door.*)

OFF-STAGE VOICE (BARKER). Christine? Are you all right? (*They continue to make love as the knocking continues. The shadow of a GIANT TUNING FORK. Lights change. Christine exits. Raoul remains. He is now in the present.*)

RAOUL. Is there always so much blood? (*Barker enters.*)

BARKER. As we have witnessed this little scene, someone else has been remembering it. And they aren't too happy. Our next stop: the self-pitying male. (*Lights change as Barker exits.*)

RAOUL. Stupid. So...so stupid. If Christine returned to me now... perhaps I could make amends for the way I left. Perhaps I could show her that there is more to me than just...than just leaving. Perhaps...perhaps *I* should be leaving her dead things to play with. (*Christine enters.*)

CHRISTINE. Raoul!

RAOUL. Christine!

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

CHRISTINE. Oh, I thought I'd never see you again! (*He throws himself on the ground and starts kissing her left foot.*) What on earth?!

RAOUL. Don't you remember? QUICKLY! THE OTHER ONE! (*She offers it to him. He kisses it.*)

CHRISTINE. (*Laughing.*) I'm going to fall!

RAOUL. Christine, marry me! (*In one motion he props himself up on one-knee and pulls her onto his leg.*)

CHRISTINE. What? No!

RAOUL. Please, it is me, your...your *Angel of Music*.

CHRISTINE. No...you can't be!

RAOUL. Yes...do you not remember your...*our* first time? Our first love?

CHRISTINE. But, Raoul. You have had, I'm sure, many lovers since that day. That day. I was but a girl. You made me feel so young. Too young.

RAOUL. My little puppet.

CHRISTINE. I think I hated that you called me that.

RAOUL. You didn't. It cheered you.

CHRISTINE. Did it? Did I need to be cheered?

RAOUL. Yes, because I was leaving.

CHRISTINE. Yes. And you will leave again.

RAOUL. Say the word, and I will order my finest horses. We shall be married in any Cathedral you wish. Notre Dame? The Vatican? Or somewhere else.

Somewhere where religion will never find us. I will shower you with gold and kisses, each one worth more than ten million francs. Just say the word, and the riches of my heart shall be yours.

CHRISTINE. Raoul. I would say yes. However...

RAOUL. However?

CHRISTINE. You cannot sing.

RAOUL. I can learn! I *will* learn! (*She touches his cheek and starts to walk away.*)

I can play the organ! (*She stops.*) I can play it...really well. I've learned...

uh...love songs. In fact...in fact, I will rent out this very Opera house. For the night after next! The engagement party of the Viscount de Changy and the lovely Christine Daae. I will play for you my music. I will have the entire orchestra there, dressed for a Masquerade Party. And there will be singing. There will be dancing. Music in everyone's ears and beaming off of everyone's plastic face. It will

ERIK: A PLAY ABOUT A PUPPET

penetrate our very hearts, and souls. Our emotions will run like slow, warm water, through our bodies and into the earth. Your father will be seated in the highest seat-

CHRISTINE. Box five. When he tuned the organ here. Years ago. I remember watching him from box five.

RAOUL. Box five, then. And from Box Five his spirit will be a part of the most musical, most joyous celebration of love Paris has ever seen!

CHRISTINE. Oh, Raoul! You ARE my angel of music! (*They kiss. Erik Puppet appears in the mirror, witnessing this. He shudders. Raoul regains his composure.*) But we must do this immediately.

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW THIS PLAY ENDS, ORDER A HARD COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.NET