

AERO-PLANE! (The Invention of Flight) A Crisis of
Extraordinary Gravity, OR: How to Die in Style!

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Cast of Characters

<u>PAUL</u> :	A young anarchist and aeronaut.
<u>CELESTE</u> :	Also a young anarchist and aeronaut.
<u>RAUL</u> :	Engineering enthusiast and, later, detective.
<u>SHIRLEY</u> :	Multimedia sensation and wealthy heiress.
<u>THE PREFECT OF POLICE</u> :	The veteran chief.
<u>POLICE OFFICER</u> :	A lackey for the Prefect.
<u>ROBESPIERRE</u> :	A horse.
<u>GOD</u> :	Ruler of the cosmos, creator of the universe, etc.

Scene

Paris.

Time

1894.

[PLEASEINSERT\PRERENDERUNICODE{ÂÑ}INTOPREAMBLE]

ACT I

Scene 1: Exposition, or: An
Introductory Instance which shall Familiarize the Audience
with the Major Players and their Designs and Intentions!

Lights.

*PAUL on a chair, facing the window. Traffic and
daytime city life below. He is wearing goggles and
a helmet--and a suit, apparently intended to
facilitate flight by the wearer.*

He is focused. He is practiced. He is unstoppable.

He prepares himself.

PAUL

Wings. Oui.

He checks his helmet.

PAUL

Helmet. Oui!

He crosses himself and signals to the heavens.

PAUL

*(subtitled by another actor, with cards
or projections)*

Mon dieu, le ciel, et mon destin:

[My God, the sky, and my fate:]

He drops his safety goggles into place.

PAUL

Oui.

Celeste! Ready!

He locks his arms out into position.

CELESTE appears. She has a cast on one arm.

CELESTE

No interruptions!

PAUL

None!

CELESTE

No distractions!

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

No!

CELESTE

No changing your mind at the last second!

PAUL

I know! Rules are rules: I lose the coin toss, I wear the wings.

CELESTE

Shall I count down, or surprise you?

PAUL

Count down.

CELESTE

(with the audience's help, and maybe in French?)

Eleven! Ten! Nine! Eight! Seven! Six! Five! Four! Three! Two! One!

She runs across the stage, howling, arms extended, ready to push PAUL out of the window.

PAUL

aaaaaaaaaWAIT I'M NOT READY!

CELESTE runs into him, but grabs him by the belt and keeps him from falling. At great effort, she pulls him back into the room.

CELESTE

You said: no changing your mind.

PAUL

I know what I said. I changed my mind.

CELESTE

Be brave. Be strong. It's only hard the first time.

PAUL

It's a long way down to the street.

CELESTE

It's only ten point seven meters. Not high enough to kill you.

PAUL

It's high enough to break a leg. What if I break my leg?

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

If you break your leg I promise you won't have to test the next one.

PAUL

Let's draft a contract.

CELESTE

Paul, remember: fear is the source of all capitalist thought-control. Real anarchists don't believe in failure or what-if. They commit to success.

PAUL

You're right.

CELESTE

We do this to free France and all humanity.

PAUL

That's RIGHT!

CELESTE

Let's get you out that window!

An anarchist outside the apartment drives a letter into their door with a bayonet and runs away.

PAUL

What was that?

CELESTE

(calling)

Hello?

Cops????

They scramble and hide the "evidence." An engineer outside the apartment drives a letter into their door with a bayonet (a pencil? maybe something more engineer-y) and runs away.

PAUL

I hear them running back down the stairs.

Knocks outside.

CELESTE

(calling again)

Who is it?!

RAUL

Raul, from Cafe Helios.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

(to Paul)

Who?

PAUL

Raul, from Cafe Helios.

CELESTE

Who?

PAUL

I gave him a copy of our pamphlet. Come in, Raul!

RAUL enters with a copy of their pamphlet.

RAUL

Ah! You must be Celeste. My name is Raul. I've been reading the pamphlet you wrote with Paul [pronounced to rhyme with Raul]: THE ANARCHIST FUTURE SOCIAL CLUB PRESENTS: The Early Bird Starts the Revolution. What on earth are you wearing?

CELESTE

A wing-suit--

PAUL

A costume. For a party.

RAUL

What sort of party would require you to don something so utterly defamatory?

PAUL

An anarchist thing.

RAUL

Indeed. Well, I'm sorry, but I will not be joining you at this party. As I refuse to associate with traitors, I came to return your pamphlet, nothing more.

CELESTE

Anarchy is the best hope for a free, good, just, noble, responsible, educated society.

RAUL

Then consider me happy to be unfree, ungood, unjust, ignoble, irresponsible, and uneducated. Anarchy is a cancer upon the French political thought-landscape: thoughtscape, if you will.

PAUL

Then we can just talk about the engineering, forget the politics.

(CONTINUED)

RAUL

No! Again, I refuse associate myself with treasonous charlatans. Take your pamphlet--even holding it makes me want to brush my teeth. Good day, traitors.

He turns to go.

PAUL

Wait!

CELESTE

Paul!

PAUL

Raul!

RAUL

It's pronounced Raul.

CELESTE

Paul.

PAUL

I'm sorry.

CELESTE

We may not be the "best" at "science" but we're going to make history in the skies for the future of France. That's no costume. It's a wing-suit.

RAUL

A "wing-suit."

Are you attempting to appeal to my humanity by suggesting that if I don't help you, you are actually going to die horribly in the attempt?

PAUL

This height isn't enough to kill a person.

RAUL

What is it, about ten point seven meters? And you intend, what, to leap out and hold your arms like this, for the breeze to carry you to heaven?

PAUL

(holding out his arms)

Not like that, like this.

RAUL

Good God. Just to spare my conscience for one day I'll explain one thing. Use balloons.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RAUL (cont'd)

There are two types of flight. Lighter-than-air, like balloons--real flight--and "heavier-than-air" which is what birds do. What da Vinci proposed with his robocopter. And so on.

If you want to carry people or cargo, it must be done with balloons. Ballooning is slow and it is not sexy. But it's the only way up. Heavier-than-air science is for God-made animals and suicidal madmen.

CELESTE and PAUL are having an idea.

PAUL

Lighter than air.

CELESTE

And heavier than air.

PAUL

Has anyone ever tried.... both?

CELESTE

To use structures inspired by birds and robocopters... powered by lighter-than-air science?

PAUL

To use forward power as upward power and vice-versa!

RAUL

If I understand you properly, I would estimate such a device would kill forty-nine of every fifty pilots.

CELESTE

Or--put another way--two out of every hundred would survive. So there's a chance.

PAUL

A chance for the great anarchist revolution.

CELESTE

For the grand revolutionary spectacle!

PAUL

You've been a true friend to the revolution today, Raul.

CELESTE

Our thanks.

PAUL

When you see us in the skies over Paris, be proud!

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

The Grand Revolutionary Spectacle will all be thanks to you!

PAUL

Now please, come sit. Have some fortified wine.

CELESTE

Let's get out some fresh paper and brainstorm.

They start to draw a design.

PAUL

We were thinking that our airframe would be wearable--like this--

CELESTE

And we'd use a multi-stage take-off process--like this--what would be the best material here? Pine? Or bamboo?

PAUL

And here we'd use fabric like what I'm wearing--something inspired by bat wings, perhaps?

CELESTE

And this is where we'd put... balloons.

The drawing is complete. It looks majestic.

RAUL

Hang on--you don't mean to go through with this?

PAUL

Of course we do.

RAUL

This machine, plus that cockamimmy jiggery-pokery of a revolutionary plot? You're going to fly this into the--

CELESTE

Sh! We can't talk about it now. Because of the police surveillance network. That's why its written in such subtle terms.

PAUL

Almost too subtle.

CELESTE

But yes--we're definitely going to do it. Now, back to--

(CONTINUED)

RAUL

Good God, look at the time! Is it 1894 already? I must be going. BEFORE I FORGET: This letter was attached to your door with this bayonet. And this letter was attached to your door with this other bayonet.

I would say I wish you good luck, but this would be a lie.

He exits.

CELESTE looks at the letters.

PAUL

From the Anarchist Future Social Club.

CELESTE

These can go in the box.

She gives the bayonets to PAUL, who puts them in a box of many bayonets. They read the letter.

Scene 2: Epistolary, A Technique
from the Very Dawn of Written Drama (Who Else Took Theatre
History in College?)

THE LETTER

(as performed by another actor)

Dear Celeste and Paul,

As you know, this organization depends on its volunteers. It does us no good to turn away sound minds and helping hands. HOWEVER! We conclude that you two boners have nothing to contribute and we demand that you stay away from all future meetings.

You did not have permission to use our printing press and you did not have our permission to put our organization's name on that incoherent war-crime of pedantic demagoguery you call a manifesto. Needless to say, your grant application is denied.

Yours in the revolution, but get new friends,

THE ANARCHIST FUTURE SOCIAL CLUB

P.S. "Ad astra per aspera", huh? More like "per aspera ad terram."

*Subtitles again for the Latin: ["To the stars,
through the struggles," huh? More like "through
the struggles to the ground."]*

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

(picking up the ending)

...ad terram.

CELESTE

This is horrible.

PAUL

There's more. P.P.S.: You may keep the bayonet.

Hey! That's good news!

CELESTE

I can't believe we're banned. This is terrible. This is so terrible.

PAUL

We ought to consider it a blessing-in-disguise.

CELESTE

But Anarchist Future Social Club was the last one!
Every other anarchist organization in Paris has already
banned us. There's not a single one left. We needed to
get that grant money for our flying machine.

PAUL

That's okay, here's hope in the second letter.

CELESTE

Oh, God.

THE LETTER

Dear Celeste and Paul,

Thank you for your interest in the Societie
Aeronautique. Unfortunately, having looked over your
designs for "flying-machines" we must conclude that you
are not qualified for our research grant award.
However, we encourage you to take one of our
many introductory classes.

CELESTE

Introductory classes!

PAUL

There's more.

THE LETTER

Further, your insistence that flying-machines be used
for revolutionary purposes is dangerous. We prefer to
keep that kind of thing out of our introductory
classes. Yours, the Societie Aeronautique.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

So no money there either.

PAUL

P.S. Please use the enclosed self-addressed envelope to return our bayonet.

Well! I think we'll do no such thing as that.

CELESTE

That's it. We're banned from every anarchist organization and engineering society in Paris.

PAUL

They didn't "ban" us, they just--

CELESTE

There's no money, Paul! It's one thing to go through trash to find food. How are we going to dig through trash for new tools, lumber, fasteners?

I don't want to die on the ground and broke.

PAUL

Let's look at our options.

CELESTE

1. Win the lottery.

PAUL

2. Bank heist.

CELESTE

3. Art burglary.

PAUL

Are you kidding? The shit that passes for art nowadays?

CELESTE

4. As soon as I get motivated enough to move, I'm going back to bed.

PAUL

Since we don't own mattresses, you're already in bed. Check!

She begins to moan out of ennui and helplessness.

PAUL

5. What if we got jobs?

CELESTE moans more loudly and sadly.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

I understand, you're having a personal moment. I hope it's providing you with relief. I want you to know that I'm here for you, however we decide to raise the money. Let's just keep in mind that we can't sit here on our asses moaning and drinking fortified wine, expecting our problems to solve themselves.

Scene 3: Money is Good! Or: If You're Rich, Your Problems Solve Themselves, Which Is Not The Most Compelling Form of Drama (But The Wealthy are Disproportionately Represented in Media Because They Exert Hegemonic Cultural Influence)

SHIRLEY enters waving her arms and moaning, and the family resemblance to CELESTE is immediately obvious.

PAUL

Excuse me--

SHIRLEY

Don't touch me, hobo, don't you know who I am?

PAUL

No.

SHIRLEY

Shirley Pesanteur.

PAUL

No way.

SHIRLEY

I'm here to see Cousin Celeste.

PAUL

Cousin?

CELESTE

Cousin Shirley!

SHIRLEY

Cousin Celeste!

CELESTE

Come in! Sit down! Want some fortified wine? Paul, get a jar for Cousin Shirley.

SHIRLEY

No thank you, I'm on a milk cleanse.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

Oh, we'll get you some milk. Do we have any milk?

PAUL

Just condensed.

SHIRLEY

No thank you, I only drink one percent.

PAUL

That makes sense.

SHIRLEY

The reason for my visit, Celeste, is Grand-père. Today is a black mark.

CELESTE

O, tell me about it.

SHIRLEY

He shot himself, just like twentieth-century Marxist philosopher and filmmaker Guy Debord: a bullet to the heart to end the suffering brought on by his virtuosic alcoholism.

CELESTE

Mon dieu!

SHIRLEY

The family is in shock. They walk in circles throwing up their hands and wailing for hours. When they get tired they rest just long enough to start all over again, throwing up their hands and wailing all day and night.

CELESTE

He shot himself?

SHIRLEY

Yes.

CELESTE

He's...dead?

SHIRLEY

Oui.

CELESTE

Shirley. You can't be serious.

SHIRLEY

I am serious.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

This must be so hard for you. You were always his favorite.

SHIRLEY

He loved you so much, too. Grand-père Marcel always thought your inventions were terribly clever.

PAUL

Marcel Pesanteur?!

CELESTE

Sh!

SHIRLEY

Oh, he loved you. He just became so frightened when you fell in with those awful anarchists.

She looks directly at PAUL. She can't help it.

CELESTE

The anarchists want the best future for all of France.

SHIRLEY

Look--it's not the time for politics. Our grand-père is dead.

PAUL

(very softly)

Grand-père?!

CELESTE

O, I know. I'm sorry. I always do this, I always make everything about me. God, I hate myself!

She throws up her arms and wails.

SHIRLEY

He left you an endowment.

CELESTE

(abruptly quitting the wailing)

What?

SHIRLEY

An inheritance to support your engineering career. A substantial sum.

CELESTE

What a beautiful man. What a generous soul!

SHIRLEY

He gave only one condition.

CELESTE

Anything.

SHIRLEY

(imitating the dying man)

She must focus on her science... and keep away from those damned... anarchists!

SHIRLEY "dies".

CELESTE

Then I renounce anarchism this instant.

PAUL

Hi, well, excuse me--

CELESTE

In the most severe terms, I swear never to take part in anarchist activity again!

SHIRLEY

Really?

CELESTE

Oui. To honor our grand-père's memory, I pledge my life to the nobler causes of engineering.

SHIRLEY

O, thank goodness! I was so afraid you'd commit to all that dangerous nonsense. Grand-père Marcel would be so pleased with you right now if he weren't dead.

CELESTE

But it's okay. We're pleased with me.

SHIRLEY

We're having a wake at the house.

CELESTE

Which house?

SHIRLEY

The big one.

CELESTE

On Avenue Deleuze?

SHIRLEY

No, the bigger one, on Avenue Guatarri.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

I'll come over right away. Wait for me outside?

SHIRLEY

Thank you.

Exit SHIRLEY wailing.

PAUL

I have some questions.

CELESTE

Not now, I'm grieving.

PAUL

Did you mean all that about giving up anarchy?

CELESTE

No.

PAUL

Just to get your hands on Grand-père's money, you lied to her?

CELESTE

Now that's not fair, Paul. We lied to her.

PAUL

Oh, great, that's all, then. Wait, one more thing: you're a Pesanteur?

CELESTE

Kind of. I have to go to a wake, so meet me at the bank in an hour.

Wearing black, she scurries away.

PAUL

Which bank? Oh, the big one, or the other big one? The Banque Pesanteur? The one your family owns?

Scene 4: Agent Raul is Tasked with
Foiling the Grand Revolutionary Spectacle (They're Really
Letting Anyone on the Police Force These Days)

RAUL and the PREFECT OF POLICE.

The PREFECT OF POLICE, who has an impressive mustache, is drinking (coffee? wine?). This scene is in the style of a network police procedural.

(CONTINUED)

PREFECT OF POLICE

So. Monsieur Raul. Tell me what I can do for you.

RAUL

I'm here to report a violent anarchist plot in the making.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Fill out this form.

RAUL

Okay.

The PREFECT OF POLICE gives RAUL a form. RAUL writes on it and signs it. He presents it to the PREFECT. The PREFECT OF POLICE gets out a huge, overstuffed folder.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Alright then.

The PREFECT puts the form into the very back of the folder and puts the folder away.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Is there anything else?

RAUL

Excuse me--I wonder if you're not taking my report quite seriously.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Not at all!

RAUL

Not at all as in--not at all seriously?

PREFECT OF POLICE

No, no--not at all, as in, no, we would never.

RAUL

Never what?

PREFECT OF POLICE

No no, never not.

RAUL

Never not what?

PREFECT OF POLICE

Never not not take it not at all seriously. Look: This is our file for open investigations into anarchist plots and radical activity. Yours is the newest. We

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PREFECT OF POLICE (cont'd)
shall get to it in time. Given France's love of
political violence, our team is stretched rather thin.

Explosion. Gunshots. Alarms. Running feet.

PREFECT OF POLICE
(calling out, totally unfazed)
What is it?

OFFICER
Marxist radicals have attacked the stock-exchange on
Avenue-Baudrillard!

*The PREFECT OF POLICE, with ultimate calm, flips
through the overstuffed file folder and finds the
form he's looking for.*

*He stamps it and puts it in another folder, a much
slimmer one.*

PREFECT OF POLICE
(gesturing to the two files)
You see? Ongoing violent plots: open investigations.
Completed violent plots: closed investigations.

RAUL
I think this plot is a tremendously serious one. These
aren't just mall-rat high schoolers writing Michel
Foucault quotes on their composition books.

*Gunshot. Glass shattering. Screams of terror,
shouts of official authority, a baby cries.*

PREFECT OF POLICE
(Calling)
Yes?

OFFICER
A member of the Hope Eternal Revolutionary Council has
been assassinated.

PREFECT OF POLICE
(flipping through files)
By who?

OFFICER
A member of a rival faction, the No Hope Eternal
Counterrevolutionary Council.

PREFECT OF POLICE
Got it. Merci.

(CONTINUED)

The PREFECT OF POLICE finds the form he needs, stamps it, and puts it in the "Completed" file.

PREFECT OF POLICE

My apologies, monsieur. Go on.

RAUL

They're going to build a flying-machine.

The PREFECT spit-takes.

RAUL

It's true!

PREFECT OF POLICE

Do you think I have nothing more important to do than chase this nonsense lead down the rabbit-hole and back up the asshole of Icarus? Get out!

RAUL

They're going to build a flying machine--

PREFECT OF POLICE

Impossible!

RAUL

--and crash it into the Eiffel Tower!

Pause.

The PREFECT OF POLICE does a very serious spit-take--like his mouth is full of coffee, but instead of spitting it out he puts it very carefully back into the cup.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Well. That's a very different story, Monsieur Raul.

RAUL

I'm glad I'm finally getting through to you.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Indeed. It takes a brave and noble citizen to come forward in these circumstances. In these pre-postmodern times, so many of us are content to say, "O, that's someone else's problem. Someone else will take care of it." But, with France's love of political violence, someone else is sometimes nobody else.

RAUL

Indeed.

(CONTINUED)

PREFECT OF POLICE

There simply aren't enough officers in counter-terrorism operations. Why do you think the world is such a piece of shit?

RAUL

That's not all your fault, sir.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Monsieur Raul: it is my honor to deputize you into our newest unit, the Task Force du Cabaret Voltaire.

RAUL

Why--do you mean it?!

PREFECT OF POLICE

I never say anything I don't mean. In this field, it's a liability. Take this badge and this camera. Careful--that's top-of-the-line surveillance technology.

The PREFECT gives RAUL a "camera" and a badge.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Now. Get out there and start compiling information. Where do they go? Who do they know? When are they making their voyage? Report back when you have some answers. Get out there and make France proud, Detective Raul.

The PREFECT salutes RAUL, hitting him gently in the face as he does.

Scene 5: Montage: A Silent Telling of the Events Leading Up to the First Test Flight of the Grand Revolutionary machine, Done in the Style of Early Film, to Jaunty Music, Perhaps Ragtime

PAUL plays a shopkeeper.

CELESTE enters in mourning clothes dragging a big bag of money. Like, drag-on-the-floor-because-it's-so-heavy kind of big.

Ragtime? Something like ragtime. It should feel like the 1890's more than it "is" the 1890's.

She starts giving handfuls of money to PAUL.

PAUL gives her tools and lumber and canvas and books and bottles of fortified wine.

(CONTINUED)

She spends a good deal of money and amasses an impressive pile of hardware and material.

CELESTE and PAUL assemble a "flying-machine" and it looks like a goddamn death-trap.

The bag of money is empty. PAUL doesn't notice; CELESTE quickly hides it. They look at the flying-machine, ready there on the ground, looking dubious.

Last thing: PAUL (as shopkeeper) gives her a bunch of balloons. When he hands them to CELESTE, she lifts off the ground. He pulls her back down. She lifts up. He pulls her down. Etc. Maybe he takes the balloons back so she can walk on the ground again.

Lights, jump-cut to:

Scene 6: Upon These Fields Shall
the Flying-Machine Rend Itself From Gravity For the First
Time, Setting Revolutionary Course and Promising a Bright
Impossible Future (Flight #1)

PAUL and CELESTE.

CELESTE is wearing a great bulky mass with an overcoat.

They are away from the center of the city, in the idyllic meadows.

PAUL

I think this is far enough.

They pull the coat off CELESTE. She's strapped in to the flying-machine. It looks quixotic, totally unreasonable, and liable to fall apart.

CELESTE

I need about a hundred meters. A hundred and fifty? No, a hundred.

PAUL

I'll set up right over there. Handoff from the right side?

CELESTE

My right.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Maybe left is more appropriate? Would you say left-wing or right-wing?

CELESTE

Right-wing.

PAUL

Okay, I guess. I brought this for the moment.

He has a bottle of champagne.

PAUL

I know we haven't discussed it, but she ought to have a name. Something that speaks to the mission.

CELESTE

Marat.

PAUL

A nice name.

CELESTE

Next Stop Hospital.

PAUL

Something with gravitas.

CELESTE

Since you've already decided, just tell me.

PAUL

How about: Melancholy Spectacular.

CELESTE

Fine. Do the bottle part, let's get this over with.

PAUL starts to swing the bottle.

CELESTE

But don't break that. We're going to drink it later.

PAUL delicately taps the forward end of the flying-machine with the champagne bottle. An important-looking component falls off the back.

PAUL

There are no second chances up there. Make us proud.

He replaces the piece. He salutes CELESTE, hitting her gently in the face as he does, and takes the balloons to his position on the other side.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

Ready!

PAUL

Ready!

CELESTE runs toward PAUL, who is holding out the balloons.

When she arrives, she reaches out and seizes the balloons. He lunges out of the path of the machine to safety.

The machine does not leave the ground. Everything falls apart and goes to hell. It is disastrous. The machine shudders and groans to a halt. She is still. PAUL runs over to her.

PAUL

Celeste, no, please, I can't do this without you! No, God, no no, Celeste--

CELESTE

Back the fuck up, I can't breathe.

PAUL

Are you hurt?

CELESTE

Why is gravity so... insistent?

PAUL

We ought to take another look at the safety measures.

CELESTE

Really? Give me more of your wisdom, Professor Smart Guy.

PAUL

And we need to generate twice the thrust or you're going to fall on your face every time. We need some kind of engine. Something to generate a lot of forward momentum.

CELESTE

Shut up, Paul, just shut up. Champagne.

PAUL

I don't think so.

CELESTE

Give it here.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

No. I'm saving it for the time it works and we lift off.

CELESTE

You sentimental ninny!

PAUL

I'm going to put it on the highest shelf and it'll wait there while we work. Think. Thrust. Forward energy.

CELESTE

What if we put the whole thing on magnets?

PAUL

We should write to the Americans.

CELESTE

What if we used a hundred magnets?

PAUL

Did you hit your head?

CELESTE

I may have a teensy little bit of concussion.

PAUL

We'll get some bandages and fortified wine on the way home. Come on.

They put the coat over CELESTE and exit.

RAUL leaps out of his hiding spot with his camera and runs in the opposite direction.

Scene 7: Shirley and Robespierre (A
Story About a Horse: What is the Purpose of Gift-Giving if
Not To Support the Social Fabric?)

*SHIRLEY and ROBESPIERRE (currently a
hand-puppet?).*

SHIRLEY

Once upon a time, there was a normal girl named Shirley. Normal Shirley had a normal family with two normal mansions in Paris and a summer house in Monaco, just like any other normal family.

One day Shirley said, "I want a horse for my birthday!" and her Grand-pere Marcel said, "Why wait? We'll buy you a horse today. On your birthday you can have something much more expensive!"

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SHIRLEY (cont'd)

Shirley's new horse Robespierre became her best friend. He carried Shirley to class at her normal school, the Curtsy Academy for Reputable Heiresses. Then they went to all the normal after-school activities: etiquette lessons, calligraphy club, and his favorite: polo.

ROBESPIERRE

Neigh.

SHIRLEY

But! Shirley also had a very selfish cousin named Celeste. Celeste was a very silly girl: she hated having money, and she really hated the Curtsy Academy for Reputable Heiresses! She liked reading books about the proletarian revolution and why contemporary society is so unfair.

But when Grand-père Marcel died, Celeste sure changed her tune!

SHIRLEY has a hand-puppet of CELESTE.

CELESTE

Hey Shirley! Can I borrow Robespierre?

SHIRLEY

Absolutely not! Robespierre is my best friend.

CELESTE

But I need him to help with my engineering projects!

SHIRLEY

Grand-père Marcel left you all that money. Buy your own horse.

CELESTE

I already spent it all on anarchist propaganda and fortified wine.

SHIRLEY

You should learn to be more responsible with your money. We'll have a vote on it. The motion: Robespierre should leave his best friend Shirley and go with Celeste.

CELESTE

Aye.

SHIRLEY

Nay.

(CONTINUED)

ROBESPIERRE
Neigh.

CELESTE
I can tell you why you should give me your horse.

ROBESPIERRE
Neigh!

SHIRLEY
Why?

CELESTE
Because you're nice, and you want me to be happy, even though I'm a narcissistic, manipulative, hypocritical brat.

SHIRLEY
All true. You're not making a case for yourself.

CELESTE
Pleaaaaaaaaase?????? I'll take really, really, really, really, really good care of him. I'll be just as good a caretaker as you are--wash him and brush him and everything.

SHIRLEY
Are you kidding? I don't do any of that stuff myself.

CELESTE
And! I promise it's not for anything anarchy-related. But if you don't let me borrow him, I might call up some of my anarchist friends to go out and throw bricks at bicycle cops. O! Temptation! NGGGGGGGG

SHIRLEY
Fine! Bring him back in a week!

CELESTE
Probably two weeks! Thanksbyeeeeeee!

CELESTE rides ROBESPIERRE away.

Scene 8: When Rich People Become
Poor, That's a Tragedy; When Poor People Stay Poor, It's
Like, Whatever

CELESTE and PAUL.

PAUL
I've been corresponding with an inventor in the (air-quotes) "United States of America" who says he can ship us an engine. Lightweight. Powerful. Exactly what
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PAUL (cont'd)
we're looking for.
Here's his letter.

(*Maybe a bayonet gag if we haven't worn that out.*)
That's the estimated cost at the bottom.

CELESTE
Don't even worry about it. I've already got the
solution.

PAUL
This meeting was for us to discuss and agree upon a new
plan, not for you to announce it's done behind my back.

CELESTE
I got a low-maintenance, high-personality propulsion
solution and I got it for free.

PAUL
Wow, really? That's fantastic.

CELESTE
It's exactly what we needed. You're going to love him.
And besides, we're out of money.

PAUL
We're out of money?

ROBESPIERRE enters.

CELESTE
Awww!

PAUL
That's a horse! Are you a horse thief now?!

CELESTE
Robespierre used to be Shirley's horse. She gave him to
me.

PAUL
She gave him to you?!

CELESTE
Don't worry about her. She has like, five other horses.
She saw how torn-up I was over Grand-père Marcel's
death, so she thought I could use the companionship.

ROBESPIERRE
Neigh.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Mon dieu.

CELESTE

Do you like him?

PAUL

He's fine, but explain to me how this is a propulsion solution.

CELESTE

It's very simple.

Maybe visual aids for this part.

CELESTE

PAUL: On the far side of the meadow, holding as many balloons as possible.

CELESTE: Strapped in to the Melancholy Spectacular II.

And ROBESPIERRE: Carrying Celeste.

We begin our approach. Robespierre at a gallop. Paul ready with the balloons. Celeste, helmet on, goggles down, looking gallant and dashing!

You hand off the balloons. With the additional velocity, the machine generates three times as much lift. We take to the sky! I cut Robespierre free, he falls to the ground unharmed. And we're airborne!

PAUL

That... is... amazing!!

CELESTE

And then, you know, we fly as according to plan.

PAUL

Yeah.

CELESTE

According to plan.

PAUL

Right.

CELESTE

The plan we can't say out loud because of the police surveillance network.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Okay.

CELESTE

You definitely understand what I'm talking about.

PAUL

Yup!

CELESTE

Okay.

ROBESPIERRE

Neigh.

CELESTE

Can you brush him and set up a spot for him to sleep?
Get acquainted. I'm going out to dumpster some garbage
bread.

She goes.

PAUL

(brushing ROBESPIERRE, making a space
for him in the home)

Hi.

I'm Paul. Nice to meet you.

You're probably not a talking horse, right? Ha! The
Pesanteurs are rich, but they're not THAT rich. Nope,
just a regular horse. No talking horses in this
play.....

I like horses. I used to work at the track, shoveling
shit and picking up trash for six francs a week. It got
easier when I started picking pockets during the races.
All kinds come through there. Bored wealthy, desperate
poor, anyone in between.

Can I tell you a secret? I never stole from the people
in the private boxes with the spectacular hats, even
though I always wanted to. I had to steal from the
other poor losers who couldn't really afford to be
gambling. You steal from someone in a private box, with
a spectacular hat, they raise hell, call the police,
you go to jail. You steal from some other jackass who
makes six francs a week, he's already used to getting
fisted in the dickhole by life. He won't bother the
cops because he figures he deserves every misfortune he
gets, and that's called society. That's how it goes.
You're always allowed to steal from someone who has
less than you. In fact, it's not even stealing.

(CONTINUED)

I'm glad you're here. Feels good to take something from the Pesanteurs. But Celeste even steals like a rich person, you know?

ROBESPIERRE
Neigh.

PAUL
That's right.

CELESTE is back with baguettes.

PAUL
That was quick.

CELESTE
You don't mind eating this part, do you? This end was in a beer puddle with half a mouse.

PAUL
You sure you don't want it?

CELESTE
Yeah.

PAUL
See, Robespierre? Told you.

CELESTE
Told you what?

PAUL
You steal garbage like a rich person. Ever since Shirley came by it's starting to make sense: you think it's cool and tuff to be a poor radical but you can't handle the real challenges.

CELESTE
We've been living on stolen scraps for three years!

PAUL
And you still can't eat the dirty end of the garbage bread. Well! Maybe if you had your private chef prepare it, that would be a different story.

CELESTE
It's not my fault we had a private chef!

PAUL
What did you pay him?

CELESTE

Six francs a week!

PAUL

And you expect people to live on that?! Why do you think the world is such a piece of shit?

CELESTE

(eating bread)

I knew he couldn't do it. One night when I was fifteen I went into the kitchen after dinner to see if I could steal a bottle of wine to drink with my friends. Gustavo--our chef--was taking bread crusts and bits of fat from our dirty plates and hiding them in a big hollowed-out book like a smuggler.

I knew exactly what he was doing, and he knew he was caught. He said, 'I'll get you a bottle of your grand-père's good port if you keep this between us.'

And that became the arrangement. I came in every Thursday night to collect so he could feed his three brats and sick wife with our scraps.

When Grand-père Marcel finally caught him, he called me down into the kitchen and said, "Gustavo tells me you were helping him steal from us." Gustavo was standing there with his hat crumpled in his hands like a dead thing, begging me with his eyes, and I said, "I have no idea what he's talking about."

That was how Grand-père Marcel tested me, and I passed, and I hate that I passed. Whenever the seasons change that scene still keeps me up for a night or two.

PAUL

The only way to redeem yourself is to eat the dirty end of the garbage bread. Trade me.

CELESTE

(jamming the rest of the bread into her mouth to prevent this unsavory deal)

Sorry, I've already eaten the rest. Nothing to trade.

PAUL

Then just take mine.

CELESTE

Really?

PAUL

Oui. Friendship isn't a market economy, just take it.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

Give me a jar of wine to chase it.

PAUL

Hell no.

She takes the bread. She isn't sure.

She takes one bite, and it's super gross and horrible and difficult.

CELESTE

Okay I did it!

PAUL

Let me see!

She opens her mouth to show him there's no more.

PAUL

Now the rest!

CELESTE

Seriously?

PAUL

Do it for Gustavo!!

She chokes down the rest of the dirty end of the garbage bread. It's pretty rough.

ROBESPIERRE

Neigh.

PAUL

That's right, Robespierre. She's tough.

Scene 9: Get a Warrant, And I Don't
Mean The Glam Metal Band (Or: You Think It's Easy Making Up
Scene Titles?)

*The PREFECT OF POLICE is grooming his mustache.
RAUL enters.*

PREFECT OF POLICE

About time! What've you got for me, Detective?

RAUL

I have the photos.

He shows the photographs to the PREFECT OF POLICE.

PREFECT OF POLICE
Jesus.

RAUL
Balloons, sir.

PREFECT OF POLICE
I see that. Balloons, huh?

RAUL
That's right, sir, balloons.

PREFECT OF POLICE
Oui. Balloons. Hmm.

RAUL
Indeed, sir. Balloons.

PREFECT OF POLICE
Balloons. Yes. Wait here.

The PREFECT OF POLICE exits. He comes back with a harpoon gun/spear/handful of darts. Some kind of hilarious pointy weapon.

PREFECT OF POLICE
Take this.

RAUL
I don't know when they'll be testing again.

PREFECT OF POLICE
Then you go back to that field and you stake out. We can't afford to miss this opportunity. A human body can survive a fall of ten point seven meters. When their craft gets to ten point eight meters, you know what to do.

RAUL
Yes sir.

PREFECT OF POLICE
You definitely understand what I'm talking about.

RAUL
Oui.

PREFECT OF POLICE
And you keep this operation between us.

RAUL
Understood.

(CONTINUED)

PREFECT OF POLICE

Godspeed you, Detective.

The PREFECT OF POLICE salutes RAUL, hitting him gently in the face. RAUL departs.

Scene 10: Gravity is, Like, a Metaphor for Economic Oppression! Are We All "On Board" With That Association? (Flight 2)

Back at the testing grounds. Overcoat. Champagne bottle.

PAUL

I dub this craft: the Melancholy Spectacular II.

He raises his arm to swing the bottle but a part falls off immediately. He puts the part back.

CELESTE

Give me two hundred meters.

PAUL salutes (hitting her, etc.) and goes to his position.

CELESTE

Ready?

PAUL

Ready!

CELESTE

On!

ROBESPIERRE gallops. CELESTE reaches PAUL, seizes the balloons, and lifts off. She cuts ROBESPIERRE free. He "tumbles to the ground" (PAUL catches the hobby-horse) uninjured.

The flying-machine doesn't quite catch the air.

PAUL

Pull up!

CELESTE

I'm obviously pulling up! GNGYRHREYHEREEAAAAAAAAA

She struggles with the controls, pulling harder until in one burst of muscular effort something falls into place and the wings fill with wind. It is magical.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

(softly and with reverence)

Mon dieu!

Hands on the controls!

CELESTE isn't listening. She's one with the motherfucking wind. Her eyes are closed and her arms are outstretched. Everything is right.

PAUL

Celeste!

Celeste. Mon dieu.

The machine soars higher than they anticipated. It is wonderful--until the machine bucks. The spell is broken. Magic is made so by the danger it holds at bay.

CELESTE

She's not responding! The starboard control wires are loose!

PAUL

Let go the balloons--come around and prepare for emergency landing!

CELESTE

No, I'm going to tie it back in place, I've got it--

PAUL

It's not worth your life, Celeste!

She reaches for the wire she needs. She can almost get it back in place. Almost. It's a struggle.

PAUL

Celeste!

CELESTE

Almost--

RAUL tiptoes out of his position like Belushi in "Animal House". He is armed. He takes aim--PAUL sees him. CELESTE is still struggling with the controls. The flying-machine is veering and tilting, which makes aiming difficult.

PAUL

Hey! Hey, fucker!

PAUL mounts ROBESPIERRE and rides to RAUL, then leaps off and tackles him.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

Got it!

She gets the piece in place and rights the flying machine.

Letting go the balloons, she returns for her landing, just a little too fast, and tumbles to a stop.

CELESTE

Did you see that?! Champagne! Where's the champagne?!
You see that, Paul? We can escape this round little
hell after all.

Hey!

She sees RAUL and PAUL struggle.

CELESTE

Hey, fucker!

She runs over to them and helps PAUL disarm RAUL.

PAUL

You a cop? Foreign intelligence? Who sent you?

Raul? What the hell?

CELESTE

I knew you were scum!

She takes his weapon.

RAUL

I hereby order you to unhand me and return that
official property!

PAUL

Not until we get some answers.

CELESTE

Let him go.

*PAUL lets him go. RAUL gets up and CELESTE pushes
him to the ground.*

*RAUL starts to get up. CELESTE pushes him to the
ground.*

*RAUL starts to get up--CELESTE gets ready to push
him--they dodge back and forth for a second. It's
a bit.*

(CONTINUED)

RAUL gets up. CELESTE pushes him to the ground.

RAUL

(seated)

Stop that this instant!

CELESTE

Who sent you?

RAUL

Nobody.

He gets up again. CELESTE pushes RAUL into PAUL, who grabs RAUL's coat and fishes in the inside pocket. He finds a badge. RAUL lunges for PAUL, who tosses the badge over his head to CELESTE.

CELESTE

Paris Prefecture of Police! Shiny. Looks new! Been a cop long, Raul?

RAUL

By the order of the Paris Prefecture of Police I am confiscating your "flying" machine.

CELESTE

Why, he didn't think we could pull it off, now he can't wait to get his hands on it.

PAUL

I'm sorry, old friend. You can't have it.

RAUL

I am not asking!

PAUL

Well, you can't have it! We'll take you for a ride if you want--

RAUL

Absolutely not. I don't know what gravitational negligence or optical illusion furnished that so-called "flight" but that thing is dangerous to yourselves, and me, and French society. I know your plan. I read your pamphlet with extreme prejudice and I know what the Grand Revolutionary Spectacle is. Again: I am confiscating your flying machine, and you are both under arrest for conspiracy, subversive activity, and assaulting an officer of the law.

CELESTE pushes RAUL to the ground.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

Come on, arrest us.

PAUL

Can you do that? Are you a cop??????

RAUL

Of course I am!

PAUL

Where's your badge?

RAUL stops and looks at CELESTE. She's not holding it. She shrugs so innocently.

RAUL

Return my badge this instant!

CELESTE

I don't have it. But we can help you look for it.

RAUL

You do have it. It's in your pockets or the strap of your brassiere--

RAUL gets a little handsy looking for his badge in CELESTE's clothes.

CELESTE

Excuse me, sir!

PAUL

How dare you, you oaf! The lady said she doesn't have it.

CELESTE

And yet out of kindness we will help you search.

CELESTE and PAUL go into the audience to "look" for the badge, riffing appropriately. They look in bags, pat down the board ops, and so on. To an audience accustomed to postmodern security procedure, this should feel familiar, but also disorienting and invasive.

PAUL

I guess it's nowhere to be found, Raul.

CELESTE

I guess you're not a cop after all. You're just our buddy Raul who thought we couldn't build a flying machine. It sucks to be wrong about so many things in one day, right, Raul?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

"Raul"? Is that how you say it? Am I saying it right?

RAUL starts to make a move for his weapon. PAUL and CELESTE step into his path, menacing him like bouncers. He breaks. He blubbers. He turns and runs in the opposite direction.

Scene 11: Friendship Isn't a Fixed State, It's a Continuous Process Which Will Include Some Failures and Conflicts!

Night. CELESTE at the window, drawing a course on a map and pondering the cosmos with a cigarette and a drink.

PAUL is examining and maintaining the flying-machine. He pauses. They ponder the cosmos.

CELESTE

When I was a girl I colored pictures of dragons flying. The ground was green and brown, the sky was blue, and the dragons moved in the uncolored space in between.

Now I wonder what that place was, between the ground and the sky. Why couldn't the dragons attain the heavens?

PAUL

You've been to that between-place now. We'll attain the heavens another day. Dragons are just fearless people.

CELESTE

I don't know if I am. Nobody in the underground talks about being afraid. They swear they're always ready to die nobly the next morning. But maybe I'm not, maybe I am afraid to die.

PAUL

Then you're only being honest with yourself.

CELESTE

Right.

PAUL

Tragic engineering accidents make the news. So what? It makes aeronautics sound so impossibly dangerous. But it's not. I think you're going to make it.

CELESTE

Did you read the chapter I wrote about the Grand Revolutionary Spectacle? In our pamphlet?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Yes.

CELESTE

And you know what happens?

PAUL

You fly the machine into Paris.

CELESTE

And?

PAUL

Straight into the center of the city, low enough for everyone to see.

CELESTE

And then?

PAUL

It's like a revolutionary thing, the people see the machine flying and realize that they can be free if they're brave enough.

PAUL's tie is in his drink.

CELESTE

Okay.

PAUL

Is that wrong?

CELESTE

No. That's what it is.

PAUL

Up there in the heavens there are no aristocrats and no bankers and no politicians and no prisons. Just one more frontier for the people to make their own. Are you crying?

CELESTE

No. It's just, you know, reflections of the starlight.

PAUL

Don't be afraid. None of us dies before our time.

He takes his tie out of his drink.

CELESTE

But what if I already know my time is coming?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Ha! Nobody can know that. If you could know when you were going to die, it would totally scramble how you lived your life. Your actions wouldn't make any sense at all.

ROBESPIERRE nuzzles CELESTE like a needy housecat.

ROBESPIERRE

Neigh.

CELESTE

Most of us won't see the revolution through to the end.

PAUL

That's true.

CELESTE

But if that mattered to us, then we chose the wrong role in life.

PAUL

I think for you, the sky comes all the way down to your feet. For most people it stays out of reach forever. They live in that in-between place with no color. Not you, though. Not me, either, on my really good days. But definitely not you. You already live in the heavens.

Silence.

PAUL

A few of the fasteners are cracked, but we still have some replacements.

He goes back to work, leaving his drink by the window.

CELESTE

Okay.

She goes to help him, leaving her map by the window. PAUL gets up to get his drink and finds her map.

PAUL

Oh, is this how you plotted out the voyage? This looks good. Very populated route. All the way up, crowds on every side, all the way to... the Eiffel Tower. Nice!

You didn't draw the return, though.

(With a pen)

So we'll go back through--

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

Don't look at that!

PAUL

Why?

CELESTE

I mean don't write on that. Don't write on that. It's not finished. I hadn't planned out the last part of the flight.

PAUL

We can do it right now.

CELESTE

No!

PAUL

What's the matter?

CELESTE

You don't need to see that map. You're going to be waiting at our take-off position, you'll see me when I get back.

PAUL

So then why are you acting so weird about this map?

CELESTE

I'm not!

PAUL

Then let me see it.

CELESTE

No! Why do you need to? You're going to be on the ground, you don't have to.

PAUL

I'm still part of this mission. I'm working on the machine, I'm helping write the manifestos, I deserve to know.

CELESTE

Yes, you do, but--

PAUL

No buts. Tell me.

CELESTE

Once the machine goes up, for the Grand Revolutionary Spectacle, I don't intend to land it.

(CONTINUED)

She gives him the map.

CELESTE

And you see the route ends at--

PAUL

I see. It's that kind of mission.

CELESTE

Revolutions are bought with blood.

PAUL

And you want to pay like this. What am I supposed to do then, huh? When you're dead and I'm alone? They'll lock me up for the rest of my life in a dark room with no shoelaces and no belt and no great height for me to fall from. I won't get to die grandly for the revolution. You're going to condemn me to live out ten thousand days in the metaphorical prison of gravity! And the regular prison of jail!

CELESTE

But you won't have to do that, don't you see? The people's great fury is already in motion, it just hasn't been awakened yet.

PAUL

That metaphor makes no sense!

CELESTE

It just takes one great sacrifice to turn history around.

PAUL

So why wouldn't you tell me?

CELESTE

I thought I did! Remember? "You definitely know what I'm talking about."

PAUL

You should have known I didn't really get it! You should have explained it with smaller words!

CELESTE

Listen. When I lived back at home with my family I had everything I wanted except a mission. I have one now. Will you still help me?

PAUL

I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

I understand if you can't do what's necessary.

PAUL

I'm not the one letting my personal shame over my family history drive me to the theatrics of public suicide. You learned the vocabulary of the revolution but this isn't a fight for the nation. You just feel guilty that you have a trust fund and your parents make more money in a week than half of France makes in a lifetime.

CELESTE

How can you say that? I'm preparing to make the ultimate sacrifice!

PAUL

Martyrs make sacrifices. Spoiled children just make spectacles.

Scene 13.1: The Sad Montage!

Sad montage.

CELESTE looks dejectedly at the flying machine.

PAUL is in a cafe. He smokes and broods. A waiter brings coffee and a fortune cookie.

PAUL opens the fortune cookie.

Fortune: "ENNUI"

PAUL's tie is in his coffee.

13.2

CELESTE flying a model airplane with her imagination, sadly. She crashes her model airplane into a Jenga set.

PAUL flying a model airplane with his imagination, sadly.

13.3

CELESTE has an idea. She looks through the tools and the scraps. She gets to work.

PAUL doing sad bar karaoke: The Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

13.4

Home. Later.

CELESTE is neither working nor moping. PAUL enters.

PAUL

I have decided that if you want to make your so-called revolutionary sacrifice, it is not my place to dissuade you, since I believe in similar political principles. However, I will not be assisting you in your Icarian voyage to destroy the Eiffel Tower.

CELESTE

I understand. Thank you for your honesty. May I ask how you came to this decision?

PAUL

I consider it a betrayal that you did not disclose the true nature of your flight. I resent that you did not ask if I wished to die nobly by your side for the cause.

CELESTE

If I may, I would like to ask you another question.

PAUL

Yes?

CELESTE

If you had the chance, would you take my place?

PAUL

No.

CELESTE

Then--if you had the chance, would you be my co-pilot?

PAUL

Of course. If it takes one bloody martyr to start a revolution, then obviously two would be twice as good.

*She reveals the flying machine.
It has an additional set of wings.*

CELESTE

More wings, more power. That's just physics.

She gives him his goggles.

Revolution!

Scene 14: Context is Everything:
The Quiz Show of Violent Extremism, Hosted by
Investment-Banking Heiress Shirley Pesanteur

SHIRLEY and RAUL. Game show.

SHIRLEY

Welcome to CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING, the quiz show of violent extremism! I'm your host, Shirley Pesanteur, here tonight with our contestant, Detective Raul of the Prefecture of Police!

RAUL

Bonjour.

SHIRLEY

Have you seen the show before, Raul?

RAUL

No.

SHIRLEY

Well! A first-timer! So, we'll go over the rules for you and anyone else new to the show: this game is CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING! Each week, we have a series of questions and answers based on a terrorist manifesto; tonight we have an anarchist pamphlet called "The Early Bird Starts the Revolution." I'll ask you five one-sided rhetorical questions directly from the pamphlet, and your job is to respond with the appropriate strawman or logical reduction. Are you ready?

RAUL

I think so.

SHIRLEY

Well, you're playing for your badge from scene ten, so we'll just need one right answer! Let's go!

Applause.

Timer.

SHIRLEY

First question: What is a terrorist?

RAUL

A damaged individual incapable of coping with civilized society.

(CONTINUED)

SHIRLEY

Ooooooh, sorry, the answer we were looking for is: "A pissed person with goals." "A pissed person with goals." That's okay, you're just warming up. Question number two: What is a country?

RAUL

A place bigger than a city but smaller than the world.

SHIRLEY

Another miss, Detective, wow, I guess they're really letting anyone on the police force these days! No wonder the world is such a piece of shit. The correct answer was: "A method of subsuming class identity, in order to prevent working-class social upheaval."

RAUL

What does that even mean?

SHIRLEY

Why don't you let me ask the questions, bub?

RAUL

Sorry.

SHIRLEY

It's okay, you can't help it. According to this pamphlet, convincing your working-class to identify as "French" instead of as "workers" prevents them from joining with other countries' workers and rising up to overthrow the global elite. Ha! What a kooky idea. Number three: What is a revolution?

RAUL

The nicey-nice word for violent treason and sedition!

SHIRLEY

Cute, but no, zero for three! The correct answer was, "The punch line to a joke called history." Question number four: Why build a flying machine?

RAUL

To transport passengers and goods?

SHIRLEY

Oooh, another miss. We were looking for "Because gravity is, like, a metaphor for economic oppression." Crazy talk, just crazy. Alright, Raul, and here it is, the final question and your last chance for the badge: Who are the authors of "The Early Bird Starts the Revolution"?

RAUL

I know this one: Paul and Celeste!

SHIRLEY

That's right, everyone! My fucking cousin was lying to me all along! The flying-machine is complete, and we're all about to be "liberated" from our "capitalist oppressors"! Ooh, what if we have to leave the country? What if it's la guillotine for les Pesaunteurs? Don't worry, everyone, we can always hide out in our summer home in Monaco.

That's our show! Everyone keep an eye on the Eiffel Tower tomorrow morning--word is there's big change coming to this town! Keep us safe, Detective. Thank you, and good night!

RAUL gets his badge back. Credits roll.

Scene 15: The Icarian Voyage! The
Moment You've All Been Waiting For!

Dawn.

PAUL, CELESTE (in coat and flying-machine), and ROBESPIERRE arrive at their take-off location with much solemnity. They are rehearsed. They are focused.

They begin to set up.

CELESTE

Are you afraid?

PAUL

Fear is a reaction to the unknown. I know exactly what I'm getting into.

CELESTE

Maybe you don't. There's nothing like the moment gravity sets you free.

PAUL

Then I'm happy to be out of her grip forever.

CELESTE

Ask me if I'm afraid.

PAUL

Are you afraid?

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

...

Wait, I had a great line for this. Don't you hate that?

PAUL

Let me know if you remember it.

CELESTE

Damn it!

PAUL

Pamphlets. Harness. Ready.

CELESTE

Helmet, gloves. Ready. Let's get to our positions.

PAUL

Celeste--

CELESTE

Don't say anything yet, Paul. This isn't goodbye.

She's right.

They go to their positions.

PAUL

Ready!

CELESTE

Vive la France.

Vive la révolution!

ROBESPIERRE gallops. PAUL holds out the balloons. CELESTE rides by and takes hold. PAUL, instead of letting go, leaps on. The flying machine, the horse, and the humans ascend over Paris.

ROBESPIERRE falls.

CELESTE

Shit.

PAUL

What?

CELESTE

We just lost a lot of weight--we may gain altitude too quickly.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

I think we're okay.

CELESTE pilots. PAUL throws pamphlets over the streets. SHIRLEY is down below.

SHIRLEY

CELESTE! You prooooooooooomiiiiiiiiiiisised!

CELESTE

(very, very far away)
Go fuck yourself!

ROBESPIERRE hits the ground in front of SHIRLEY.

CELESTE

We're gaining altitude. Let some balloons out.

PAUL

I did.

The PREFECT OF POLICE and RAUL are down below.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Alright, Detective, what's the latest?

RAUL

I. Um. Well. I staked out their position.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Excellent.

RAUL

I had my darts at the ready.

PREFECT OF POLICE

I knew you could do it.

RAUL

And just as they got into range--

PREFECT OF POLICE

Outstanding work, Detective! Sounds like someone around here needs a promotion and a cigar!

The flying-machine roars overhead.

CELESTE

Fucker!

PAUL

Hi!

(CONTINUED)

PREFECT OF POLICE

They're still at large?!

RAUL

You kept interrupting me--

PREFECT OF POLICE

Back to the station!

To the armory.

They run off in search of harpoon guns.

CELESTE

We're still rising. Let out some more.

PAUL

I don't think we're rising. We're being pulled.

CELESTE

I'm trying to get back on course.

PAUL

That's all the balloons. Why are we still gaining altitude?!

CELESTE

Look out ahead! What is that? An... office complex?

PAUL

Brake! Brake!

CELESTE

Brace for impact!

CELESTE crash-lands the machine in heaven, which is an office complex.

CELESTE

Oh fuck, I just remembered what it was. Ask me again.

PAUL

Ask you what?

CELESTE

"Celeste, are you afraid?"

PAUL

No.

CELESTE

Come on!

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Fine. "Celeste, are you afraid?"

CELESTE

"No, Paul--I'm a dragon."

PAUL

Weak.

ROBESPIERRE appears, probably as a really handsome man.

CELESTE

Robespierre? You fell! What are you doing in the sky?

GOD appears.

GOD is a trendy and slightly effeminate German man with a thick accent.

GOD

Ja, it should be obvious. Robespierre broke his neck when he hit the street below.

CELESTE

Oh no!

ROBESPIERRE

I didn't suffer. Just kidding, I suffered a lot. A lot.

PAUL

But if Robespierre is dead, then--

GOD

Don't worry about that, Paul. You zwei aren't dead. You're trespassing.

CELESTE

Where are we?

GOD

This is heaven.

PAUL

Then you must be--

GOD

Ja. Ich heie: GOD.

PAUL

Heaven looks like offices?

(CONTINUED)

GOD

Heaven is ein hedgenfunden. I have clients in the upper-crust all over the world. Your grändenfätzer Marcel works for me, Celeste. If not for all this foolishness, you could have had ein executive position here. But not anymore, nein.

CELESTE

You're a hedge fund manager?

GOD

Of course God is ein hedge fund manager. Why do you think the world is such a piece of sheiße?

CELESTE

You said there were no bankers in heaven!

PAUL

How would I know? I just thought the sky was made of clouds.

CELESTE

Look here, God. This is what the anarchist revolution is all about. The Earth and its resources belong to us all, not an elite class of financiers and corporate overlords--

GOD

Blah blah blah, ja, ja, we've heard it all, we've heard all about "justice" and "equality", fucking YAWN, BORING, GET OVER IT, am I right?

CELESTE

Gravity is, like, a metaphor for economic oppression.

GOD

Gravity is, like, God's law.

CELESTE

What about "the meek shall inherit the earth"? What about "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven"?

GOD

You know how gravity works. Mass attracts mass. Wealth attracts wealth. The rich make the money, and, the rest of you... I know it sounds shitty when I say it out loud, but... you kind of just have to get over it. Ja.

PAUL

Man. You're really a dick.

(CONTINUED)

GOD

You don't become the ruler of the cosmos by being nice und playing fair. Now, to business.

Obviously we can't have you telling all of France that heaven is six hundred meters in the air and basically accessible by ladder.

He has a wad of cash. He starts counting.
Why don't we start with this?

He holds out the money to CELESTE.

PAUL

I don't get a share?

GOD

Nein, Paul, you're poor. Jesus Christ, it's like you're not paying attention.

He offers the money.

GOD

Keep this between us, ja?

CELESTE

I can't be bought. Like "ein politician".

PAUL

Ja!

CELESTE

Ja!

PAUL

Ja!!

CELESTE

JA!!!

CELESTE pushes God. He falls on His ass. He gets up and CELESTE pushes him again. He gets up and CELESTE pushes him again. He starts to get up, she starts to push him, they dodge back and forth. It's a bit. He gets up and CELESTE pushes him.

GOD

Stop that this instant!

CELESTE and PAUL get back in the flying machine and prepare ready to leave.

(CONTINUED)

GOD

Where are you going?

Sunglasses. This is where "Danger Zone" should play.

CELESTE

To finish what we started.

PAUL

Together! Ja!

CELESTE

Ja! Oui!

PAUL

Ja! Yeah!

CELESTE

Yeah! OUI!!!

They take off and dive toward the Eiffel Tower (played by an actor wearing its image on a t-shirt).

PAUL+CELESTE

FRAAAAAAANCE!

A gigantic ball of flame consumes the tower and the flying-machine and the aeronauts. It is tragic, or awesome, depending on your politics.

Alarms, sirens, babies crying, all the sundry sounds of violent disaster unfolding.

Scene 16: Fuck!

RAUL and the PREFECT OF POLICE, watching it happen.

RAUL

Fuck.

PREFECT OF POLICE

Oui. Fuck.

RAUL

Why would anyone do a thing like this?

The PREFECT OF POLICE shrugs.

(CONTINUED)

PREFECT OF POLICE

Best not to think of terrorists as people. Otherwise you go crazy trying to think about why, why, why? What do we do? How can one live in such a senseless world? I don't know. Terrorism is a fire upon the French political thought-landscape.

RAUL

Thoughtscape.

PREFECT OF POLICE

So remember this: a fire burns while we feed it, but if it goes out.

He doesn't continue, thinking he has made his point.

RAUL

Well, you're a cop, not a philosopher.

PREFECT OF POLICE

What is a cop? Just a philosopher who points his gun at others, instead of at himself.

This fire, we feed it or we fight it. But the world is a piece of shit, and shit burns.

The PREFECT OF POLICE opens the bulging folder of violent plots and finds the very last file, the one RAUL filled out in scene four.

Slowly he takes it out, stamps it, and puts it in the "Completed" folder.

RAUL

Fuck.

End of play.