

WE'RE CHEAP THAT WAY

Written by Kyoung H. Park

“We’re Cheap That Way” was inspired by Annie Lennox’s “Walking on Broken Glass” and written for Ensemble Studio Theater’s Youngblood. It was performed Oct. 6-8, 2011 and directed by Andrew Grosso.

THE PLAYERS

LOUIS XVI	King of France
MARIE ANTOINETTE	Queen of France
CHARLES HENRI SANSON	The Executioner

SETTING

The Temple, a medieval fortress in Paris

TIME

16th of January, 1793

(At rise: We are in the Temple, a medieval fortress in Paris. It is late in the evening and Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette are playing Jenga.)

LOUIS: *(singing and moving a Jenga piece)* I'm living in an empty room.

MARIE: *(singing and moving a piece)* With all the windows smashed.

LOUIS: *(singing and moving a piece)* I've got so little left to loose.

MARIE: The National Assembly will retract
our execution. Surely, they won't
behead us... will they...?
... Louis?

LOUIS: *(lost in the game)* I don't know Marie.

MARIE: What's taking them so long?
Their deliberation is endless!

LOUIS: *(placing a piece on top of the tower.)* It's called due process of
the law, mon cherie.

MARIE: *(to the audience)* Those revolutionaries don't have laws,
they're beasts, like the ones I saw *le Youtube*.
Have you seen that video with the
baby buffalo that gets kidnapped by lions,
but is snatched by a crocodile that
plays tug on war with that poor infant
until the buffalos return to
confront the lions with absolute
vengeance in their eyes—!

LOUIS: It's your turn.

MARIE: My turn?

LOUIS: To play.

MARIE: Why are we playing *le Jenga*?

LOUIS: It's the only game they'll give us.

MARIE: You are the absolute Monarch of France, Louis.
You are King!
You shouldn't sit there and accept whatever
crumbs they decide to give us,
you should demand from our prisoners

full customer care and service—

LOUIS: The times are changing, Marie—

MARIE: Yes, the times are changing, but—

LOUIS: And the people are cheap that way.

MARIE: I knew we were in trouble when that
angry mob of peasant women stormed into Versailles
and tried to stab me in my sleep.
You were wondering about in the rose gardens
like usual, in one of your bouts of depression,
that you can't seem to shake out of,
when they dragged us—those people!—
they dragged us away from our palace and
set us up here, in this decrepit tower in *Parée*,
to live with them—
(pointing to the audience) those animals!—
those beggars and laborers,
those unshowered hispters,
they're there—
(pointing at the audience) all there!—

LOUIS: Marie, we can't play this game
if you don't concentrate.
This is what matters now:
whether these blocks can be removed and
stacked in single rows
all the way to the ceiling—

(Marie strikes her fists around the Jenga tower. The tower collapses.)

MARIE: I don't want to die, Louis.
I am not ready to die.

LOUIS: ...

MARIE: What is going to happen to our children?

LOUIS: They'll probably be executed.

MARIE: And you're OK with that?

LOUIS: ...

MARIE: Our children belong on the throne of France, Louis,
to govern with the blessing of God.

LOUIS: Only my grandfather got away with saying
“L’etat c’est moi” and he only got away with it
because the people were stupid enough to
believe it—

MARIE: Don’t be such a coward!
No one should defy us!
When did this happen to you, Louis?
When did you become so
secularly compromising?

LOUIS: It’s the age of Enlightenment,
we can’t avoid the truth, Marie.
We were privileged in times
of ignorance, but the people
can’t be deceived anymore.

MARIE: Says who?

LOUIS: Look at us: dethroned.
(singing) They are trying to behead us and
they know we will bleed.

MARIE: *(singing)* They have cut us down because
they know they’ll succeed.

LOUIS/: *(singing)* And if they’re trying to kills us
MARIE there’s nothing left to fear,
‘cause if they’re trying to hurt us,
haven’t they done well, my dear?

*(Music: Paul Wranitzky’s “Funeral March of the Death of the King Louis XVI”
from the Symphony Op. 31 “The Revolution” or “La Paix.” Movement 2, part 2.*

*The Executioner marches on-stage with an ax. He’s hunchbacked, wears a black
mask and a red, clown nose. Marie slowly moves to Louis in fear. Louis embraces
her.*

*The Executioner hands to Louis an official document rolled into a tube. The roll is
an order of Execution. Louis shakes his head “no” to Marie. Marie gasps.*

*Louis and Marie slowly march center-stage, where a block is placed by the
Executioner for their beheading.*

Marie silently and melodramatically sobs and wails in refusal. Louis comforts her as he helps her walk center-stage.)

SANSON: Citizen Louis Capet and Maria Antonia Johanna,
I, Charles Henri Sanson,
will read your charges:
(reading) "Accused of conspiring against your own country,
poorly mismanaging wars with foreign powers,
and living in total unconcern for your people,
you are hereby stripped from all titles and powers,
including any granted by God.
With 380 votes in favor of your execution,
I shall now ask you to
bend over this chopping block so
I can behead you and your wife."
Any questions?

LOUIS: ...

MARIE: *(silent, melodramatic sobs).*

SANSON: If there are no questions, let us proceed!

LOUIS: Wait!

(Music stops in a halt.)

LOUIS: I have questions!
Mes questions sont pour mon peuple,
les gens qui sont sortis de cette
Sanglante (jeudi / vendredi / samedi) pour voir votre
Roi et la reine decapites.
Je veux savoir si vous avez perdu la raison et ne
realisez pas que nous, votre roi et la reine,
representent la bonne volonte et la bienveillance de
notre longue durable aristocratie qui
au cours des siecles, avec ses dents et ses ongles,
a conduit la France a vivre dans cette gloire!
Comment pouvez-vous trahir notre sacrifice
ce qui vous amene a la revolte?
Est-ce notre corruption?
Est-ce la violence gore de nos guerres ou
La pauvreté du proletariat?
Si ce sont les raisons de votre folie,
comment peut-elle etre annulee afin que
nous puissions revenir a notre paix?

(Sansón attempts to behead Louis and accidentally stabs his back.)

LOUIS: Owww! Owww!
You fuckin' stabbed me in the back,
you Brutus!

MARIE: *(aside)* Potatoes are very good fried in fat;
the salad oil was not rancid.
The oil from the grocer at the corner is
better quality than the oil from the grocer
across the street.

SANSON: Ooops.
Erreur! Erreur!
...
Come back here.
Ma hache; my ax!

LOUIS: *(lying on the chopping block.)* I'm getting dizzy.
(Sansón removes the ax off his back. Louis screams.)

MARIE: Sansón,
arête!
Ne le touchez pas!

MARIE: You're hurting him!

(Sansón beheads Louis.)

LOUIS: I am beheaded.

MARIE: Mais non, Louis!
No!

LOUIS: *(singing)* Everyone of us was made to suffer.

MARIE: *(singing)* Everyone of us was made to weep.

LOUIS/: *(singing)* We've been hurting one another
MARIE and now the pain has cut too deep...

LOUIS: *(singing)* I can't keep on—

MARIE: *(singing)* Keep on walking—

LOUIS: *(singing)* I can't keep on walking on,
walking on broken glass...

(Louis dies.)

MARIE: Sansón, explain this atrocity!
You gave him death with no dignity!

SANSON: Who are you to speak to me

about dignity, you Austrian slut?
You come to us from a foreign country and
live off the best of France with no right!
You're clueless to the ways of the Frenchmen—
I bet you don't even know Joel, le Plombier!

MARIE: Who's Joel, le Plombier?

SANSON: Moi: je suis le Plombier!
I have trois enfants and a working wife.
I have to execute people on Main Street as
as a deuxieme job, because it's the only way
I can make ends meet.

MARIE: I didn't know that.
No one told me about your troubles.

SANSON: I tried... We all tried!
As you strolled down le boulevard in
ridiculous sheep-girl costumes,
we tried telling you we didn't want to go to war,
that we didn't wish to burden ourselves with
debts to foreign powers while
you bailed out your friends and les bankers!
But you kept on strolling while
Louis condemned our next two generations
to support your lifestyles with
no jobs in an economy that is
going nowhere but abroad!
We cried and we marched;
we sang and we danced, and
at the end of it all,
you just looked at us and said:
"If you don't have bread, eat cake."

MARIE: I said "eat brioche," Sanson.
I never said cake!

(Sanson beheds Marie.)

MARIE: Mon dieu, ma tete.

SANSON: Adieu, my Queen.

(Marie dies.)

SANSON: *(to the audience)* People of France,
our time has come!
Like butterflies out of cocoons,
we shall change and stop this suffer.
*(he straightens his back vertebrae by vertebrae, sounds of a loud gear
cranking.)*
We won't live deformed and hunchbacked,
we won't live with a red, skin aberration
on notre nez.
(He removes the clown nose from his face.)
We shall live in dignity and no longer
be the punch-line of a sad joke overtold.
People of France,
free your voices and sing:
"Justice, justice!
Viva la revolucion!"

(Blackout.

End of Play.)