

Script Sample

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The Chairs

Tragic Farce

by Eugène Ionesco
translated by Rob Melrose

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CHARACTERS

The Old Man, 95 years old	Paul Chevalier
The Old Woman, 94 years old	Tsilla Chelton
The Orator, 45 to 50 years old	Sylvain Dhomme
And lots of other characters	

The Chairs, tragic farce, was performed for the first time on the 22nd of April 1952 at the Théâtre Lancry. The director was Sylvain Dhomme, the designer was Jacques Noël. The play was reprised at the Studio des Champs-Élysées, in February 1956, then in March 1961, directed by Jacques Mauclair with Jacques Mauclair in the role of the Old Man and Tsilla Chelton in the role of the Old Woman.

SET

Circular Walls with a recess at the back.

It is a very bare room. On stage right, going upstage from the proscenium, three doors. Then a window with a stool in front of it; then another door. In the recess, at the back, a grand double door with two other doors facing each other on either side framing the double doors. These two doors, or one of them at least, are almost hidden from the view of the audience. On stage left, again going from the proscenium, three doors, a window with a stool on the opposite side as the window stage right, then a blackboard and a platform. To make this clearer, please see the attached plan.

Downstage, two chairs next to each other.

A gas lamp hangs from the ceiling.

(The curtain rises. Semi-darkness. The Old Man is on the stool leaning out the window stage left. The Old Woman lights the gas lamp. Green light. She goes to the Old Man and pulls on his sleeve.)

The Old Woman

Come, my dear, close the window, the rotten water smells and it lets in the mosquitoes.

The Old Man

Leave me alone!

The Old Woman

Come, come, my dear, come sit down. Don't lean out, you could fall into the water. You know what happened to François the first. You have to be careful.

The Old Man

More examples from History! My poopsie, I'm tired of French history. I want to see; the ships on the water make spots in the sun.

The Old Woman

You can't see them, there's no sun, it's night, my dear.

The Old Man

There are still shadows.

(He leans out more)

The Old Woman *(She pulls him with all her strength)*

Ah!...You're scaring me, my dear...come sit down, you won't see them coming. It's no use. It's night...

(The Old Man reluctantly lets himself be pulled in)

The Old Man

I wanted to see, I love to watch the water.

The Old Woman

How can you, my dear?... It gives me vertigo. Ah! This house, this island, I can't get used to it; all surrounded by water... water from the windows all the way out to the horizon.

(The Old Woman and the Old Man, the Old Woman dragging the Old Man, head to the two chairs down stage; the Old Man seats himself naturally on the lap of the Old Woman.)

The Old Man

It's six in the afternoon... It's already night. You remember, before, it wasn't like wasn't like that; it'd still be daylight at nine in the evening, at ten, at midnight.

The Old Woman

You're quite right, what a memory!

The Old Man

It's changed a lot.

The Old Woman

And why, do you think?

The Old Man

I don't know, Semiramis, my Popsie... Maybe, it's because the further one goes the deeper one sinks. It's because of the Earth, it turns, turns, turns, turns...

The Old Woman

Turns, turns, my little dear...

(Silence)

Ah! Yes, you are certainly a great mind! You are very gifted, my dear. You could have been chief president, chief king, or even chief doctor, chief marshal, if you had wanted, if you have had a bit of ambition in your life...

The Old Man

What good would that have done? We wouldn't have lived any better...and besides, we have a profession, I'm a marshal all the same, marshal-of-lodgings, since I'm the caretaker.

The Old Woman (*She caresses The Old Man as one caresses a baby*)

My little dear, my cutie...

The Old Man

I'm very bored.

The Old Woman

You were happier, when you were looking at the water... To entertain ourselves, let's pretend like we did the other night.

The Old Man

Pretend yourself, it's your turn.

The Old Woman

It's your turn.

The Old Man

Your turn.

The Old Woman

Your turn.

The Old Man

Your turn.

The Old Woman

Your turn.

The Old Man

Drink your tea, Semiramis.

(There is no tea, of course)

The Old Woman

Come on, imitate the month of February.

The Old Man

I don't like the months of the year.

The Old Woman

Well for now, there aren't any others. Come on, to make me happy...

The Old Man

All right, here's the month of February.

(He scratches his head, like Stan Laurel)

The Old Woman *(laughing, applauding)*

That's it. Thank you, Thank you, you're as cute as can be, my dear.

(She kisses him)

Oh! You are so gifted, you could have been at least chief marshal, if you had wanted...

The Old Man

I'm the caretaker, marshal-of-lodgings.

(Silence)

The Old Woman

Tell me the story, you know, the story: *So then we laughed...*

The Old Man

Again?... I've had enough of it... *So then we laughed?* That one again... You always ask me for the same thing!... "So then we laughed..." But it's monotonous... For the seventy-five years that we've been married, every evening, absolutely every evening, you have me tell the same

story, have me imitate the same people, the same months... always the same... let's talk about something else...

The Old Woman

My dear, I'm not tired of it... It's your life, it's my passion.

The Old Man

You know it by heart.

The Old Woman

It's as if I forget everything, right afterwards... Every evening I come to it with a brand new mind... But yes, my dear, I do it on purpose, I take a purgative... I become new, for you, my dear, every evening... So then, begin, I'm begging you.

The Old Man

If you want.

The Old Woman

Go ahead then, tell your story... It is also mine, what is yours is mine!
"So then we laughed...aft..."

The Old Man

"So then we laughed...aft..." my poopsie...

The Old Woman

"So then we laughed...aft..." my dear...

The Old Man

"So then we laughed...aft...aft...After that we came to a large gate. We were all wet, frozen right to our bones, after hours, days, nights, weeks..."

The Old Woman

"Months..."

The Old Man

"...In the rain... Our ears were chattering, and our feet, our knees, our noses, our teeth were too... It was like that for eighty years. They

wouldn't let us enter... they could have at least opened the door to the garden..."

(Silence)

The Old Woman

"In the garden the grass was wet."

The Old Man

"There was a path that led to a little square; at the center; a village church..." Where was this village? Do you remember?

The Old Woman

No, my dear, I don't know.

The Old Man

How did we get there, where is the road? This place was called, I believe, Paris...

The Old Woman

Paris never existed, my darling.

The Old Man

That city must have existed, because it later collapsed into ruins... It was the city of light, but then it was extinguished, extinguished after four thousand years... There's nothing left of it now, except a song.

The Old Woman

A true song? That's funny. What song?

The Old Man

A lullaby, an allegory: *Paris will always be Paris.*

The Old Woman

And we had to get there through the garden? Was it far?

The Old Man *(dreaming, lost)*

The song?... the rain?...

The Old Woman

You are very gifted. If you had had a little ambition in your life, you could have been chief king, a chief journalist, a chief comedian, a chief captain... In the hole, all this alas... in the deep hole all black... In the black hole, I tell you.

(Silence)

The Old Man

“So then we laughed...aft...”

The Old Woman

Ah! yes, go on... tell...

The Old Man (while the Old Woman starts to laugh, softly, in a batty way; then, progressively, in bursts; The Old Man laughs too)

“So then we laughed, we had bellyaches, the story was so foolish... Lafter that, the fool came belly up, bare-bellied, with a big beer belly. Lafter that he brought in a trunk all full of taffy. The trunk went belly up and the laffy poured out... The poor fool poured out as well, belly up still bare-bellied... So then we laughed and laughed and laughed, the belly fool, bare taffy belly up, the all full chest, the awful story of the all full taffy belly up, so then we laughed, the fool so then lafter that the fool came all bare, we laughed...”

The Old Woman *(laughing)*

“So then we laughed at the fool after he came all bare, we laughed, the all full chest, the all full chest of laffy, the taffy on the belly, all poured out...”

The Old Man *(laughing together)*

“So then we laughed. Ah!... laughed... aft... aft... Ah...Ah!...laf...ter...after...laf...ter... the bare-bellied fool... came with taffy after...came with taffy after...”

(These are the only words we can make out)

So then we l... bare-bellied... lafter... the chest all full...

(Then they calm down little by little)

We laf... aft... laf... a... aft.. laft...er... laft...er...a... laft...er laft...er!"

The Old Woman

So it was like that. Your famous Paris.

The Old Man

Who could say it better?

The Old Woman

Oh, my dear! You are so very skilled, oh! Very, you know, very, very, you could have been something in life, even more than a marshal-of-lodgings.

The Old Man

Let's be modest...be contended a with little...

The Old Woman

Maybe you missed your vocation.

The Old Man *(He cries suddenly)*

I missed it? I ruined it? Ah! where are you, mommy, mommy, where are you mommy?... waah, waah, waah, I'm an orphan...

(He moans)

an orphan, an orphaaaa...

The Old Woman

I'm her with you, what are you afraid of?

The Old Man

No, Semiramis, my poopie. You aren't my mommy... orphan, orphaaaa, who will protect me?

The Old Woman

But, I'm here my dear!...

The Old Man

It's not the same thing... I want my mommy, nah, you, you aren't my mommy...

The Old Woman (*caressing him*)

You're breaking my heart, don't cry, little one.

The Old Man

Waaa, waaa, leave me alone; waaa, waaa, I feel like I'm broken, I'm hurt, my vocation is hurting me, it's ruined.

The Old Woman

Calm yourself.

The Old Man (*sobbing, mouth wide open like a baby*)

I'm an orphan...orphaaaaa.

The Old Woman (*She tries to console him, cuddles him*)

My orphan, my dear, you break my heart, my orphan.

(She rocks the Old Man who after a moment has come back to her lap)

The Old Man (*sobbing*)

Waaaa! Waaaa! My mommy! Where's my mommy? My mommy's gone.

The Old Woman

I'm your wife. It's me. I'm your mommy now.

The Old Man (*giving in a little*)

It's not true, I'm an orphan, waaaa, waaaa.

The Old Woman (*still rocking him*)

My cutie, my orphan, orphaaaaan, orfin, orfine, orfoon, orphan.

The Old Man (*still sulky, but giving in more and more*)

No... I don't want, I don't waaaaaant.

The Old Woman (*she sings*)

Orphan-ah, Orphan-aire, orphan-ton, orphan-la.

The Old Man

Noooo... Noooo...

The Old Woman (*same game*)

Ah, ton, aire, la, lala, ah ton aire, orphan-ton-y, orphan-ton-y-airy-air-eye, orphan-ton-y-relie, rella...

The Old Man

Waaa, waa, waa, waa.

(he sniffles, calms down little by little)

Where is my mommy?

The Old Woman

In the flowery heaven... She's waiting for you, she's looking at you, among the flowers, don't cry, you might make her cry!

The Old Man

It's not even true...oo..she doesn't see me...she doesn't hear me. I'm an orphan in life and you aren't my mommy...

The Old Woman (*The Old Man is almost calm*)

Let's see, calm yourself, don't put yourself in such a state... you have great qualities, my little marshal... wipe your tears, our guests are coming tonight, they mustn't see you like this... all is not lost... everything isn't ruined, you will tell them everything, you will explain, you have a message... you always talk about what you will tell them... you have to live, you have to fight for your message...

The Old Man

I have a message, what you say is true, I fight, a mission, I have something in my belly, a message to communicate to humanity, to humanity...

The Old Woman

Your message, my dear, to humanity!...

The Old Man

It's true, yes, it's true...

The Old Woman (she wipes The Old Man's nose, dries his tears)

It's true... you are a man, a soldier, a marshal of lodgings...

The Old Man (leaves her lap and walks around agitated with little steps)

I'm not like the others, I have an ideal in my life. Maybe I'm gifted like you say, I have talent, but I don't have the ability. I've served well in my office as marshal of lodgings, I've always been on top of the situation, honorably, perhaps that's enough...

The Old Woman

Not for you, you aren't like the others, you are far too great, and yet you would have done even better if you had gotten along with everyone, like everyone else does. You argued with all your friends, with your bosses, with your marshals, with your brothers.

The Old Man

It's not my fault, Sermiramis, you know very well what he said.

The Old Woman

What did he say?

End of Script Sample

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