

**LA MÈRE/LA MER**

**Characters:** Marine: Female, African from a former French colony - 30s

**Emile:** Male, French - 60

**Setting:** A living room in a French apartment

**Time:** Present

**Setting:** The play takes place in a Parisian living room

This play was presented at the Just Acts Play Festival in Calgary – February 14 – 19 2017 with the following cast.

Sasha Monica – Marine

Chris Gibson – Emile

**La mer touche au plus profond de l'homme... Philippe Plisson**

(The set consist of a couch, a television set and a pair of children's shoes half hidden under the couch. Emile is sitting on the couch watching the TV. There is the sound of keys opening a door and Marine enters, she is carrying several shopping bags.

**Marine:** Salut.

**Emile:** Where were you?

**Marine:** Shopping.

**Emile:** Where were you last night?

**Marine:** Last night? At, at my friend's –

**Emile:** Your friends?

**Marine:** Yes, I decided to stay over at her place.

**Emile:** I've been trying to call you-

**Marine:** My phone died.

**Emile:** Doesn't your friend have a phone? I tried to reach you last night and all day today-

**Marine:** Sorry I meant to call and then I just got caught up with, with -

**Emile:** I was worried-

**Marine:** I-

**Emile:** Who is this friend anyway?

**Marine:** Sorry, what did you say?

**Emile:** (He turns down the volume on the TV.) Which friend? I don't' know any of your friends you never invite anyone here-

**Marine:** Don't start on me about that, you never invite any of your friends either.

**Emile:** Because you never want to see anyone. We live like hermits.

**Marine:** Let's not get into this now. She's the friend I told you maman would be staying with.

**Emile:** Who? Oh right, right. Where is Sophie?-

**Marine:** I know I should have called.

**Emile:** Don't worry about it we've agreed we don't have to be at each other's beck and call but you had Sophie with you and I wondered...

**Marine:** Yes you're right sorry.

**Emile:** I still don't understand why your mother can't stay with us when she comes-

**Marine:** I told you, she doesn't want to be a bother to us.

**Emile:** Fine, whatever. When is she coming?

**Marine:** Who, maman? She, she came already.

**Emile:** What?

**Marine:** She arrived yesterday.

**Emile:** Yesterday?

**Marine:** Yes that's why I spent the night at my friend's so I could visit with her.

**Emile:** She arrived yesterday?

**Marine:** I told you she was coming.

**Emile:** You told me you'd asked her to come but you didn't say she would come this soon. Did you know she was planning to arrive yesterday?

**Marine:** Non, she called me after she got here.

**Emile:** Why didn't she let you know?

**Marine:** That's maman for you.

**Emile:** This is strange. Anyway is –

**Marine:** I was caught off guard too I didn't know she was going to come without letting me know.

**Emile:** She should have let you know. Is Sophie?-

**Marine:** That's maman, she does things on her own time and I don't dare question her especially since she's doing us a favour.

**Emile:** Sounds like she's quite something. Is Sophie?-

**Marine:** That she is.

**Emile:** Where is Sophie?

**Marine:** Sophie?

**Emile:** Is she playing in the garden?

**Marine:** Non.

**Emile:** Where is she?

**Marine:** With maman.

**Emile:** What, why?

**Marine:** Why? She's taking her back with her. You know this, we've discussed it.

**Emile:** Yes I know but-

**Marine:** So why are you acting surprised?

**Emile:** Because I didn't know you were - why did you leave her there with people she doesn't know?  
Where does your friend live?

**Marine:** Why?

**Emile:** I'm going to fetch her.

**Marine:** Why?

**Emile:** She shouldn't be there alone with strangers.

**Marine:** Maman is not a stranger.

**Emile:** Yes she is. Sophie doesn't know her-

**Marine:** She's her grand-mother-

**Emile:** She's never met her Marine she'll be scared. Why would you leave her there without-? I'm going to bring her home and your mother too if she will come.

**Marine:** You can't do that.

**Emile:** What do you mean I can't?

**Marine:** You can't she's, she's already left.

**Emile:** What?

**Marine:** She left this morning.

**Emile:** This morning? But she just got here.

**Marine:** Yes she could only spare one day to come to get Sophie.

**Emile:** You mean Sophie's gone?

**Marine:** Yes.

**Emile:** With her?

**Marine:** Yes.

**Emile:** But... This is ridiculous.

**Marine:** Maman didn't have much time she said she had to get back right away.

**Emile:** I didn't even get to say goodbye.

**Marine:** Sorry I know it was all so -

**Emile:** What about her passport?

**Marine:** Passport?

**Emile:** Yes, she needs a passport if she's taking her back to Africa.

**Marine:** I took care of that a while ago. She's registered on maman's passport.

**Emile:** Can you do that?

**Marine:** Yes I took care of that ages ago. I told you before she was born that I would take care of everything pertaining to Sophie that you wouldn't have to concern yourself about anything. I said that didn't I?

**Emile:** Yes but-

**Marine:** And I've kept my word haven't I? You haven't had to concern yourself about her.

**Emile:** I wouldn't say that exactly, I take care of her, I take her to the park and-

**Marine:** I know, I mean I take care of all the fiddly things so you don't have to. I do all that so you don't have to be bothered.

**Emile:** When you say it that way you make it sound as if I don't care about her.

**Marine:** I know you care, (Pause.) in your own way.

**Emile:** Meaning?

**Marine:** Nothing.

**Emile:** Meaning what Marine?

**Marine:** You've made an effort to accommodate her.

**Emile:** You make it sound as if all I do is provide a place for her to live.

**Marine:** I am not accusing you Emile. You've been very good about it even though you didn't want her.

**Emile:** Don't say that.

**Marine:** You asked me if I was sure she was yours remember?

**Emile:** I, I...

**Marine:** It's alright Emile.

**Emile:** I admit it was a shock in the beginning. I, I had no plan to become a father again at 60.

**Marine:** You wanted me to get rid of it.

**Emile:** I never said that.

**Marine:** You said it with your eyes, your attitude; by asking me over and over what I planned to do.

**Emile:** I wanted- it was my way of letting you know- of, of making sure you understood that I was leaving it up to you to do what you thought was best. I, I asked you to marry me remember?

**Marine:** Yes how elegant of you.

**Emile:** You needn't be sarcastic I meant it.

**Marine:** I don't want you to marry me out of a sense of obligation. Becoming pregnant was a shock to me too. It was not part of my plans, I have my thesis to finish; having a child was not convenient for me, for either of us.

**Emile:** But you have managed, we both have.

**Marine:** Yes but it has been difficult that's why I want her to spend a year with Maman in Africa. It will give me time to finish my thesis and it will also be good for us as a couple.

**Emile:** I'm going to miss her.

**Marine:** A year goes by so fast.

**Emile:** She will be a year older. She may forget us.

**Marine:** No she won't, don't be silly.

**Emile:** It's going to be so strange tomorrow not taking her out in her stroller to the park. Where is her stroller?

**Marine:** I left it there.

**Emile:** Where?

**Marine:** At, at my friend's we don't need it anymore, she has little ones of her own.

**Emile:** Why didn't your mother take it? She'll need it won't she?

**Marine:** She has one at home.

**Emile:** Oh?

**Marine:** My, my sisters all have kids.

**Emile:** She could have used it at the airport.

**Marine:** I, she, we were in such a rush to get to the airport last night we were running late and I-

**Emile:** Last night?

**Marine:** What?

**Emile:** You said last night.

**Marine:** I said last night what?

**Emile:** You said you were in a rush to catch the plane last night.

**Marine:** Oui.

**Emile:** I thought you said she left this morning-

**Marine:** Oh sorry I mean this morning. I, I 'm a little tired we stayed up chatting all night; I haven't had much sleep.

**Emile:** God I hope she's alright.

**Marine:** Of course she's alright, why shouldn't she be?

**Emile:** She'll be missing us.

**Marine:** You agreed to have her go.

**Emile:** Yes I did because you said you need to finish your thesis.

**Marine:** I did it for the both of us. (She puts her arms around him and kisses him.) This is nice just us n'est-ce pas?

**Emile:** Hm.

**Marine:** Just like old times.



**Emile:** Hmm.

**Marine:** Now we can make love in the middle of the afternoon without worrying that Sophie is going to interrupt us.

**Emile:** (He relaxes into her embrace but then he sees Sophie's shoes on the floor.) These are her favourite shoes why didn't you pack them for her?

**Marine:** What? Oh I, I forgot. It was all such a rush when maman called. (She undoes her blouse.) Do you like my new bra? I bought it today just for you.

**Emile:** I... she loves these shoes.

**Marine:** Mmm, Don't worry about it Maman will buy some for her. Here give them to me I'll get rid of them.

**Emile:** Get rid of them?

**Marine:** Well what do you want me to do with them?

**Emile:** Keep them for when she comes home.

**Marine:** She won't.

**Emile:** What did you say?

**Marine:** She, she won't need them anymore.

**Emile:** Why not?

**Marine:** She'll have outgrown them silly.

**Emile:** (He gives her the shoes and she throws them in a corner.) You're glad she's gone.

**Marine:** How can you say that?

**Emile:** You don't miss her. You don't want her here.

**Marine:** Of course I want her. Of course I miss her, she's my child.

**Emile:** You aren't acting like it.

**Marine:** What would you have me do, tear my hair out, fall to the floor keening like some big African earth mama?

**Emile:** Come on-

**Marine:** I am not like that.

**Emile:** I don't expect-

**Marine:** You're all the same-

**Emile:** Marine come off it-

**Marine:** *"Oh Africans wear their emotions so close to the surface,"* which we all know is code for "They are so primitive"-

**Emile:** Knock it off-

**Marine:** I miss her too but I don't have to, to carry on about it. It had to be done you agreed to send her away. How can you say I don't want her? If I didn't want her I wouldn't have given birth to her, wouldn't have kept her. I loved her- I love her. I was entranced to see her learning to walk, hear her say maman. Emile I miss her, I miss her.

**Emile:** Sorry I shouldn't have said that- it's just that you never, well for one you never take her out to the park, or anywhere. I was the one who would take her out and show her off.

**Marine:** I was busy. I have this goddam thesis to finish and it's been driving me crazy. I told you I feel sometimes like the walls - as if they are closing in on me. It's too much, too much, too much. Everyone expects me to do everything, every fucking thing!

**Emile:** Who, who expects you to do everything?

**Marine:** You-

**Emile:** I don't expect-

**Marine:** My family, everyone, everyone is always expecting me to do things; great things. "Her IQ is 135 she can do anything she puts her mind to." I have always had to be the best at everything; Back home in Africa the reputation of my family takes precedence, I must never let them down. If someone has a problem they say, "Go talk it over with Marine, she's so bright, so intelligent so calm she'll know what to do." Did it ever occur to them to any of you that I don't always know; I don't have the answers-

**Emile:** Hey take it easy-

**Marine:** I also need someone to tell my troubles to. I feel so alone, alone and afraid.

**Emile:** I, I understand-

**Marine:** Have you ever had to write a doctoral thesis?

**Emile:** Non but-

**Marine:** Have you ever had everyone expecting you to excel at everything, to always be the best?

**Emile:** Non-

**Marine:** Then don't say you understand. Sometimes I feel I can't go on.

**Emile:** That's why I've suggested you see someone.

**Marine:** Sometimes I think I'm going crazy.

**Emile:** Of course not you're-

**Marine:** That I'm cracking up.

**Emile:** You're stressed that's why I suggested you seek out counselling. It can't be easy for you, studying, looking after Sophie, I understand.

**Marine:** You understand nothing.

**Emile:** Don't say that, that's why I agreed to have your mother take care of Sophie for a while to give you a-

**Marine:** My mother.

**Emile:** Yes to take some of the pressure off.

Marine: My mother.

**Emile:** That was the whole idea wasn't it? She's willing to help you out.

**Marine:** My mother.

**Emile:** Are you alright?

**Marine:** Yes, why wouldn't I be?

**Emile:** I don't know you sound a little-

**Marine:** Ha, ha, ha (Her laugh is strange and bitter.)

**Emile:** Why are you laugh?-

**Marine:** She didn't protect me you know.

**Emile:** Who didn't protect you, your mother, protect you from what?

**Marine:** She knew because I told her.

**Emile:** Marine what are you talking about, what did you tell her?

**Marine:** About the touching.

**Emile:** What touching? Who touched you?

**Marine:** She said it was all in my head and not to mention it to anyone. I have a fertile imagination, so you see I don't know if I did make it all up. Maybe I did, maybe it was just a dream.

**Emile:** You're not making any sense, made what up, who touched you?

**Marine:** Umm?

**Emile:** Sophie, she's with your mother, will she be alright with her?

**Marine:** She's with la mer.

**Emile:** La mère? You mean your mother right?

**Marine:** La mer.

**Emile:** Bon Dieu Marine, who is Sophie with?

**Marine:** With maman I told you-

**Emile:** Is she safe with her? You said she didn't protect you-

**Marine:** Don't listen to me I don't know what I'm saying-

**Emile:** Is Sophie safe with your mother oui ou non?

**Marine:** Of course she is.

**Emile:** I don't know what to think.

**Marine:** There's nothing to think about. Rien du tout. Come let's go to bed.

**Emile:** I don't want to. Not right now, later. (He turns and something on the television catches his eye, he picks up the remote control and increases the volume. The voice of the television announcer cuts in.)

**TV Announcer:** "...the child who appears to be of mixed race was found dead on the beach apparently by drowning at Berck sur-Mer, still strapped in her stroller. The body was clad in the same one-piece suit as the one seen in this CCTV footage. This is the woman who was last seen with the child pushing her in the stroller at La Gare du nord in Paris yesterday. A villager from this peaceful seaside town situated in the north of France remembers speaking with her": *I remember her because she was very striking, very beautiful very well spoken and the little child in the stroller was so cute. She, the young woman, she asked me if I knew when high tide was. Oh God poor child to drown like that.*

**Emile:** Non.

**TV Announcer:** The police fear that the woman seen in this CCTV footage may have drowned too. If anyone knows of her whereabouts or knows who she is please call 0 800 35 832 345. In other news the President today said...

(The voice fades as Emile stares at Marine.)

**Emile:** Non, non.

**Marine:** It's OK Emile, It's alright. She, she was calm, I stayed with her on my knees to the end, I swear.

**Emile:** Non.

**Marine:** I told her I was sorry but that I had to do it. I asked her to forgive me. She, she wasn't afraid... I had to do it, I don't know why. There, there was a force in me telling me to. She's safe now. She, she was calm... the moon was bright, like a spotlight guiding me. I gave her to la mer, the sea has taken her; she will protect her. La mer will protect her. The moon was bright, like a spotlight showing me the way, guiding me. She's safe.

**Emile:** Noooooooooon!

**Marine:** Safe from everything and everyone.

(Lights fade to black.)

*Curtain*