

WHAT HAPPENS

*when a pot-smoking University of Colorado French major
finds himself in 15th Century France
as a great poet is about to be hanged?*

PRESENTING THE NEW MUSICAL PLAY

YESTERYEAR

Three Days in Paris with François Villon



**Book & Lyrics by David Alpaugh
Music by Lewis Alpaugh**

YESTERYEAR CONTACTS

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ABOUT THE LIBRETTIST AND COMPOSER

David Alpaugh has published poetry, fiction, voice plays, and essays in more than 100 journals, including *Modern Drama*, *Scene4*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Zyzyva*, and in the Norton critical anthology, *Eight Modern Plays* and the Dana Gioia edited anthology *California Poetry from the Gold Rush to the Present*. A popular performer at Bay Area poetry venues, he has taught at the University of California and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. His honors include Woodrow Wilson and Ford Foundation fellowships; prizes for his plays from the University of California; and the Nicholas Roerich poetry prize from Story Line Press.

Lewis Alpaugh has performed in genres that range from country and bluegrass to jazz and traditional Celtic music. His compositions have been performed and recorded by a variety of artists from Irish flautist, James Galway, to Nova Scotia's Rankin Family, Florida's Nature Coast Concert Band, and the San Francisco Bay Area's Lowell Trio. He has co-authored a popular collection of Acadian folk songs and hosts the syndicated radio show, "Backroads," which features country and traditional music and interviews with well-known artists.

SYNOPSIS

While writing a term paper on François Villon, a University of Colorado French major finds himself behind a scaffold where his literary hero has just escaped hanging. François has three days to get out of Paris, during which he befriends the student, answering his questions with a tragicomic flair that rockets the life and times of France's greatest medieval poet into the 21st century. The student introduces the poet to something called "pot" (as well as "The American Dream") and finds himself participating in a burglary; a visit to the court of the wealthiest man in France; and incarceration in an underground prison. Along the way, our Colorado Yankee in Villon's Paris (named "Denver" by François) falls for a lovely chanteuse at the poet's favorite watering hole. The last scene returns "Denver" to 21st century America with some unexpected twists out of *The Wizard of Oz*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

There are 32 Characters in *Yesteryear*—but only 9 Actors*

The actor who plays François Villon plays *only* Villon. The actor who plays Denver (aka Student, aka Stephen Pleshette) plays *only* the student in his three manifestations. The Generic actors also play the individual characters as noted below and in the script.

GENERIC CHARACTERS

(and the individual characters their actors play)

Nobleman: plays Colin De Cayeux, Charles of Orléans, Mimed Villon, Barfly 1

Young Woman: plays Yvette, Ysabeau, Maria of Cleves, Katherine De Vauselles, Yvonne

Old Woman: plays Mlle. deBruyère, Villon's Mother, La Belle Heulmiere, Aunt Emma, Barfly 3

Cleric: plays Guillaume Villon, Abbot of St. Denis, Uncle Hank, Barfly 2

Beggar: plays Gilles, Guy Tabarie, Bishop Thibaut d'Aussigny, Frank, Barfly 4

Reaper 1 & Reaper 2: Sinister, corpse-like figures from "*La Danse Macabre*" who play Barflies 5 and 6 and serve as stagehands and extras (played by actresses to balance male/female choruses).

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS

François Villon: Greatest medieval French poet, born 1431; banished from Paris in 1463

Denver/aka Student/aka Stephen Pleshette: American Student, stranded in 15th Century Paris

Yvette: Barmaid and chanteuse at the Pine Cone Tavern

Barflies 1, 2, 3, 4: Regulars at the Pine Cone Tavern

Mademoiselle de Bruyères: Senior citizen and proud owner of a rock called "The Devil's Fart"

Guillaume Villon: François' foster father and Chaplain of St. Benoît-le-Betourné

Villon's Mother: Who wisely left young François with Guillaume Villon, after her husband died

Mimed Villon: Dressed to look like François, acting him in dumb show re both love and death

Gilles: Friend of Villon

Ysabeau: Friend of Villon

Colin de Cayeux: Petty criminal, Coquillard, friend of Villon, and lover of Yvette

Guy Tabarie: Witless petty criminal and acquaintance of Colin de Cayeux and Villon

Charles, Duke of Orléans: Courtly poet, patron of the arts, and wealthiest man in France

Maria of Cleves: Charles' third wife—mother of King Louis XII and an accomplished soprano

Thibaut d'Aussigny: Bishop of Orléans and enemy of Villon

La Belle Heulmiere: Decrepit old woman, once the most beautiful courtesan in Paris

Katherine de Vauselles: A lady, once adored, now hated by Villon

Abbot of St. Denis: Caught in *flagrante delicto* with Katherine de Vauselles

Uncle Hank: Stephen Pleshette's uncle

Aunt Emma: Stephen Pleshette's aunt

Frank: Stephen Pleshette's brother

Yvonne: Stephen Pleshette's 21st Century fiancée who looks a lot like 15th Century Yvette

***NOTE:** Designed to allow small acting companies to perform *Yesteryear* and play with its theme of identity. Larger companies may prefer to undouble some of the roles.

SETS

Sets are painted façades on poles, easily twirled about by the Reapers to change scenes. Other than that all that's required is furniture—desk, bed, bar, tables, chairs, stools, etc.

1. The Cemetery of the Holy Innocents
2. The Pine Cone Tavern Exterior / Interior façade
3. Mademoiselle de Bruyères' Cottage
4. Arched doorway of the Church of St. Benoît le Betourné
5. Villon's quarters inside the Church of St. Benoît le Betourné
6. An inner chamber at the College of Navarre
7. Courtroom at Duke Charles of Orléans' castle in Blois
8. Underground prison at Meung-sur-Loire
9. Another part of the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents with *La Danse Macabre*
10. A bedroom in the Abbey of St. Denis
11. Stephen Pleshette's student quarters in Denver, Colorado

SONGS*

To listen to *Yesteryear* songs via Dropbox copy and paste this link into your browser:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4pz0bhdgv3sxf1c/AACnDIdxwLvgYz1avQ33PDuda?dl=0>

"I Am François"	<i>Villon, Denver</i>
"Tavern Ubi Sunt"	<i>Yvette, Barflies, Reapers</i>
"The Devil's Fart"	<i>Students, Mademoiselle de Bruyères, Reapers, Nobleman</i>
"Wild Oats"	<i>Guillaume Villon</i>
"I Killed A Man"	<i>Villon, Denver</i>
"Language Lesson"	<i>Colin de Cayeux</i>
"Upward Mobility"	<i>Colin de Cayeux, Guy Tabarie, Barflies, Villon</i>
"Falling Angels"	<i>Yvette, Colin de Cayeux</i>
"Upward Mobility Reprise"	<i>Guy, Colin de Cayeux, Villon</i>
"So Much One Cries Noël"	<i>François' Mother, Carolers</i>
"Springtime for Charles"	<i>Maria of Cleves</i>
"The Pirate and the King"	<i>Charles of Orléans, Villon, Courtiers</i>
"Until the Morning Star"	<i>Villon</i>
"Yesteryear"	<i>Nobleman, Young & Old Woman, Cleric, Beggar, Reapers</i>
"One Woman Brothel"	<i>Old Woman</i>
"Rest Ye Merry"	<i>Villon, Katherine de Vauselles</i>
"Wrong Side of Heaven"	<i>Denver, Villon, Beggar, Old Woman</i>
"Flies in Milk"	<i>Villon</i>
"Waltzing My Heirs"	<i>Villon, Denver, Yvette</i>
"Wild Oats Reprise"	<i>Guillaume Villon</i>
"Aubade"	<i>Denver, Yvette</i>
"The Reaper's Stair"	<i>Colin de Cayeux, Guy Tabarie, Villon</i>
"Return from Yesteryear"	<i>Stephen Pleshette (aka Denver)</i>
"Envoi"	<i>Villon</i>

***NOTE ON DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN RECORDINGS AND SCRIPT**

Some songs were recorded before lyrics were finalized. Script wording is correct in all cases.

YESTERYEAR

Three Days in Paris with François Villon

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The Cemetery of the Holy Innocents

“I Am François”

François Villon is standing on a scaffold at back stage center—motionless, in half light—with a rope around his neck. Five Generic Characters—Nobleman, Young Woman, Old Woman, Cleric, Beggar—are also motionless, at various positions on stage.

Reaper 1 appears, stage right; Reaper 2, stage left. They dance among the Generics to the music of “Yesteryear,” pulling on their arms, as if to lead them offstage; but all remain frozen.

The Reapers approach Villon and try to dance him off the scaffold; but, like the Generics, he doesn’t budge. Then, as the music ends, there’s a drum roll, and a spotlight comes up on Villon. The Reapers point at him from either side, presenting the star of “Yesteryear” to the audience.

As the Reapers cartwheel offstage, Villon comes to life; removes the rope from his neck; and jumps onto the stage. As he does so, the Student peeps out from behind the scaffold. (Although the audience can see him, Villon’s back being turned, he does not.)

Villon advances to the Nobleman, who comes to life as Villon sings, “I Am François,” while going through the motions of robbing him.

VILLON: I am François, maybe you know me?
Perhaps when I was short of coin,
I pulled you deep into a doorway
And held a knife against your groin.

And emptied out your bulging wallet...
And stripped your jewelry, left you stark...
And warned your jaws to stick together...
And cursed you gently down the dark!

(As Villon turns from the Nobleman, he sees the Student gawking at him from behind the scaffold and shrugs, as if to say, “Who the hell are you?” As François sings to each of the remaining Generic Characters, the Student continues to peek out from behind the scaffold, venturing forth a step or two at times to get a better view, but scurrying back to his hiding place each time Villon notices him. The Young Woman is next to be addressed. She comes alive and struts her stuff, dancing flirtatiously, as Villon sings to her.)

I am François. Maybe you know me?
Perhaps in love, perhaps in lust,
You gave the nod that says, “I’m willing”
To do what man and woman must.

And as we tumbled into darkness,
There was no place, there was no time.
No voices crying, “I am François!”
No he nor she; no me nor I’m.

(Villon addresses The Old Woman, who likes his first verse very much; his second, not at all.)

I am François. Maybe you know me?
I’d pass your window as a boy
And stare in awe, bewitched by your beauty,
As if you were Hélene of Troy.

The boy is gone—and where’s your beauty?
You’ll soon be rotting in the ground.
Go curse old age for stealing love’s booty.
All flesh must find what you have found.

(As Villon sings, the Cleric starts to bless him but, realizing that he is being disparaged, puts his hands over his ears.)

I am François. Maybe you know me?
You called me “rogue.” You called me “thief.”
You threw me in your deepest dungeon
And tortured me beyond belief.

Until the King passed through your city.
Gave all your pris’ners amnesty.
Like Jesus Christ, King Louis had pity.
Your malice failed. He set me free.

(Villon addresses the Beggar, who holds his cup out, silently pleading for alms.)

I am François. Maybe you know me?
Cast out of Paris, life askew,
Cold and hungry, ragged and homeless,
I held my cup out—just like you.

I begged the street. I begged the palace.
I learned to wheedle, not demand.
To swallow pride and grovel for pennies.
But why go on? You understand.

(As lights dim, the Reapers dance back on stage and lead the Generics away in a Dance-of-Death-like chain, as Villon strolls to front center and sings to the audience.)

I am François. Maybe you know me?
I wrote about last winter’s snow.
I simply asked, “Where did it go to?”
If you’re like me you still don’t know.

You need to make your will in earnest.
The Sorbonne bell's about to chime.
The night is chill. The snow is falling.
There is no time. There is no Time.

(Lights come up full and Villon turns his attention to the Student, hiding behind the scaffold.)

VILLON *(Shouting)*: You can come out now!

(The Student emerges. He is wearing jeans and a Denver Broncos tee shirt, and holding an iPhone. Villon and the Student approach each other, meeting at center stage.)

STUDENT *(Realizing who is standing before him)*: O–M–G. François Fuckin' Villon!

(He steps back, and takes a photo of Villon. During the play, he will frequently take photographs—but Villon and the other 15th Century characters appear to be wholly unaware of this activity.)

VILLON *(Looking him over)*: And you? What are you doing skulking about in the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents? Is that a weapon in your hand? Where did you get those funny clothes?

STUDENT: I'm just a poor student...

VILLON *(Sympathetically)*: Ah... I was *un pauvre escollier* once. At the Sorbonne. Are they still teaching Scotus? Aquinas?

STUDENT: I don't go to the Sorbonne. And they don't teach Divinity at my school. I'm majoring in French with a minor in English *(Villon suddenly grabs the Student by the throat so tightly that he can barely eke out the rest of his sentence)* at the U-NI-VER-SI-TY of COL-OR-A-DO in DEN-VER.

VILLON *(Relaxing his grip a little)*: *Anglais?* We've been trying to run you bastards out of France for nearly 100 years! Are you a spy? Is King Edward plotting to retake Paris?

STUDENT *(Gasping for breath)*: *Non! Pas Anglais!* I'm AMERICAN! I love France!—I love Joan of Arc!—and I love your poetry!

VILLON *(Suddenly animated)*: You know *ma poésie*?

STUDENT: I'm reading it for French class. Your *Testament*—your marvelous ballads. I'm reading your poems in the year two thousand and fourteen. At least I *was*.

VILLON: *Deux mille quatorze?* And you LOVE *ma poésie*?

STUDENT: Everyone does. Well, everyone who still reads poetry. Most of my countrymen are too busy with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram....

VILLON: But *some* still read *ma poésie*? Six centuries from now? *(Daring him)* Recite a line.

STUDENT: How about the most famous question in French literature? *(Reciting)*:

Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?

VILLON: Your accent's *terrible*. But that's one of my favorites, too.

STUDENT: The poet Rossetti translated it into... *(Catching himself)* AMERICAN... as: "But where are the snows of yesteryear?" He invented the word—YESTERYEAR—for your poem.

VILLON: You must thank him for me. *(Aside)* He's broken into my room and stolen my *Testament*. *(To Student)* Do you know my Quatrain? Where I imagine being hanged?

STUDENT: Your celebrated Quatrain! I had to translate it for French Honors:

I am François. Cry alas! alas!
Born in Paris, near Pontoise—
And with a rope, stronger than grass,
My neck will feel the weight of my ass!

Professor Boudreaux said it was the best translation of your Quatrain *ever*.

VILLON (*Aside*): Reads my poems six centuries from now in a country that doesn't yet exist. *Fou, non?* But I just wrote those lines in my head—up there—waiting to be hanged. I've yet to write them down or recite them to—*anyone*. Is he from *Le Diable?* (*Preening*) Or am I truly *un poète éternel?* (*He smiles at the thought and extends his hand*) Welcome to Paris. I am François.

STUDENT: Awesome! (*He extends his hand, but draws it back*): I am... I am... Odd. I know where I'm from... what I was doing before I got here. I remember Uncle Hank, Aunt Emma, brother Frank, Professor Boudreaux—everyone back in Denver. But I can't remember my name!

VILLON: How did you get here?

STUDENT: It was Friday evening. I started writing my term paper—on *you*. I thought I'd loosen up first by smoking a little pot. (*Villon is puzzled by the word, which the Student interprets as disapproval*) It's okay. Pot is legal in Colorado. (*Villon still looks puzzled*) Here, I have some joints in my bag.

(*He takes one out; lights it; takes a drag; and passes it to Villon, motioning him to do the same. Villon does so and has a coughing fit; but he tokes again; and again—and smiles at the result.*)

STUDENT: It's like that red-black wine you say you're going to drink before you leave this world. Only better! Anyway, as I typed your name, suddenly, I found myself behind that scaffold. (*Slaps his face*) But I'm not high. Nor dreaming. I'm *really* here!

VILLON (*Takes a cross from around his neck and brandishes it at the Student*): Satan! Get thee behind me! Go back to Hell! Or America! (*He still has the joint in his hand and takes another drag*) But leave me some of this *pot* before you go. (*Seeing that the Student is not exorcised*) So. You're not a fiend. Then what you say... must be true.

STUDENT: It is. And I *want* to go home. But it seems like I'm stuck in... what year is it?

VILLON: *Quatorze cent soixante-trois.*

STUDENT: 1463. The year you leave Paris and disappear into the provinces—*forever*.

VILLON (*Pointing at the scaffold*): I was to be hanged on Mountfaucon.

STUDENT: The Hill of Falcons!

VILLON: Where the birds peck out your eyes. But my sentence has been commuted to banishment. I have three days to put my affairs in order and leave Paris.

STUDENT: Today is?

VILLON: *Vendredi.*

STUDENT: *Friday.* The day I began writing my paper. And when must you leave?

VILLON (*Counting on fingers*): *Samedi, Dimanche, Lundi—Mardi.*

STUDENT: *Tuesday.* The day my paper's due. (*Typing on his iPhone*) I'm going to Google *Ask dot com* to see if someone can tell me how to get back to Denver. Meanwhile, can I tag along—so you can tell me about Paris, your poetry, and those folks you were singing to?

VILLON: *OMG. Ask dot com.* Like my friend, Colin de Cayeux, you speak a secret language. *(Pause)* Still, we are brothers in banishment. Me from Paris. You from “Denver.” I am François. *(He extends his hand again, but the Student still can’t recall his name)* Until you remember the name your parents gave you: You are “Denver.”

DENVER *(Completing the handshake, resigned):* “Denver” it is.

VILLON *(Looking at the scaffold while fingering his throat):* Same old neck. New friend. This calls for a celebration! What better way to introduce you to Paris than to take you to The Pine Cone. You like girls? Wait’ll you see Yvette.

(As they walk back stage, Reaper 1 and 2 remove the scaffold and install The Pine Cone Tavern exterior. As Villon opens the tavern door, Denver turns and sings a cappella to the audience.)

DENVER: I am Denver. Maybe you know me?
Perhaps when I was lost in France,
We got together at The Pine Cone,
Where Paris goes to drink & dance.

blackout

SCENE TWO

The Pine Cone Tavern

“Tavern Ubi Sunt”

The Reapers twirl the outer façade of The Pine Cone around so it suggests the interior of a medieval tavern; then quickly provide a bar with six stools, a table, and chairs. When lights come up, The Nobleman, Cleric, and Old Woman, dressed as Barflies 1, 2, 3, are sitting on three of the six stools. The Reapers enter and jump onto right and left stools, leaving one stool empty. Yvette, played by the Young Woman, rises from behind the bar, humming “Tavern Ubi Sunt.”

BARFLY 1: Sing it again, Yvette.

YVETTE: Not a chance. All you louts are good for is a jig.

BARFLY 3 *(Primping her hair):* Yvette’s right. You don’t appreciate beauty...

(She is interrupted by Barfly 4, played by the Beggar, who enters and shouts to Yvette from across the room, then seats himself at the empty stool.)

BARFLY 4: I just saw the ringer climb the Sorbonne tower.

YVETTE: Six bells! François is about to swing...

(As the bells sound, everyone but the Reapers close eyes and bow heads. As they do, the door opens and Villon and Denver sneak in, Villon motioning Denver to sit at the table.)

YVETTE *(Eyes still closed, as the last bell sounds):* It’s finished. François is dead.

(Villon comes up behind Yvette and cups his hands around her eyes. She turns and lets out a shriek. Seeing what they think is an apparition, Barflies 1, 2, 3, and 4 jump off their stools and run for the exits, where they turn and look back, crossing themselves.)

YVETTE *(To the Barflies):* Idiots! Do you think he’s a ghost? *(To Villon)* So. You’ve slipped the noose again. How did you manage this time?

VILLON (*As the Barflies return*): I shudder to think how much my father had to pay. Still, it's not as good as it sounds

YVETTE: What do you mean?

VILLON: I shan't be hanged.

YVETTE: But?

VILLON (*Anguished*): Banished for ten years! I have three days to leave Paris.

YVETTE: Still, you're alive.

VILLON: True.

YVETTE (*Angrily*): While Colin is still swinging on the gibbet! He and Gilles condemned, while you got off with a fine for a crime you were even more guilty of, being their leader! And although you did nothing to deserve it this time—once again, François Villon escapes hanging!

VILLON: Yvette... You know I couldn't save Colin. I leave Paris in three days. (*Pointing to Denver*) He says *forever*. Let's part as the friends we've always been.

YVETTE: Sorry. I'd be crying like a baby, had you been hanged. What are you drinking?

VILLON (*Sitting down next to Denver*): Morillon! The same for my friend. (*To Denver*) Stand up. (*To everyone in the bar*) May I present—Monsieur Denver...

BARFLY 1: He wears funny clothes.

BARFLY 2: Where did you find him? In an orphanage?

BARFLY 3 (*Ogling him*): Who cares *where*? He's *cute*. Hey, honey, do you have a girlfriend?

VILLON: Tell them where you're from, Denver.

DENVER: I'm from America—a country that will be discovered 29 years from now by an Italian sailor named Christopher Columbus. I'm from the 21st century. (*Grasping the absurdity of his situation*) It's like a Mark Twain novel. I'm *A Colorado Yankee in François Villon's Bar!*

(*The Barflies respond with drunken laughter.*)

BARFLY 4: We don't care where you're from, as long as you're not English and like good wine.

BARFLY 1: There are 200 taverns in Paris. But Yvette's is the best.

BARFLY 2 (*Turning to Villon, now at the table with Denver*): We're glad you're back, François. If only for three days.

BARFLY 1 (*Drunkenly*): Sing that song again, Yvette...

VILLON (*Suddenly interested*): What song?

YVETTE: One Colin brought back from Orléans. (*Indicating the male barflies*) I made the mistake of singing it to these oafs. It's actually an old English...

BARFLY 4: Down with the *Anglais!*

BARFLY 3: Remember Joan! Burned at Rouen!

VILLON: Let her speak!

YVETTE: Duke Charles translated it when he was imprisoned in the Tower of London. I used to sing it for Colin after the bar closed.

VILLON: Can *we* hear it?

YVETTE (*Pointing to the male Barflies*): If these louts will keep quiet!

BARFLIES 1, 2, 4 (*In chorus*): We promise, Yvette.

(*Yvette seats herself on the bar and sings "Tavern Ubi Sunt."*)

YVETTE: Where are they that went before?
Greyhounds led and falcons bore.
Rode through forests without fear,
Chasing fox and wolf and deer.

Where the ladies in Love's bower?
Wearing gold to flaunt their power
Over courtly suitors gay—
Where the banter? Where the play?

Eating. Drinking. Ever glad.
Joie de vivre. Never sad.
Then in a twinkling of an eye
Their cups were all drained dry.

(The ensuing chorus is sung drunkenly by the three male Barflies, who roll their eyes and slosh their wine glasses as Yvette, Villon, and Denver look on in disgust.)

BARFLIES And their lives were all forlorn,
1, 2, & 4: Their lives were all forlorn.
As if they were never born,
Their lives were all forlorn.

VILLON (*Brandishing his dagger*): Interrupt again—and you die!

(Frightened, all three turn back to the bar and keep their heads down as Yvette continues.)

YVETTE: Where's the laughter? Where's the song?
Bosoms soft. And muscles strong.
Lords and ladies, where are they?
Well has come to well-away!

Joan of Arc is ashes now.
Blossoms fallen from their bough.
Raise your cup. And drink it down.
Smile today. Tomorrow frown.

Eating. Drinking. Ever glad.
Joie de vivre. Never sad.
Then in a twinkling of an eye
Their cups were all drained dry.

(All applaud, as if the song is over. The Reaper Barflies—whom no one can see or hear—get off their stools, approach the audience, and sing with sinister solemnity, pointing to the mortal men and women behind them.)

REAPERS: And their lives were all forlorn,
Their lives were all forlorn.
As if they were never born,
Their lives were all forlorn.

(The Reapers return to the bar, take the four mortal Barflies in hand, and dance them offstage. Yvette reprises the first verse of “Tavern Ubi Sunt” to a rapt Villon and a mesmerized Denver, who is already showing signs of falling in love.)

YVETTE: Where are they that went before?
Greyhounds led and falcons bore.
Rode through forests without fear,
Chasing fox and wolf and deer.

blackout

SCENE THREE

On the Streets of Paris

“The Devil’s Fart” • “Wild Oats” • “I Killed A Man”

Reaper 1 enters in half light and twirls The Pine Cone pole so it becomes the exterior façade again. Reaper 2 wheels the façade of Mademoiselle De Bruyères’ cottage into position back stage right. Both Reapers carry a huge boulder on stage and tuck part of it under the head of Denver, who is sleeping, stage right. As the Reapers exit and lights come up full, Denver, tormented by a fly, slaps his face, wakes—and sees Villon, asleep, stage left.

DENVER: François! Wake up! It’s the first of your last three days in Paris.

VILLON *(Shakes himself awake and sees Denver):* So... you’re not a dream.

DENVER *(Holding head in hands):* Too much wine last night. *(Fondly)* Speaking of dreams... Yvette! Does she have a boyfriend?

VILLON *(Rising):* Yvette’s in love with Colin. She’ll never get over him. By the way, your head is resting on *Le Pet au Diable*.

DENVER *(Jumps up, shocked, and runs his finger over those words, painted, graffiti-like, on the boulder):* The Devil’s Fart?

VILLON: Our city’s most notorious official landmark. In the yard of Mademoiselle de Bruyères.

(Mlle. de Bruyères, played by the Old Woman, opens her door and shakes a stick at Villon.)

DENVER: You wrote a poem about it.

VILLON: My *Romance of the Devil’s Fart*. I left it to my father in my *Legacy*.

DENVER: But it never came down to us. Some think you never wrote it—that your mention of it was merely a joke.

VILLON: Joke? *(Preening)* Everyone in Paris loves my *Pet au Diable*. *(He goes to stage front and addresses the audience)* You have my *Legacy*? My *Testament*? *(Throwing up his hands)* But you don’t have my *Fart*? *(Returning to Denver)* If I give you the *gist*—will you take my *Fart* back to America with you?

DENVER: Of course. Medieval scholars will be thrilled to get even a whiff of it.

VILLON: Here, then, are three of my classmates with the *essence* of what *this* *(he points to the boulder)* was all about....

(The Cleric, Nobleman, and Beggar come out of The Pine Cone, dressed as students, and stand before Le Pet au Diable. The Reapers appear at the same time and stand at either end of the

boulder. The Students pass a flask around, taking swigs as they sing “The Devil’s Fart.” (Whenever that moniker occurs, however, it is sung basso by the Reapers.)

REAPERS: The Devil’s Fart... The Devil’s Fart...

STUDENTS: On our way to the Sorbonne,
We bachelors of art
Would pass by an enormous stone
Paris calls

REAPERS: The Devil’s Fart...

STUDENT 1 (*Standing in front of the boulder*):

Students of Divinity,
Philosophers at heart,
We’d read Scotus on Infinity,
Standing on

REAPERS: The Devil’s Fart...

(Mademoiselle de Bruyères, played by the Old Woman, rushes into the yard, shaking a stick.)

STUDENT 2: Into the yard would rush a crone,
Shaking her stick:

BRUYÈRES: Get off my stone!
Ruffians! Hoodlums! Vagabonds! Depart!
Beware the pungent curse of...

REAPERS: The Devil’s Fart!!

(As Student 3 sings, Villon embraces the boulder.)

STUDENT 3: Forbidden fruit, that boulder there,
Smote François with Love’s dart.
He longed to touch, to hold her,
To possess

REAPERS: The Devil’s Fart...

(Villon struggles to lift the boulder, without success, as Student 2 sings.)

STUDENT 2: The Sabine women were a breeze.
Lucrece was not that smart.
Far easier those girls to seize
Than to budge

REAPERS: The Devil’s Fart...

(As Students 1 and 2 sing their lines, the Reapers lift the boulder onto a wagon and wheel it offstage. Mademoiselle de Bruyères rushes into the yard again and sings her line, after which the Reapers stick their heads out from the wings to sing their refrain.)

STUDENT 1: One moonless night, there, in the yard:
Shadowy figures, toiling hard,

STUDENT 2: With ropes and planks, a tripod, and a cart.

Come dawn

BRUYÈRES: Sweet Christ, it's gone!

REAPERS: The Devil's Fart...

(Student 3, who exited earlier with Villon, returns in his Nobleman robe to play Authority. Mademoiselle de Bruyères, whom we know from earlier forays is quite spry, fakes a hobble, so as to plead her case with maximum pathos. Reapers are back on stage to sing their final refrain.)

STUDENT 2: Age hobbles to Authority:

BRUYÈRES: Youth's torn my world apart!

Prince, grant my suit priority

And restore

REAPERS: The Devil's Fart...

(Students 2 and 3 sing the first two and a half lines of the final verse. As the Nobleman shouts, "Who could have done this," and everyone sings the last line, Villon enters with The Devil's Fart in his arms which he tosses into the air. Turns out, it's just a big balloon.)

It wasn't all that wondrous

How they found the missing stone.

The Prince asked, "Who could have done this?"

And we all cried—FRANÇOIS VILLON!

(Reaper 1 opens a valve on the "boulder"—and it collapses with a loud whooshing sound, provided by the orchestra. The Reapers bow to the audience and drag what's left of Le Pet au Diable offstage, followed by the Students and Mademoiselle de Bruyères, who shakes her stick at Villon on her way out.)

VILLON: Mademoiselle de Bruyères was right. The stone *was* cursed. When the watch came to retrieve it they tore up our lodgings and beat us. Our Rector protested, marching through Paris with 800 students! The watch attacked, injuring scores and stabbing a student to death. All over a prank! *(Pause)* If I could go back, I would never have removed that stone from her yard. I could have been hanged.

DENVER: Why weren't you?

(As Villon speaks, Reaper 1 twirls the façade of Mademoiselle de Bruyères' cottage around so it becomes the arched door of a medieval church.)

VILLON: My foster father—no, *true* father—Guillaume Villon, Chaplain of Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné (my home) stood between me and the law. *(As lights dim, Gilles, played by the Beggar, enters towards the church)* Look! It's my friend Gilles, rousing the good old man out of bed.

(A spotlight illuminates the church door, which Gilles raps on frantically until Guillaume Villon opens it and steps out. Gilles whispers in his ear, then squats at the right of the church door while Guillaume rubs his eyes; then sings "Wild Oats," as Villon and Denver look on.)

GUILLAUME: My reverie shattered
By furious rapping—
François is in trouble again.
Cavorting in taverns
Or brawling in alleys,
Still I can remember when...

(Spotlight up on Villon's Mother, played by the Old Woman, who enters stage right as Guillaume finishes his first verse. She holds a doll, representing young François, by the hand.)

He stood by his mother
In this very doorway,
A fatherless waif of three.
With winter upon her
And nothing to feed him,
She left poor François with me.

(Spotlight off Villon's Mother as Guillaume sings the song's refrain.)

Wild Oats... Wild Oats...
Oats every youth has to sow.
François has been sowing them, longer than most.
Rank weeds are beginning to grow.

A promising scholar,
He quickly learned Latin,
Was proud to be called *Villon*.
Could have been a bishop
Or maybe a cardinal—
Or even a pope on a throne.

His first fling was merely
A college boy's caper—
Stealing an old woman's rock!
Next, singing satirical
Songs at The Pine Cone,
Giving the bourgeois a shock.

Wild Oats... Wild Oats...
Oats every youth has to sow.
François has been sowing them, longer than most.
Rank weeds are beginning to show.

And now here's a stranger
With terrible tidings—
François has been stabbed in a fight...
It's off to the barber

To pay for his dressing...
And make sure my son is all right....

(Spotlight up on Villon's Mother—doll in hand again—as Guillaume sings his last verse.)

I'm still François' father,
I'll always stand by him—
Whether he's right or he's wrong.
That cold, hungry child
Still stands in my doorway.
I doubt that he'll ever belong.

(Guillaume takes the doll from Villon's Mother and kisses it on the forehead. The Reapers enter and lead Villon's Mother offstage. Gilles and Guillaume cross the stage. As they pass François, Guillaume stops; compares the doll he is carrying to Villon; then sings to his wayward son.)

Wild Oats... Wild Oats...
Oats every youth has to sow.
I fear you've been sowing them longer than most.
How many? We may never know.

(As Gilles and Guillaume exit, stage left, lights come up full as the Sorbonne bell rings.)

VILLON: Twelve bells. Half my first day gone. And here I am wasting it with *you*.

DENVER (*Hurt*): I'm your only chance to answer the many questions future readers have about you, and I'm not worth your time? (*Feeling his oats*) Besides, we have much in common. I'm studying medieval French—and you're a medieval Frenchman. If I get the fellowship I've applied for, I'll be earning *my* Masters at the Sorbonne. And now I've learned that your father died when you were three, and you were raised by Guillaume. My parents died when I was three, and I was raised by my Aunt Emma and Uncle Hank.

VILLON (*Sitting down in front of the Abbey*): Yes, Denver, we are alike. Except for . . .

DENVER: What?

VILLON: Did you ever *kill* a man?

DENVER (*Shocked*): Of course not! I was too young to go to Iraq or Afghanistan....

(Villon gets off the church stoop to make way for Mimed Villon, played by the Nobleman, who comes on stage, wearing Villon's distinctive cap and suit. Gilles and Ysabeau, played by the Young Woman, enter and sit on the stoop to either side of Mimed Villon. While Villon sings "I Killed A Man," Gilles, Ysabeau, Mimed Villon, and Phillipe Sermoise, played by Reaper 1, act out the ongoing incident in dumb show. As Sermoise attacks Mimed Villon, Gilles and Ysabeau flee behind the church, where they peep out to observe the action.)

VILLON:

I killed a man... I killed a MAN....

On a summer evening, I was on the abbey stoop with Gilles and Ysabeau.

We had watched the sun go down and we were basking in the splendor of the afterglow

When a man came round the corner (perfect stranger) someone I had never seen before.

But the moment that he saw me, he was shouting, running at me like a raging boar.

He attacked me with his dagger, slashed my lip, and I was bleeding. I was all alone.
Then he chased me through an alleyway. I stumbled and I fell, and I picked up a stone.
I arose, continued running, he was forty feet behind me, with his knife in hand.
When I ran into a wall, I was at his mercy, trembling, I could hardly stand.

I cried, "Friend, why are you angry?" He was 20 feet behind me. There was no way out.
My offense an utter mystery, but that he was going to murder me, I had no doubt.
I was David to Goliath, with no weapon to defend me but a cobblestone.
I took aim and hurled it at him, struck him on his head, he fell to earth. I heard him groan.

(Sermoise is on the ground, clutching his head. Mimed Villon looks on in horror.)

VILLON:

I killed a man... I killed a man....

(As Villon sings the next verse, Gilles and Ysabeau come out from behind the Abbey and help Mimed Villon hobble stage left to where a Barber, played by Reaper 2, dresses his wound. Meanwhile, Sermoise has crawled offstage and by the time Gilles gets there is gone. Gilles rubs his finger on the ground as if scooping up blood and holds it up for Villon and Ysabeau to see.)

I was bleeding so profusely, I was feeling so light-headed that I almost swooned.
Gilles and Ysabeau on either arm, I hobbled to a barber who could dress my wound.
I sent Gilles to help the stranger, there was no one where he'd fallen—just a pool of blood.
I cried, "Go and rouse my father, tell him François is in trouble—things do not look good!"

(As Villon sings his final verse, Guillaume enters and, after comforting Mimed Villon and paying the Barber, he, Gilles, and Ysabeau lead Mimed Villon offstage right.)

When my father came to help me, he advised me to leave Paris, with the early dawn.
Till he found out what had happened to the stranger who attacked me I had best begone.
He said were I charged with murder, he'd make sure the Provost knew that I was not to blame.
I fled Paris in a frenzy, spent six months outside the city, till my pardon came.

Two pardons. One from the City. One from the Church. His name was Philippe Sermoise. A priest. I never found out why he hated me. He died shortly after I left Paris—but not before proclaiming me blameless. I still have the scar he left on my lip. Nothing can erase the scar on my heart.

(As Villon has been speaking, the Nobleman, Beggar, Young Woman, and Old Woman, dressed in black, cross the stage, following the Reapers, who carry a casket. Villon and Denver follow the funeral cortège offstage, singing.)

VILLON: I killed a man...

DENVER: Say what they can...

VILLON: I killed a man...

DENVER: You didn't plan... to

BOTH: Kill a man....

blackout

SCENE FOUR

Villon's Quarters inside the Church of Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné “Language Lesson”

The Reapers twirl the church door around so it becomes the door to Villon's quarters inside the church; then furnish his room with bed, desk, bookcase, dresser, and chairs. As they dance offstage, the door opens and Villon and Denver enter.

VILLON (*Shushing Denver as he goes about the room, looking under bed, dresser, etc.*): Shhh!

DENVER: What are you doing?

VILLON: Colin said he'd meet me here. I want to make sure he hasn't arrived early.

DENVER: Colin De Cayeux? Wasn't he hanged six weeks ago? Yvette said his body still dangles from the gibbet on Mountfaucon.

VILLON: You're here six centuries before you're born, and you have a problem with someone who's been dead just a few weeks dropping by for a visit? Get used to it, Denver! You're living in—what did your friend Rossetti call it—Yesteryear? (*Suddenly startled by the Sorbonne bell*) Three bells. I must finish my *Testament* before I leave Paris.

(He rummages in his desk and pulls out a sheath of parchment.)

DENVER (*Rushing to the desk, excited*): The manuscript of *Le Testament* in your own hand? Sotheby's would pay millions for this!

VILLON: I must give it to Yvette before I leave Paris. There are cops, thieves, pimps, money lenders, church and city officials—the Provost himself—who will want me hanged for what I say about them here. (*Preening*) It will be a must read for everyone in Paris! (*As Villon speaks, fingers come up from behind the desk; find the manuscript; and disappear with it.*) How would you like to see Yvette again tonight? (*Denver brightens*) Not *tonight* night. Tonight, seven years ago—when she was (*Figuring on his fingers*) seventeen.

DENVER: Tonight or any night!

VILLON: Last night we celebrated my escape from Mountfaucon. Tonight, Christmas Eve, seven years ago. (*Turning back to his desk, he reaches for his manuscript but finds nothing.*) My *Testament's* gone! (*Quickly figuring it out, shouting*) COLIN! SHOW YOURSELF. I KNOW YOU'RE HERE.

(Colin De Cayeux, played by the Nobleman, pops up from behind the desk, manuscript in hand.)

COLIN: If I knew where “Sotheby's” was I'd of been out of here with these poems five minutes ago. The one about the whore in love with her pimp is my favorite. I also like your Christmas carol. Yvette should sing it tonight at The Pine Cone.

VILLON: Why didn't you show yourself when we came in?

COLIN: How could I? When you came through that door it was January, 1463, and I was being eaten by jackdaws on Mountfaucon. Now, it's Christmas Eve, 1456—and I am very much alive.

VILLON (*Puts his manuscript in his desk, then turns to Colin, who has been sizing up Denver*): Let me introduce you to Monsieur Denver. He's studying my poetry six centuries from now in a country that won't be discovered until 1492. (*Aside, to Denver*) I'm getting tired of saying that.

COLIN: He wears funny clothes. (*Taking Villon aside*) *Fou, non?*

VILLON (*Whispering*): I thought so, at first. But he's telling the truth.

COLIN (*Makes the ding-a-ling sign*): You're both *fou*. But who cares? It's been a long time since I had a drink. Even longer, since I kissed Yvette. (*Confidentially to Villon*) And we have business to discuss....

(*Denver, bristling at Colin's mention of Yvette, confronts him, face to face.*)

DENVER: I know who you are. You're a Coquillard! A hoodlum who robs innocent pilgrims on their way to holy shrines. You're a bad influence on François and a disaster for Yvette.

COLIN (*Turning to Villon, incredulous*): You told this mad man I was Coquillard?

VILLON: I told him nothing. And he's *not* mad.

COLIN: Then how does he know?

VILLON: The same way he knows a poem by heart that exists only in my head. (*Aside*) He's in love with Yvette. But I trust him. And you can too.

COLIN (*Laughing*): You love Yvette? Does *she*... requite... your... *love*?

DENVER: I only met Yvette last night. But one thing I know. *You* don't deserve her!

COLIN: *Didn't*.

DENVER: Sorry. *Didn't*.

COLIN (*Grabbing Denver by the collar*): Tonight, Yvette is *mine*! So much as flirt with her, and I'll slit your throat. (*Softer*) Tomorrow, I'll be swinging again on Mountfaucon. If she likes you then, who am I—my pecker eaten away by crows—to object?

DENVER: You're a... (*Desperately seeking for the right word*) cad!

COLIN: Cad... rascal... vagabond.... How many young men like François and me can find honest work where you come from?

DENVER: I'm not proud of America's unemployment rate: It's 14 percent for men 16 to 24....

COLIN (*Seizing Denver by the collar again*): 14 percent? Listen, you, from whatever century you're from: In Paris it's 90 percent for young men. And for young men without connections, like me? 100! (*Preening*) Not that I'm an ordinary Coquillard. I'm their *linguist*. If they taught modern languages at the Sorbonne, I'd be—*Professeur* of Coquillard.

(*Denver is looking to Villon for an explanation.*)

VILLON: You've read my poems in jargon? (*Denver nods*) The Coquillards have a secret language. Colin teaches it to new members. I met him while hiding out after killing Sermoise—and he explained their words to me.

DENVER: If I knew Coquillard I could define all the words in your jargon poems. I'd be a hero with Professor Boudreaux when—that is *if*—I get back to America.

COLIN: Would you like me to give you a lesson?

DENVER: Would you?

COLIN: As long as you don't say anything for six centuries, I don't see how you can hurt us. Sit at François' desk and take notes.

(*As Denver sits down, Colin makes the ding-a-ling sign to Villon, then romps about the room, pretending he is searching for spies, while he sings his introduction to "Language Lesson."*)

COLIN: Should my comrades learn that I have spoken
A single word to you of Coquillard—
They'll put me on the rack until I'm broken,
And from the tribe I'll be forever barred.

(Colin winks at Villon as he presents Denver with the cross he's wearing around his neck.)

COLIN: Now that I've made sure that no one's near,
Swear upon the cross that you agree—
No matter what rare syllables you hear,
You'll never breach your vow of secrecy.

DENVER *(Singing with great seriousness):* I swear!

COLIN: Now write this down.

(Denver takes Villon's feathered quill in hand, but Colin sings so rapidly that he soon gives up trying to write and simply listens to Colin's performance, mouth agape.)

COLIN: Suppose you screeve? or go cheap-jack?
Or fake the broads? or fig a nag?
Or thimble-rig? or knap a yack?
Or pitch a snide? or smash a rag?

Fiddle, fence, or mace, or mack?
Or mosconeer, or flash the drag?
Dead-lurk a crib, or shoe a crack?
Harrump or tout or mump a gag?

(To audience): You flymee titters fond of flam,
You flats and joskins great and small,
With mags men bold that work the cram,
You swatchel-coves that pitch and stall.

You judes that clobber for the stramm,
You kipsies good at shalking squall
To fawneys on your dexter famm:
A mot's meeskite to gorby crawl!

(To Denver): And, if I call you tibby whack
Or bonnet sprouts or mulligrubs?
Will you be vaxy with your crack?
Or nix your dibbs or duff your bubs?

(Spoken): I'm sure you understood every word I said.
Now darkness falls, and I must prowl the street.
I leave you with this moral to think about in bed.
(And remember! You swore to be discreet!)

(Singing again): It's up-the-spout and Charley-Wag,
With wipes and tickers and what not.
Until the squeezer nips your scrag,
It's booze and blowens cop the lot.

(Colin exits, shouting back to them offstage.)

COLIN: See you at The Pine Cone....

(Villon is laughing heartily; Denver, dumbfounded.)

DENVER: Did you understand *any* of that?

VILLON: Every word.

blackout

SCENE FIVE

The Pine Cone Tavern

“Upward Mobility”

In darkness, the Reapers replace Villon's room with the The Pine Cone interior, adding a large banner with “JOYEUX NOËL” prominently displayed. As lights come up, Yvette is sitting on the bar, singing the last line of Villon's Christmas carol.

YVETTE: So Much One Cries Noël That it comes!

(Villon, Denver, Colin, Barflies 2, 3, Reapers, and Guy Tabarie, played by the Beggar, are all present and applaud. Colin swoops Yvette off the bar and kisses her passionately, as Denver, sitting with Villon at the table, watches jealously.)

DENVER: A magnificent Christmas carol! *(To Villon)* If America could hear Yvette sing “Noël” you'd sell more MP3's than “The Little Drummer Boy.”

BARFLIES 2, 3, & GUY *(Turning to stare at Denver):* The little *WHO?*

DENVER: I'm done explaining America to you. All you do is jeer and say I'm *fou*.

COLIN *(Coming from behind the bar to the table):* I risked my life, sharing my tribe's secret words with you. How about sharing some of yours with me? I've been writing them down. *(He produces a piece of parchment)* “OMG”?

DENVER: *O, Mon Dieu.*

COLIN: “TMI”?

DENVER: *Trop d'informations.*

COLIN: “Google”?

DENVER: It'll be New Year's Eve before I can explain that one!

VILLON: Enough jargon. *(Motioning to Colin to sit down)* We have business to discuss. *(To Denver)* Yvette looks lonely. Go talk to her.

COLIN *(Pinning Denver's hand to the table as he rises):* Remember: Tonight, Yvette is *mine*.

(Denver sticks his tongue out at Colin, then proceeds to the bar where he and Yvette converse.)

VILLON: Why did you ask Guy Tabarie to join us?

COLIN: Why not?

VILLON: How about because he has the biggest mouth in Paris, and he's already been arrested three times. Last month, he was almost hanged.

COLIN (*Breezily*): Guy's good. He needs the money. I'll vouch for his silence.

VILLON: Since he already knows our plan, there's no way we can cut him out now. (*Hailing Guy, who is sitting at the bar*) Guy Tabarie! Come join us.

(The name jolts Denver out of his conversation with Yvette. He follows Guy to the table where Villon is spreading out a large parchment with a floor plan.)

DENVER: You're going to burglarize the College of Navarre! (*To Colin and Guy*) You'll both hang for it. (*To Villon*) And you'll go into exile for five years. (*Sudden epiphany*) That's why I'm here. To stop you. Don't do this!

COLIN: Yes, yes, we know all about America—14 percent unemployment, everyone working in their “garage,” taking advantage of—what do you call it?—“Upward Mobility!”

GUY (*Stupidly*): “Upward Mobility?” What's that?

COLIN: Steve Jobs... Bill Gates... We've heard it all! And thanks for letting us know the Pope will make Jeanne d'Arc a Saint. But François, Guy, and me are here, now: *Christmas Eve, 1456*. So, unless you can take us back to your pie-in-the-sky century, we need to make other plans.

(Colin rises from his chair, pulling Guy to the bar with him, where they sing “Upward Mobility,” as Villon, Denver, Yvette, Barflies, and the Reapers look on.)

COLIN: The Cardinal becomes the Pope.

GUY: The fodder becomes the beef.

COLIN: The Hangman readies his rope.

GUY: The beggar becomes the thief.

COLIN: The Dauphin becomes the King.

GUY: The bud turns into a leaf.

COLIN: Our necks begin to swing.

GUY: The gladness becomes the grief.

BOTH: If we had “upward mobility”
Six centuries from now—
He says we'd all be free
To be whatever we want to be:
Bad luck to be stuck in the fifteenth century!

GUY: Our Joan will become a Saint.

COLIN: Our war with the English cease.

GUY: Still man can't be what he ain't.

COLIN: Though Art is long, Life is brief.

(Colin returns to the table with Guy and sings the next verse solo, the first two lines to Denver, the second two to Villon, whom he motions to stand up.)

COLIN: You may be shocked to know it.
Rub eyes in disbelief.
François Villon—the Poet—
Is also our Outlaw Chief!

(François rises. Everyone, except Denver, Yvette, and the Reapers, sings the concluding chorus.)

If we had “upward mobility”
We’d live “The American Dream.”
A fig for your “nobility!”
We’d all be Sons of “EEE-QUAL-IT-EEE.”
We’re screwed to be glued to the fifteenth century!

VILLON *(As the raucous feeling in the bar subsides):* We’re going into the back room to talk poetry. I don’t recommend that any of you disturb us. *(As they exit, stage left, he turns and brandishes his dagger)* Remember. I killed a man!

DENVER *(Urgently, to Yvette):* They’re going to burglarize the College of Navarre. Tonight. They won’t be found out for years—until, here, at *that* table, Guy Tabarie will get drunk and spill the beans to a clerical spy. François will be ordered to repay his share of the loot. But Guy and Colin will be hanged!

YVETTE: I must stop them!

(She heads for the back room, Denver trying to prevent her.)

DENVER: François said he’ll kill anyone...

YVETTE *(At the exit):* François! Death to any *man* who dares enter? How about a *woman*?

(She darts offstage. Denver slumps into a chair at the table. As the Reapers lead Barflies 2 & 3 offstage right, Yvette returns, stage left, distraught.)

YVETTE: They sneaked out the back way. Go to the College and stop them. Before it’s too late.

(Lights dim slowly to black, as the Reapers set up the façade, door, table, chairs, and safe for the upcoming College of Navarre scene.)

DENVER *(Kissing her hand):* Your wish is my command! *(He exits stage left—but we hear him shouting from the wings)* Monsieur! Can you show me the way to the College of Navarre?

SCENE SIX

The Pine Cone Tavern

“Falling Angels”

(Spotlight on Yvette, singing “Falling Angels” at stage center or before curtain, if there is one.)

YVETTE: I’m in love with Colin,
Thief and Coquillard.
I’m in love with Colin.
I’ve fallen for him hard.

Colin doesn't love me.
I'll not be his wife.
He's not dreaming of me.
I'm nothing in his life.

I know one day he'll climb up Mountfaucon.
He'll wave goodbye, and I'll be all alone.
I'll be the only one to weep and moan
And ask God, "Why?"

But if my first love is my very last,
And if the rapture's over all too fast,
I know the memory of our thrilling past
Will never die.

Colin's songbird style
Warbles me away.
Can't resist his smile:

COLIN (*Offstage*): Yvette! Come out and play!

YVETTE: I'm in love with Colin.
I guess we're both ill-starred.
I'm in love with Colin.
I've fallen for him hard.

(Yvette is joined by Colin, who sings to her in spotlight at center stage or in front of curtain.)

COLIN: I can't say, I love you.
That is not my way.
Still, I'm thinking of you.
Yvette! Come out and play.

What you love about me?
I'm the Prince of FUN!
I can't change. Don't doubt me.
My greyhounds have to run.

Each time they clap me in the Chatelet.
I play a game called "Feeding Donkeys Hay."
They chomp it up! Thank God, I have a way
With words and rhyme.

The tale I tell those asses makes 'em weep;
They say, "Poor Colin is a straying sheep."
Their gate swings open, and I get to keep
My life of crime.

If you're set on marriage
I am not your man.

There's no horse or carriage,
No children in my plan.

DUET: Still, Yvette, your smile I'm in love with Colin
Drives dark clouds away. Thief and Coquillard.
Shine for me a while I'm in love with Colin
I need your light today. I've fallen for him hard.

blackout

SCENE SEVEN

A Chamber inside The College of Navarre “Upward Mobility Reprise”

Lights up on Villon, Colin, and Guy, inside a room at the College of Navarre. Colin is trying to open a safe. François is sitting at a table, Guy slumped on the other side, snoring.

VILLON (*To Colin*): I don't remember my real father. Yours treated you like *merde*—but there's one thing you can thank him for.

COLIN (*Looking up from the safe, puzzled*): What's that?

VILLON: He was a locksmith.

COLIN (*Laughing*): My old man couldn't open this safe on the best day of his life. (*He turns back; twirls his fingers; and the door swings open. He pulls out a heavy burlap bag and looks at Villon in wonder as he sings*) So much one cries Noël—that it comes!

(He hands the bag to Villon, who shakes it several times as the orchestra simulates jangling.)

VILLON: I like the sound. But a picture is worth a thousand clinks.

(He pours its treasure onto the table, startling Guy out of his sleep.)

GUY (*Jumping up and staring at the gold*): *Mon Dieu! Beaucoup D'argent!*

COLIN (*Laughing*): Not just *argent*, Guy. “Upward Mobility!”

(Their mirth is suddenly shattered by loud knocking at the door.)

VILLON: The Watch! (*Grabbing Guy by the collar*) Did you tell someone?

GUY: No one! I swear!

DENVER (*Rapping harder*): François! Colin! Guy! It's Denver! Let me in!

(The panicked burglars relax. Villon opens the door and Denver bursts into the room.)

VILLON: What are you doing here?

DENVER: Yvette sent me—to stop you.

COLIN: From what? (*Pointing to the gold, triumphantly*) This?

DENVER: Put it back. Before the priests discover it's gone and you hang for it!

COLIN (*Making the ding-a-ling sign to Villon*): I told you he was *fou*.

(Colin starts divvying the gold into three separate piles on the table.)

DENVER (*To Colin*): If you won't put it back for your own sake, do it for Yvette. (*He lunges at the table but is stopped by Guy*) François! Stop them!

(Villon shrugs, indicating that he can do nothing.)

COLIN *(Taking a gag and rope from his pocket and tossing the rope to Guy): Ferme la bouche!*

(Colin gags Denver as Guy binds his hands then pushes him into a chair. Colin rapidly finishes sorting the coins, inviting Guy and François to bag their shares.)

VILLON: How do we know there's the same number of coins in each pile?

COLIN: There were three hundred and one in the safe. Count them yourself if you want to waste time. *(Grinning)* I'm a savant *mathématique*, as well as a linguist.

VILLON *(Bagging his share):* They look close enough for me. But what about the 300 and first?

COLIN *(Bags his share, then holds up an extra-large gold coin):* So neither you nor Guy will feel cheated, I'm giving it to HIM. *(He points to Denver who is grunting and trying to break free. Colin drops the coin into Denver's shirt pocket)* AMERICA! This makes you part of our gang! *(He turns and shakes his bag at Guy in triumph)* Know what this is? Upward Mobility! I know what I'm going to do with mine. How about you?

(Guy begins singing "Upward Mobility Reprise")

GUY:
I'll binge on the finest wine.
I'll buy a new pair of pants.
I'll make the cutest girl mine.
We'll party all over France.

(Colin takes a joint out of Denver's bag; waves it in his face with one hand; then indicates Guy's pile of gold, still on the table, with the other as he sings to his captive.)

COLIN:
If only you'd show me how
To grow this stuff you call *pot*—
A small investment now? *(Spoken)* Think about it, Guy!
The little becomes a lot!

(Guy, hastily bags his coins, then joins Colin in the last verse.)

COLIN & GUY: This gold is "Upward Mobility"
Who needs "THE AMERICAN DREAM."
We've seized the capability
To bask in GALLIC EEE-QUAL-IT-EEE—
Here! Here! Give a cheer for the fifteenth century!

(Villon frees a dazed Denver; puts his arm around his shoulder and leads him to the door. As they exit, Villon turns and sings, his hand over his mouth, to Colin and Guy, who are about to follow.)

VILLON:
Make certain "Upward Mobility"
Is not swinging from a noose—
Avoid the possibility
That joy will end in futility
By sealing your lips so your tongues cannot run loose.

blackout

SCENE EIGHT
Villon's Quarters
"So Much One Cries Noël"

The Reapers remove the College of Navarre set and replace it with Villon's room. Villon and Denver enter, Villon shaking his bag of gold.

DENVER: It's almost midnight. Will tomorrow be Christmas Day, 1456, the day after I failed to stop you from burglarizing the College of Navarre? Or January, 1463—the second day of grace before you're banished from Paris?

VILLON: Tomorrow, I'll be here, saying goodbye to my father and friends. But I'll also be visiting Duke Charles of Orléans at his castle in Blois. I can be in two places at once. And so can you. You're probably back in Denver at this very moment, writing your paper on (*Preening*) the greatest, what do you call me?—"medieval"—French poet.

DENVER: A great *American* poet wrote:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.

VILLON: *Yesteryear.* You can remain with me in Paris or accompany me on my visit to the courtliest poet—and wealthiest man—in France.

DENVER (*Musing*): I'd love to see how the one per-centers live...

VILLON: Poets, artists, musicians always receive a warm welcome from Duke Charles.

DENVER: One thing I must be sure of...

VILLON: What's that?

DENVER: That we'll be coming back. That I'll get to go to The Pine Cone again and see Yvette.

VILLON: I'll spend my last evening in Paris there; so, unless you've gone back to Denver, you'll be with me—and Yvette.

DENVER: Then it's off to the court of the second greatest medieval French poet! If only Professor Beaudreux could come with us!

VILLON: When the Sorbonne bell sounds you and I will be outside Charles' castle at Blois. I hope you won't mind if I present you as my valet?

DENVER (*Bowing*): Delighted to serve you, my Lord.

(As Villon puts the stolen gold into a duffel bag, Carolers are heard offstage, singing the last line of "So Much One Cries Noël." The door opens and the Carolers enter. Villon's mother, played by the Old Woman, is among them. The other Carolers are the Cleric, Nobleman, Young Woman, Beggar, and both Reapers.)

VILLON (*Embracing her*): Mother! You're caroling late.

VILLON'S MOTHER: Last stop, son. We wanted you to hear the song you wrote for us.

VILLON: Mother, Carolers—my friend, Denver. Can I offer you some wassail?

CAROLER 1: I fear we've had too much already. We'll sing, then toddle home.

CAROLER 2: Everyone loves your Noël, François. They ask for it everywhere.

(Acting as tuner, Caroler 3 hums an A. All tune, then sing "So Much One Cries Noel.")

CAROLERS: So deeply we hunger
We seek more than crumbs.
So much one cries Noël
That it comes.

so hard beat the drummers
They shatter their drums.
So much one cries Noël
That it comes.

So empty the heart
That it longs for a voice
It wants to cry out to be free.
So swiftly the soul
In its need to rejoice
Believes what it knows cannot be.

So vibrant the strummers
They bloody their thumbs.
So much one cries Noël
That it comes.

So ardent the lover
His lady succumbs.
So much one cries Noël
That it comes.

So wet is the snow
So chill is the night
We long for a place by the fire.
So dark is the path
We imagine a light
To lead us to all we desire.

So loud sings the choir
The whole parish hums.
So much one cries Noël
That it comes.

So much one cries Noël
That it comes!

VILLON'S MOTHER: And it will come, François. It always does.

ALL: JOYEUX NOËL!

(The Carolers exit, but Villon stops his mother in the doorway.)

VILLON: Mother, I've decided to leave Paris for a while. My companion and I want to see Blois, Anger, Orléans.... We leave tomorrow.

VILLON'S MOTHER *(Embracing him):* You have my blessing, son. Be careful.

VILLON *(After she exits):* That's the last time I'll see *ma mère*. By the time I return she'll be dead. *(The Sorbonne bell starts to ring)* The bells! Are you ready?

DENVER: I am.

VILLON: By the way, while we're in the area, we'll also visit Bishop Thibaut d'Aussigny—but, in the spirit of what you call "TMI," I'll tell you about *that* later.

(As the 12th bell sounds, Villon and Denver cry NOËL!)

blackout

SCENE NINE

The Court of Charles, Duke of Orléans, at Blois

"Springtime for Charles"

The Reapers clear Villon's room and install the façade of Charles' castle at Blois, along with dais, chairs, and a performing platform. As lights come up, the Cleric, Old Woman and the Beggar are sitting in chairs, dressed as courtiers. A trumpet sounds and Charles, played by the Nobleman, and his consort, Maria of Cleves, played by the Young Woman, enter the room from stage left. Courtier 1, played by Reaper 1, announces the Duke's presence.

COURTIER 1 *(Holding a flag, bearing Charles' coat of arms):* Make way for his Grace, Charles, Duke of Orléans—nephew and cousin to two French Kings and future father of King Louis XII. Captured by the English at Agincourt in 1415 and held in the Tower of London for twenty-five years. France's greatest poet. Patron of artists, musicians, and writers everywhere!

(Before Courtier 1 completes his spiel, the noble pair have seated themselves at the dais. Charles is bored by his bio, but perks up when Villon is heard shouting offstage.)

VILLON: I'm a POET, damn you! I hold a masters degree from the Sorbonne. I'm author of the celebrated *Romance of the Devil's Fart*.

(The door suddenly opens and Courtier 2, played by Reaper 2, shoves Villon and Denver into the room. Seeing an open chair, Denver seats himself hastily amidst the Courtiers.)

CHARLES: What is the meaning of this?

COURTIER 2 *(Pointing to Villon):* I found this fellow, your Grace *(Pointing to Denver)* with his so-called *valet* skulking by your drawbridge, crying, "I AM A POET!" I longed to dispatch him with my crossbow, but... you know....

MARIA OF CLEVES *(Sighing):* No matter how dirty, how shabby, how common, how ugly...

COURTIERS *(In chorus with Maria):* Poets are always welcome at the court of Duke Charles.

CHARLES *(Motioning to Villon to approach):* You are a poet?

VILLON: Not just any poet, your Grace. Author of the celebrated *Romance of the Devil's Fart*—the poem that took Paris by storm!

CHARLES: "Devil's Fart," eh. Your name?

VILLON: François Villon. Parisian and Master of Divinity from the Sorbonne.

CHARLES: Welcome, Master Villon. Do you have a poem for us?

VILLON: I do, your Grace.

CHARLES: I will hear it at our Open Reading. But first, my lady, Maria of Cleves, will delight us with *my* latest creation—a rondeau.

VILLON: May I ask what it's called, your Grace?

CHARLES (*With great pride at his originality*): I call it—"Spring!"

(*Rising from the dais, Maria takes her seat at the platform and sings "Springtime for Charles."*)

MARIA: Winter sheds its ugly cloak
Made of wind and ice and rain;
Puts on festive clothes again
With jewels on every elm and oak.

No beast on earth, no bird in tree
That doesn't sing this sweet refrain:
April's here. At last we're free
Of Winter's dismal wind and rain.

Snowflakes melt and rivers flow.
It's time for joy to have its fling.
'Round the maypole we shall go,
Party dancers, dressed for spring.

Party dancers, dressed for spring.

(*The Courtiers shout "Brilliant!" "Splendid!" "Now that's real poetry!" All rise to dance as the orchestra plays "Springtime for Charles Jig." Villon motions to Denver, who joins him at center stage as the the music stops and the dancers freeze in place.*)

VILLON: "Party dancers, dressed for spring?" Don't tell me they're still reading such tripe six centuries from now....

DENVER: Charles is less known for his own poetry, than from the fact that *you* visited his court. And since you have nothing in common with the Duke—what *are* we doing here?

VILLON: He's the wealthiest man in France. If he likes my poetry...

DENVER: Ah, a pension....

VILLON: Shhh! I need to go to work.

(*As music starts where it left off, Charles, Marie, and the Courtiers unfreeze and conclude their dance, after which Charles and Marie take their seats again on the dais.*)

CHARLES: Master Villon.

VILLON: Your Grace.

CHARLES: You said nothing about my rondeau. Do you not admire it?

VILLON: Aristotle says we show men as they are; worse than they are; or better than they are. (*Bowing*) You make everything better than it is, your Grace, and such generosity is admirable. My own poetry walks the streets of Paris. Would you like a sample? It's very short. A Quatrain.

CHARLES: Let the Open Reading begin. François Villon will read his “Quatrain,” followed by Lord Henri Marchant, reading his sonnet, “Lovely Ladies, Sweet and Fair” and (Ahhh!) Lady Mirabelle Angellie, singing her chanson, “My Wounded, Wounded Heart.”

(Courtier 1 bows as Charles mentions Lord Henri and the Courtier played by the Old Woman curtsies as he mentions Lady Mirabelle; after which Villon leaps onto the platform and shouts.)

VILLON: I am François. Cry alas! alas!
Born in Paris, near Pontoise
And with a rope, stronger than grass,
My neck will feel the weight of my ass!

(All react with horror, except Denver, who has all he can do to suppress his laughter.)

blackout

SCENE TEN

**The Court of Charles, Duke of Orléans
“The Pirate and the King”**

Courtier 1 flings open the door and Charles and Villon enter. Charles pulls up a chair and sits, most un-royally, facing its back. Villon seats himself in like fashion, facing the Duke.

CHARLES: François, I have sad news.

VILLON (*Puzzled*): Your Grace?

CHARLES: Many poets have visited me at Blois; none as entertaining and companionable as you. Who would have thought Charles of Orléans would ever write a *funny* poem! I can hardly wait to see the expressions on the faces of Lord Henri and Lady Mirabelle when they hear it.

VILLON: But something’s wrong...

CHARLES (*Earnestly*): When Authority makes absolute rules sooner or later one of them will bite Authority (in your words) on the “ass.”

VILLON: What’s the rule that’s about to bite me on *mine*?

CHARLES: My court is always open to artists, musicians, poets...

VILLON: Yes...

CHARLES: For three months.

VILLON: Ah....

CHARLES: You’ve been here 90 days. (*Trying to soften the blow*) Several poets are outside my castle, clamoring to come in. If I make an exception and let *you* stay longer...

VILLON: I understand, your Grace. I’ll tell my valet to prepare to leave in the morning.

CHARLES (*Intimate tone*): François...

VILLON: Yes.

CHARLES (*Standing up, animated, pacing*): You said I make men “better than they are.” I understand how you might think (*Gesturing at the dais*) that I live in a dream world. I want you to know what happened at Agincourt. Forty years ago—and I still have nightmares! The English slaughtered us. I was unhorsed, falling to the ground, grievously wounded, the battle raging all around me. One corpse, two, six, twelve, landing on top of me as if the Grim Reaper had dozens of faces, hundreds of arms and legs—the stench of men’s blood and guts flooding my lungs....

VILLON (*Trying to comfort him*): Your Grace....

CHARLES: When the battle ended, the English found me, barely breathing, under six feet of dead comrades. House arrest in the Tower of London followed—for 25 years—during which time my wife, Bonne, whom I adored, and wrote to daily, died.

VILLON: Paris, Jeanne d’Arc—no one understood why you weren’t quickly ransomed?

CHARLES: I was too dangerous as a rallying cry for France. Only when the English saw that they couldn’t win the war did they consider releasing me.

VILLON: Ah...

CHARLES: You and I, François, have had our fill of men “worse than they are.” I choose to make them better, knowing too well they are not, but hoping one day they will be. You show them worse, hoping they’ll become better. But enough “reality.” We have a merry piece to perform. Where are our costumes?

VILLON (*Clapping hands and shouting*): Denver!

(The doors open and Denver enters with costumes then takes a seat. Villon tries to give the crown and scepter to Charles, but, despite Villon’s protests, he takes the Pirate’s costume instead.)

CHARLES: Don’t cross me. As a boy, I longed to be a Pirate. My dream is about to come true.

(Trumpet sounds. Courtier 1 opens the doors and—as per the previous scene—the others file in behind him and take their seats.)

COURTIER 1: Court is in Session. France’s greatest poet will now perform his composition “The Pirate and the King” (*Disdainfully*) with his collaborator, Master François Villon.

(All applaud. Courtier 2 has distributed choral parts to the other Courtiers, but they are shocked to see Charles don the Pirate’s garb, while Villon crowns himself and wields the scepter. They don’t know how to react to this topsy-turvy performance of “The Pirate and the King.”)

CHORUS: The Pirate and the King...
 The Pirate and the King...
 The Pirate and the King...
 Of thee we sing!

CHARLES: They’ve captured me at last.
 They’d like to hear me groan.
 Loaded down with chains
 I approach the throne.

CHORUS: (He stands before the throne.
 No mercy should be shown!)

VILLON: And me? I am the King.
 Strong justice I shall bring.
 I’ll judge his immorality
 Then let the bastard swing!

CHORUS: (We’re counting on our King.
 To make the bastard swing.)

VILLON: And so I shake my scepter,
Shout, “Down upon your knees!
Are you that low-born robber,
The terror of my seas?”

CHORUS: (His neck’s about to wring.
Soon he’ll feel Death’s sting.
But here’s the shocking thing.
He talks back to the King!)

CHARLES: Why do you call me “robber”?
And bring me to my knees?
Because I loot a boat or two
Upon your precious seas?

If I had riches such as you
I’d plunder ships no more.
I would be a monarch too
With lots of swag in store.

And if my gold ran out
Why, then, I’d simply just relax.
No need to play the pirate
When you’ve the power to tax.

CHORUS: (He’s telling you the facts.
Monarchs have the power to tax.)

VILLON: I’ve listened to your story
And what you say is true
So I will change your fortune now
As only Kings can do.

I’m making you my chamberlain
With servants and a staff.
You’ll manage all my ill-gained goods.
I’m serious! Don’t laugh!

CHORUS: The rogue we hoped would swing,
Instead got everything—
And now he sings his fav’rite song:
“God Save The King!”

The Pirate and the King...
The Pirate and the King...
The Pirate and the King...
GOD SAVE THE KING!

blackout

SCENE ELEVEN
An Underground Prison at Meung-sur-Loire
“Until the Morning Star”

VILLON (*Shouting in the darkness*): AND GOD DAMN THIBAUT D’AUSSIGNY!

(*Villon’s cry follows the last line of “The Pirate and the King,” echoing as the Reapers remove the throne room at Blois and replace it with Bishop d’Aussigny’s underground prison at Meung-sur-Loire, equipped with instruments of torture and a large basket with a rope hanging down from the flies. As lights come up halfway, Villon is in chains. Denver is sitting by his side, dazed.*)

DENVER: Where *are* we? Just seconds ago, I was listening to you and Duke Charles perform “The Pirate and the King.”

VILLON: Not seconds ago, Denver. Years. (*Pause*) Remember I said while we were in the area we’d pay a visit to Bishop Thibaut d’Aussigny?

DENVER: In *prison*? How did we get here? And how do we get out?

VILLON: We’re in a brick cylinder sunk sixty feet into the ground. (*Pointing to the basket*) We were lowered here in that basket.

DENVER (*Sarcastically*): I guess it’s pointless to ask *why* we’re here.

VILLON: We’ve been rambling about the provinces together for five years. I’ve been a peddler, a preacher, and, most recently, manager and star performer with a traveling acting company.

DENVER: Five years? And I’m still wearing this crummy tee shirt? *Why* are we in prison?

VILLON: I made the mistake of performing “The Pirate and the King” in the square at Meung-sur-Loire. The Bishop attended our performance. I played the Pirate. You played the King. You’ve become quite a good actor!

DENVER (*Waves his hand, indicating that he can’t deal with this remark*): Go on....

VILLON: Unlike the Duke, the Bishop didn’t find the Pirate amusing. He thought I was making fun of Authority.

DENVER: Which you were...

VILLON: I made the mistake of telling him I have a degree in Divinity from the Sorbonne.

DENVER: “Master” François Villon.

VILLON: Turns out it’s against the law for someone with clerical status to perform in public in a play. In short, Bishop Thibaut d’Aussigny would like to see me hanged; but priests are not allowed to have blood on their hands. So he’s slowly starving me to death.

DENVER: Jesus! And what about *me*? What crime have *I* committed?

VILLON: The Bishop won’t harm you. You’re just a valet. Besides, you haven’t been born yet.

DENVER: Thanks. Maybe we can co-author an article for *Scientific American*.

(*There’s a great clanking sound from above, as of a grate being lifted, followed by the booming voice of Bishop Thibaut d’Aussigny, played by the Beggar.*)

VOICE OF BISHOP D’AUSSIGNY: Villon—you filthy piece of suppurating offal! You disgrace to the Holy Calling of the Church! I’m sure you’ve committed many other crimes. I’m sending down *La Poire* to help you remember!

DENVER (*Urgently*): What’s *La Poire*?

VILLON: A pear shaped device. They force it into your mouth, then pump water into you until it

comes out your eyes and ears and asshole.

DENVER: It's worse than waterboarding!

VOICE OF BISHOP D'AUSSIGNY: *La Poire* is on its way. As for your valet (the one with the funny clothes)—he has committed no crime and will be set free.

DENVER: François! I can't leave you...

VILLON: You must.

DENVER: Are you going to *die*?

VILLON: I don't know. (*He points to an opening at the top of the wall*) But you can watch through that chink up there to find out.

(The Reapers arise suddenly from the trap. As Reaper 1 forces La Poire into Villon's mouth, Reaper 2 pushes a reluctant Denver into the basket.)

DENVER (Pleading): Don't hurt him! He's your country's greatest poet!

REAPERS 1 & 2 (In chorus): WE HAVE NO COUNTRY!

(Reaper 1 starts pumping water into Villon. Reaper 2 grabs the rope as if to raise the basket—and the stage goes black. For 30 seconds we hear Villon's gurgled attempts at screaming, while Denver shouts through the chink.)

DENVER: Are you men or fiends? Have pity! How can you do this?

(Silence for ten seconds; then lights come up half way. The Reapers are gone. Villon is on the floor, moaning. Slowly, he raises himself to a sitting position, his back against the wall, and sings "Until the Morning Star," lights coming up gradually to full by the time he finishes.)

VILLON:

Far away in the mountains
Rain from heaven fresh and clean
Gathers strength in the fountains
Till it forms a running stream;
Then it flows down the valley
Where it mixes with the mud
Till it ends in the city
In a gutter red with blood.

Until the morning star rises in your heart...
Until the morning star rises in your heart...

At the breast of its mother
Lies an infant suckling love;
Then a youth in an alley
Gives a smaller lad a shove;
Next a man with a knife demands
Your money and your rings;
Till the hangman is hooded
And the bloody puppet swings.

Until the morning star rises in your heart...
Until the morning star rises in your heart...

In a dank dirty dungeon
Lies poor François cold and bare.
How he cries for forgiveness
Begs you not to leave him there;
With the fleas and the vermin
And a moldy crust of bread—
How he groans in the darkness
Dreaming of the life he led...

(Once again, the sound of a grate being lifted, followed by the Bishop's booming voice.)

VOICE OF BISHOP D'AUSSIGNY: Villon! *La Poire* has helped you admit to unspeakable crimes. You have confessed to murder, rape, blasphemy, peeing on a statue of the Blessed Virgin, and fornication with animals! I was going to turn you over to the civil authority to be hanged, but, alas, an untimely event prevents me.

VILLON: What's that?

VOICE OF BISHOP D'AUSSIGNY: Our newly crowned King, Louis XI, has passed through Orléans and has—unwisely—granted amnesty to all my prisoners. And though I wish you in hell, attendants are on their way down to lead you back to light.

(Villon hobbles to the audience and finishes singing "Until the Morning Star," after which Denver sings the refrain from "The Pirate and the King," Villon joining him on the last line.)

VILLON: Until the morning star rises in your heart...
 Until the morning star rises in your heart...

DENVER: The Pirate and the King...
 The Pirate and the King...
 The Pirate and the King...

BOTH: GOD SAVE THE KING!

blackout

(Sustained long enough to allow Villon and Denver time to exit—then lights up.)

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

The Cemetery of the Holy Innocents “Yesteryear” • “One Woman Brothel”

Half light. The Reapers have simulated “La Danse Macabre” painting in a frame back stage. Reaper 1 holds hands with the Nobleman; Nobleman with the Young Woman; Young Woman with the Old Woman; Old Woman with the Cleric; Cleric with the Beggar; and Beggar with Reaper 2. All are motionless, as if objets d’art. As lights come up full, Villon and Denver enter, squinting, having just emerged from the underground prison at Meung-sur-Loire.

DENVER: The light is blinding! Where are we?

VILLON: In Paris on the morning of my last day. I must be outside the gates by noon tomorrow.

DENVER (*Pointing back stage*): And what is *that*? A painting?

VILLON: *La Danse Macabre*. We’re in the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents, where we first met.

DENVER (*Approaching and staring at the Generics*): The Dance of Death!

VILLON: Installed a few years before I was born. I loved it as a child—and love it still.

DENVER: It’s so... *grotesque*.

VILLON: One of our century’s few comforts. The Dance assures the poorest of the poor that *everyone* (*Gesturing at the Generics*)—King, Beggar, Prostitute; even the Pope—will be treated the same in the end. (*Poking Denver in the ribs*) You might call it “Downward Mobility.”

DENVER (*Shuddering*): This place gives me the creeps.

VILLON: Once Paris wakes, this will be the most festive place in the city. Hundreds of men and women will come to watch the hangman do his work. There will be preachers preaching. Singers singing. Strumpets strumpeting. And food!—beef and salmon pasties, sausages, cheese soup, croissants; ale, wine, fresh baked bread. I’ve spent some of the happiest hours of my life here. (*He puts his arm around Denver and starts to exit*) But I must finish my *Testament*. So it’s back to my room. Our last night at The Pine Cone will be here in... what did Yvette’s song say? “A twinkling of an eye.”

(As Villon and Denver exit, lights dim and the Reapers come to life. They wake the Generics, then lead them out of their panels to center stage, where they arrange them as a chorus. Using batons that look like human bones, the Reapers conduct “Yesteryear.”)

NOBLEMAN: I was a baron.

CLERIC: I was a bishop.

BEGGAR: I was a beggar.

ALL 3: Yesteryear!

YOUNG WOMAN: I was a lady.

She was a harlot.

OLD WOMAN: Not *any* harlot—

ALL 5: “Belle Heulmière!”

ALL 5: None of us were ready.
We all tried to fight them.

ALL & REAPERS: They cried out, “It’s time to
Disappear!”

ALL 5: Harbor no illusion.
They are coming for you.
You are on your way to
Yesteryear!

REAPERS: Emperor & king must
Dance with the riffraff
Leaving a message
Very clear:

Nothing but *merde*,
The gold in your pocket.
There’s no escaping
Yesteryear!

ALL 5: Time to ask yourself if
You are really ready?
If you’re truly ready
Have no fear.

REAPERS: We will not harm you.
We’ll simply lead you
Into the land of
Yesteryear....

(The Reapers lead the Generics back into their panels, where they become motionless again.)

blackout

SCENE TWO

The Cemetery of the Holy Innocents

“One Woman Brothel”

Spotlights up slowly on the Old and Young Women, inside their panels.

OLD WOMAN: I’m not dead yet! You?

YOUNG WOMAN: I should hope not! I just turned seventeen.

OLD WOMAN: Let’s get out of here.

(They step out of their panels and go to center stage, spotlights following.)

YOUNG WOMAN: Am I correct, that I find myself in the company of... a *whore*? (*Peeved*)
You told me you were a helmet maker!

OLD WOMAN: The Beautiful Helmet Maker. That's what the sign said over my shop.

YOUNG WOMAN: I don't care what the sign said. How many helmets did you make?

OLD WOMAN: Well, soldiers would always take their helmets *off* when they came for a visit. But as to how many I made? (*Makes a zero sign, laughing*) *Rien*.

YOUNG WOMAN: You're nothing but a common whore.

OLD WOMAN: Try *rare*, honey. I was the most exquisite woman in Paris. That cute young man, Denver—I believe he's an astrologer—tells me that centuries from now a great artist named Rodin will honor me with a statue that will be famous throughout the world. Why he'll choose to show me old and withered rather than young and beautiful... François, at least, showed both.

(*She takes a mirror out of her purse and fixes her hair as she quotes Villon.*)

OLD WOMAN: "Intoxicating, wine-red lips
slender arms and shapely shoulders;
plush, pillowy breasts and sturdy hips,
well-wrought for pageantries of love...."

Now, *that's* poetry. (*She circles the young woman, patting her face and pinching her behind*) Not a bad body. Not as luscious as mine—I mean, not when I was *your* age. But it'll do. There are always plenty of openings in the oldest profession. Have you considered becoming...

YOUNG WOMAN (*Gasping*): A whore? (*Crossing herself.*) *Mère de Dieu!*

OLD WOMAN: Tart? Working Girl? Daughter of Joy? Lady of the Night? (*Pause*) Courtesans work the shortest hours for the highest pay. What you're called depends on how you present yourself—and to whom.

YOUNG WOMAN: I'm saving myself for the right man. I want *love*, not tawdry liaisons.

OLD WOMAN: Why not have both? I did. Let your apricots hang on the tree too long, honey, and all they do is rot. And if, one day, you come around to my way of thinking, don't be just another trollop in a crowded bawdyhouse. Go into business for yourself. Fine to have a sweet-heart to help around the house. But don't ever let a pimp or madame lord it over you.

(*She sings "One Woman Brothel"*):

Once I ran a whorehouse
And charged the highest fee:
A house with one harlot,
That harlot was *me*.

A one woman brothel
I ran by myself—
Until I hired Johnny
To manage my wealth.

The mess that we ran into
We didn't quite foresee:
Alas! I loved Johnny!
And Johnny loved me!

Both wounded by Cupid
With darts from above.
(Nothing kills Business
Quicker than Love.)

When a client stopped in
Johnny'd hop right out of bed.
When he heard heavy breathing
He'd cover up his head.

He'd flee into the kitchen
And sulk jealously;
But when I uncoupled,
He'd gladly share my fee.

When he tried to spank me
I'd kick him in the shin:
He'd give me his yang.
I'd give him my yin.

And then the Black Plague took him,
Leaving me on my own:
A one woman brothel,
Forever, alone.

And now there is nobody
To ogle this bust...
And handsome young Johnny
Has crumbled into dust.

The question that I'm faced with
I think you'll agree:
Did I run that whorehouse?
Or the whorehouse run me?

I look in the mirror.
The crone that I see
Says, "Did you run that whorehouse
Or the whorehouse run thee?"

(As she finishes, lights illuminate the Reapers and the two empty panels in La Danse Macabre.)

REAPER 1 *(Holding out his bone baton):* Ladies...

REAPER 2 *(Holding his out, as well):* It's time...

*(Sighing, they return to the the frame; step back into their panels; and become motionless again.
The Reapers present their completed Danse Macabre to the audience.)*

blackout

SCENE THREE
Villon's Quarters
"Rest Ye Merry"

The Reapers replace La Danse Macabre frame with Villon's room. When lights come up, he is at his desk working on his Testament, while Denver is at a table eating something from a bowl.

VILLON: Here ends the Testament and life
of François Villon. Come to his burial
When you hear the Sorbonne bell.
Wear not black, but brightest red.
For he died a martyr to Love.

DENVER: Martyr to Love.... We know you adored a woman named Katherine de Vauselles and that she treated you badly. But that's all we know.

VILLON: Katherine is a metaphor for how *life* treated me. I tried to engage the world with good will and affection, but was greeted with self-interest and chicanery.

DENVER: To hell with metaphor! I want to know about the *real* Katherine. How you met? Why you loved her? What went wrong?

VILLON: I began writing like Duke Charles. Women were goddesses. Love, always at first sight. *You* fell for Yvette the moment you heard her singing. Katherine was singing when I first saw her; and I sang back, with all my heart!

(The Reapers wheel Katherine, played by the Young Woman, on stage on a simulated balcony, humming the tune to "Rest Ye Merry." Mimed Villon enters, looks up, and is smitten.)

VILLON: Now, I must tell you something I'm ashamed of. Stealing from clerical scoundrels who fleece the poor with indulgences is one thing. But for a time I was like those young men you told me about in *your* country—what did you call them—*muggers*? I'd lie in wait for gentlemen, stumbling out of bars at night, and steal their rings, crosses, and jewelry they'd bought to give their mistresses. And where did it all go?

(Villon points to the balcony where Mimed Villon has been tossing trinkets up to Katherine, who receives them, delighted, blowing kisses in return.)

VILLON: She couldn't have enough of my visits. I was ready to propose marriage. Then...

DENVER: What?

VILLON: One night a man recognized me. Instead of turning me over to the Watch, he went to Guillaume. I returned his jewelry and my father made me promise I would never "mug" anyone again—and I haven't.

DENVER: I think I see where this is going.

VILLON: Fool that I was, I thought I still had a precious gift to offer. Poetry! That night, I returned to Katherine's balcony and sang a song so lovely it could have been written by Duke Charles himself.

(Lights dim, signifying dusk. Mimed Villon returns to the balcony where Katherine shows off her jeweled wrists and fingers, as if to say, "What do you have for me today?" Mimed Villon indicates that he has no jewelry, but something better. Mimed Villon lip-synchs to an offstage recording of François singing "Rest Ye Merry" as Villon and Denver look on.)

MIMED VILLON: Rest ye merry, rest ye very merry:
Noble heart beat softly in thy breast.
Guardian Angel, heaven sent to guide thee,
Make thy soul a place forever blessed.
Let the night bring dreams of sweet fulfillment:
Dreams to banish every worldly care.
Till my heart can fall asleep beside thee,
Rest ye merry, cherry-pink and fair.

(Katherine points to her wrists and fingers, indicating her eagerness to receive more jewelry. Mimed Villon continues to lip-synch as the recording continues.)

Let the night bring dreams of sweet fulfillment:
Dreams to banish every worldly care.
Till my heart can fall asleep beside thee,
Rest ye merry, cherry-pink and fair.
Rest ye merry, precious jewel, so rare.

(Mimed Villon blows kisses to Katherine, who picks up a pitcher and pours slop onto his head. Reaper 1 wheels Katherine offstage, followed by a dazed Mimed Villon, wiping his face.)

VILLON: I returned again and again, but her heart was cold. When I tried to climb her balcony, she reported me to the Provost, and I was beaten on the buttocks at every street corner, while she looked on and laughed.

(Reaper 1 leads Mimed Villon on stage left, pausing to beat him on his buttocks. Reaper 2 wheels Katherine on stage right, while Reaper 1 drubs Mimed Villon again, this time in front of her; after which she sings her own version of "Rest Ye Merry" to her unfortunate suitor.)

KATHERINE: Are you mad? To think I'd love a poet!
Empty pockets. Lots of words to spare.
Get thee gone! And by my door don't tarry.
Not until you have more gold to share.
Rest ye merry. Blighted love affair.

(Reaper 1 leads Mimed Villon offstage, while Reaper 2 wheels Katherine, laughing, after them.)

DENVER: Beaten in public, with both friends and enemies watching!

VILLON: That's when I became a real poet. No more men and women better than they are.

(After sharp rapping at the door, Villon opens it to the Beggar who whispers excitedly. Villon listens; then, waving the Beggar away, motions to Denver to rise.)

VILLON: My time has come! We must away.

DENVER: Where to?

VILLON: To visit a fat priest at the Abbey of St. Denis.

blackout

SCENE FOUR
A Bedroom in the Abbey of St. Denis
“Wrong Side of Heaven”

The Reapers replace Villon’s room with Abbey fittings at stage right—a bedroom door, a table with flowers, wine and cheese; and a featherbed with an ample coverlet. As lights come up, Villon and Denver are on stage, Villon peering into the Abbey bedroom through a cardboard keyhole mounted on a stick.

VILLON (*Handing the keyhole to Denver*): Fill your heart—and pants—with this!

(As Denver looks through the keyhole, the Abbott, played by the Cleric, and a masked lady, played by the Young Woman, come into the room through the door at stage right, holding hands and giggling. The Abbott seats the lady at the table.)

ABBOTT (*Smiling as he pours*): Champagne, my dear?

DENVER: Through an Abbey keyhole
What is this I see?
Fat Abbott with a woman
Lovely as can be...

(Villon takes the keyhole from Denver and peers through it, and sings.)

VILLON: I wish that I were in that room
To drink such tasty wine
To toast a pretty lady
And ask her to be mine.

DENVER It would be grand to live the life of ease!
& VILLON: Bowing down to no one. Doing anything you please.
Every keyhole has a key for those with clout.
On the wrong side of heaven I’m locked out!

(The Beggar comes on stage and Villon passes the keyhole to him.)

BEGGAR: Through an Abbey keyhole
What’s this that greets my eye?
Laughing, cooing, kissing...
Their pie’s not in the sky!

If I could get into that room,
To beg a cup of wine...
Sweet Venus granting favors...
Would that not be sublime?

ALL: It would be grand to live the life of ease!
BEGGAR: Lolling on a featherbed, no roaches and no fleas.
ALL: Every keyhole has a key for those with clout.
On the wrong side of heaven I’m locked out!

(The Old Woman hobbles on stage, takes the keyhole from the beggar, and peers through it.)

OLD WOMAN: This side of the keyhole,
I face an iron door.
The wine I drink is sour
My love life is no more.

The joy she has upon that bed
For me such joy has died.
At Love's gate I mope about
But can't get back inside.

ALL: It would be grand to live the life of ease!

OLD WOMAN: Could I regain my beauty, how many men I'd tease.
Were I rich I'd have ten gigolos, no doubt!

ALL OTHERS: On the wrong side of heaven she's locked out!

VILLON: The woman in that room
Is Katherine de Vauselles.
She'd like to see me dead, I'm sure,
And I see her in hell!

She said she loved me truly,
Until my gold ran out.
Now she's behind the keyhole
In bed with some rich lout!

ALL: It would be grand to live the life of ease!
All the livelong summer, doing anything you please.
Every keyhole has a key for those with clout.
On the wrong side of heaven We're locked out!

VILLON (*Ripping up the keyhole*): Who needs a keyhole, when one can break down the door!

(He pulls the covers off Katherine and the Abbott—who are revealed in flagrante delicto.)

VILLON: Whipped on the buttocks at every street corner, eh? You, Katherine, are a beneficiary in my last will and *Testament*. See that fellow there? *(He points to Denver)* He's a famous astrologer. And he tells me that everyone in Paris and the world will continue to know what a bitch you are—six centuries from now!

(Villon shakes his fist at the unhappy pair, as they scurry, half naked, out the door.)

EVERYONE: On the wrong side of heaven they're locked out!

blackout

SCENE FIVE

Villon's Quarters

"Flies in Milk"

The Reapers replace the Abbey with Villon's room. As lights come up, Denver is lolling about, reading Villon's Testament. Villon is at his desk, ladling spoonfuls of milk to his lips from a bowl.

DENVER: Most of your bequests drip with irony. That's why readers are so touched by the charity you show those poor little orphans:

I leave out of pity to three small orphans
(naked, destitute, no garments to cover their
bodies, or shoes to protect their feet)
a part of my estate, or, if they prefer
three gold coins, so they can enjoy a good meal...

(Villon is convulsed with laughter as he listens to Denver read.)

VILLON: Poor little orphans? Marceau? Gossouyn? Laurens? If you could only see them.

(Nobleman, Cleric, and Beggar walk across the stage, wearing top hats and leaning on canes.)

VILLON: They are rapacious money-lenders—the most hated old misers in Paris!

DENVER: I should have known! But here's a bequest all readers find monstrous!

Item: To those shivering in poorhouses I leave
Spider webs for windows to keep out the cold.
To the homeless, sleeping in cemeteries,
A punch in the eye and kick in the groin.

How could you be so heartless to those who have nothing?

VILLON: My pen is the only weapon I have to right the world's wrongs. To the wealthy, the powerful, I bequeath gold, wine, veal, capons; swords, houses, coats of arms—things they already possess in obscene abundance. What can I leave the miserable, other than their *reality* in all its horror?—a reality so unjust it should shame the landlords, usurers, priests, and noblemen who ride upon their backs. It won't. But at least they'll know François Villon and his readers see them for the hypocrites they are.

DENVER: Tonight you leave your *Testament* with Yvette. Tomorrow you leave Paris. What happens to me?

VILLON: I can't answer that, *mon ami*. Because I don't know.

DENVER (*Sighing*): Socrates said, "Know thyself."

VILLON: Ahhh. Which self? Poet? Scholar? Peddler? Drunkard? Actor? Lover? Thief?

(Villon spoons milk from the bowl and raises it to his lips; but seeing something revolting, he flings the spoon to the floor and sings "Flies In Milk.")

I know flies in milk.
Milk is white.
Flies are black.
I know burlap from silk.
I know everything but myself...

I know monks by their robes,
Nuns by their veils,
Popes by their crosiers.
I know Christ by His nails.
I know everything but myself...

I know masters by their servants,
Pimps by their harlots,
Tapsters by their brew.
I know him and her and you.
I know everyone but myself...

I know getting and spending,
Paying and lending,
Fingers in the till.
How and when to write a will.
I know everything but myself...

I know visions and dreams,
Orpheus looking back,
Present and past.
I know nothing can last.
I know everything but myself...

I know trees by their sap,
Fruit by its color,
Pink cheeks from pale.
I know death shall prevail.
I know everything but myself...

I know flies in milk.
Milk is white.
Flies are black.
I know burlap from silk.

(With Denver): We know everything but ourselves....

VILLON *(Taking his Testament from Denver):* Ready?

(Denver nods, and they exit.)

blackout

SCENE SIX

The Pine Cone Tavern

“Waltzing My Heirs”

The Reapers replace Villon’s room with the interior of The Pine Cone; then take their places at either end of the bar. As lights come up, Yvette is behind the bar, and barflies 1, 2, 3, & 4 are sitting on their stools, sandwiched between the Reapers. Villon and Denver enter and sit at the table. Barflies turn and greet Villon, boisterously.

YVETTE *(At the table):* Your last night, François. Drinks on the house. What would you like?

VILLON *(Pulling his manuscript out of his bag, and thumbing through to the end):* You’ll find it in the last four lines of my *Testament*.

YVETTE (*Reads*): Prince, gentle as a falcon
Know what he did before he disappeared:
He took a gulp of red black wine
Before he bid this world goodbye.

(*Pouring wine for Villon and Denver*): Morillon. I've one bottle left. I'll lock it in the wine cellar tonight—and open it when you return.

VILLON: Ten years from now. And if I don't return?

YVETTE (*Pointing to Denver*): He and I will sit at this table and raise a glass of the finest wine in France to the memory of its greatest poet.

BARFLY 4: François?

VILLON: Yes?

BARFLY 4: Who is that Prince you keep talking to in your poems? Louis? Charlemagne?

BARFLY 2 (*Quoting*): "Prince, gentle as a falcon"... "Prince, who consists of all perfection..."

BARFLY 1: It takes nerve to be so familiar with royalty. You could be whipped.

DENVER (*Covering his mouth, sings*): The Pirate and the King... The Pirate and the King...

VILLON (*Brandishing his manuscript*): My *Testament*! Yvette will keep it behind the bar for those who care to read it. There's something here for everyone. Bishop Thibaut d'Aussigny... Katherine de Vauselles...

BARFLY 1 (*Jumping off his stool and presenting his bum*): Rest Ye Merry, Katherine!

VILLON (*Ignoring the jest*): As for my Prince? I never met a lord as noble as the falcon who perches on the limbs of my *Testament*. Without my royal confidante I would never have written a word. I've only one thing to bequeath my liege—the only thing he cares about.

BARFLY 2: What's that, François?

VILLON: Truth.

BARFLY 3 (*Ogling Denver*): How about bequeathing your cutie pie "valet" to me? I'd love to have him dress me each morning—and undress me... each night....

VILLON (*Handing his manuscript to Yvette*): Should I explain my *Testament* to these imbeciles?

BARFLY 4: Yes, but not with *poetry*.

BARFLY 1: We *hate* poetry! Do it with a song!

VILLON: I will. And you must dance to it!

(*He moves about the tavern, singing "Waltzing My Heirs."*)

VILLON: I'm a poor poet with nothing to give—
Not a franc or croissant, not a goose or a pig;
But although my purse is empty, my imagination's big,
And it's full of bequests fools can catch in a sieve.

I'm leaving hypocrites what they deserve.
Let them choke on the wit of each poisoned hors d'oeuvre;
And those money-sucking sponges, it's my turn to dance a jig,
As they look in truth's mirror and cringe at each dig.

In my purse there isn't anything for starving women or for beggar men.
I cannot conjure up a slice of cheese or crust of bread with my pen.
Saddest thing about my *Testament* is that I have to leave the needy out;
Had I real wine to offer paupers, I'd open up the spout.

Leeches get drunk on the blood that they swill
From their victims who never get named in a will
Better listen to the beggar, for if you ignore his scream,
Your descendants may die (*Pointing to Denver*) on the *what?*

DENVER: *Guillotine!*

(He steps forward and sings.)

DENVER: Wish I could tell you the world will improve
With a lightning bolt miracle from God above;
But it's going to take centuries, the Seine run red with blood,
Before Paris enjoys far less evil than good.

(Yvette steps forward and sings, waving François' manuscript.)

YVETTE: Read François' *Testament*, each barbed bequest
To the self-serving bastards who keep us suppressed.
Colin spat into their faces, as he climbed up Mountfaucon.
Here they are. Let them deal with François Villon!

VILLON: Life can be lovely, melodic, not shrill
That's why I'm rearranging the world with my will.
So I hope you'll feel the fire there and catch its golden gleam
And pursue what (*Pointing to Denver again*) he calls...

DENVER: *The American Dream!*

(Villon opens his bag and starts tossing confetti-like bequests into the air. Barflies get off their stools; kneel, pick up, and shout the names of various recipients of his bequests.)

BARFLY 1: Item: To Robert D'Estoutville, Provost of Paris...

BARFLY 3: Item: To three poor orphan boys...

BARFLY 2: Item; To my lawyer, Master Jean Cotart...

BARFLY 4: Item: To Mendicants and Carmelites of Paris and Orléans...

BARFLY 3: Item: To Fat Margot and Big Jeanne of Brittany...

REAPER 1: Item: To Garnier, Clerk of the Chatelet Prison...

(A hush falls over The Pine Cone as Villon approaches the audience and sings slowly, intimately. As he does so, Denver and Yvette approach each other from opposite ends of the bar.)

VILLON: I'm a poor poet with nothing to give—
Not a franc or croissant, not a goose or a pig;

But although my purse is empty, my imagination's BIG...

(Slowing the tempo, the orchestra completes the melody as Yvette and Denver kiss.)

blackout

SCENE SEVEN

In Spotlight (or in Front of Curtain)

“Wild Oats Reprise”

GUILLAUME: Had they hanged him for burglarizing the College, I'd understand. But he was merely a bystander at a street brawl. No one even hurt. But because Ferrabouc is the King's notary the Provost does whatever he wants, no matter how unjust. *(The Sorbonne bell rings five times)* One hour left. *(He sings “Wild Oats Reprise.”)*

GUILLAUME: It's been thirteen weeks now
Since I begged for mercy.
No one has answered me yet.
In just one more hour
He'll go to his maker,
Leaving me nought but regret.

(The Nobleman enters, takes a letter from his pocket, and presents it to Guillaume.)

GUILLAUME *(Reading):* Spared! With less than an hour to go! I must hurry.

(He exits, singing)

GUILLAUME: Wild Oats... Wild Oats...
Mary has answered my prayer.
Did she watch Jesus sow his Wild Oats?
All children give parents a scare.

blackout

SCENE EIGHT

The Cemetery of the Holy Innocents

“Aubade” • “The Reaper's Stair”

The Reapers have set the stage with the original Act One, Scene One, Cemetery of the Holy Innocents set. Colin de Cayeux, eyes blackened, face white as chalk, is hanging at the right side of the gibbet; Guy Tabarie, similarly made up, at the left. There are flowers in front of Colin, presumably left by Yvette. We hear birds chirping as lights come up halfway to indicate dawn. Denver wanders on stage left—in a dream—after his night with Yvette, slowly moving to stage front center, as he sings his “Aubade” to the tune of “Falling Angels.”

DENVER: In the moonlight, rising,
Kissing sweet Yvette:
Love is most surprising
When love is a duet.
Will we love tomorrow?
Only time can say.

Will joy end in sorrow
As dawn goes down to day?
Is this merely a poetic dream?
Will I go back to Denver, write my theme
About a bard who shines his starry beam
Across the years?
The thought that I might utterly forget
This night of vivid love with rare Yvette
Her aura fading like we'd never met
Brings me to tears.

BOTH:	Yvette's poignant smile	I'm in love with Denver.
<i>(Yvette singing offstage)</i>	Sings "Love Is Here To Stay." Not for just a while... "Forever and a day."	Yes! I'll be his wife I'm in love with Denver: He needs me in his life.

DENVER: François! Where are you? You told me to meet you here at dawn. *(Turning, he sees the bodies on the gibbet and crosses the stage for a closer look)* Colin? Guy? Half-eaten by crows. François!

(Villon enters stage right. He kneels before Colin and bows his head; goes to Guy and does the same. Only then, does he address Denver.)

VILLON: The Sorbonne bell rang twice as I left The Pine Cone. How was your night with Yvette?

DENVER: To talk about it, other than to say I just spent the best three hours of my life, would cheapen the best three hours of my life.

VILLON: And did you sing Yvette an aubade, as you left her side?

DENVER: *Aubade?*

VILLON: A morning song, where dawn breaks, and the lover laments that he must leave his lady to return to the workaday world. I had one ready to sing to Katherine, but never got the chance.

DENVER: You're mocking me. What are we doing here?—with Colin and Guy on the gibbet?

VILLON: I came to say goodbye. You're here to make the most important decision of your life.

DENVER: My choices?

VILLON: Last night I talked about Thibaut, Katherine, and my Prince as metaphors. That's what we become, Denver—the few of us who leave a trace behind. What metaphor will you choose? You can walk out of Paris and disappear into the Provinces with me...

DENVER: Or?

VILLON: You can stay in Paris with Yvette. Help her run The Pine Cone. Get your degree from the Sorbonne and try to secure a civil or clerical post...

DENVER: Or?

VILLON: Go back to your own wild time and live it for all it's worth, until—like me—you become part of Yesteryear.

DENVER: If I do, I'll lose Yvette.

VILLON: Prince! Trust me. Yvette will go with you. (*Shaking him by the shoulders to dispel his disbelief*) Prince! I am François! You've tasted my red-black wine!

DENVER (*After a decision-making pause*): I believe you. But how do I get home?

VILLON (*Pointing to Colin and Guy*): The dead are about to sing. Listen carefully. But not here.

DENVER: Where?

VILLON: In back of the scaffold—where you were before we met. Remember Colin and Guy's words always. But when *I* sing, try to remember your real name. Chant, "I am... I am... I am..." over and over until it comes to you.

DENVER: This is goodbye?

VILLON (*Embracing him*): Till we meet again—in my poetry. (*Calling after him as he withdraws behind the scaffold*) Give my regards to Professor Boudreaux. And don't forget to thank Monsieur Rossetti for inventing the word "Yesteryear!"

DENVER (*Peeping out from the scaffold*): And Yvette will be with me?

VILLON: As soon as you are with yourself.

Denver draws his head back behind the scaffold. Villon approaches Colin and Guy, who sing "The Reaper's Stair" to him and the audience.)

COLIN: Brothers, breathing still when we are dead,
Harden not your hearts, but treat us kindly...

GUY: For when he walked the earth sweet Jesus said,
He who damns his brother judges blindly.

COLIN: Some time ago the hangman did his duty
And left us here to ripen in the sun.

GUY: The crows pecked out our eyeballs one by one.
Bones are all that's left of strength and beauty.

BOTH: We all must climb the Reaper's stair...
On your way up, dear brother, say a prayer.

COLIN: Prince or Priest don't turn away in wrath
From vagabonds who pay the hangman's price...

GUY: Who stumble on the straight and narrow path
Not all can stroll, like you, so pure and wise.

COLIN: How chaste we are here swaying in the wind,
Reminding all who waltz by warm and fresh,

GUY: Though you may not by birds of prey be skinned—
Worms will one day feast upon your flesh.

BOTH: We all must climb the Reaper's stair...
On your way up, dear brother, say a prayer.

(François ascends the stair. The Reapers enter and fit a rope around his neck.)

VILLON: Think about us here on Mountfaucon.
Scorn us not because our lives went wrong.

Pity us, instead, our foolish crime.
Here's a hill we hope you'll never climb.
Still, Christ himself was nailed upon a tree,
Like Colin here—and poor Guy Tabarie...

(Guillaume enters waving the commutation letter and rushes to the scaffold.)

VILLON: Father!

GUILLAUME: Son! You'll not be hanged! *(Angrily to Reapers)* Take that rope off his neck.

REAPER 1 *(Bidding Villon a reluctant farewell as he removes the rope):* Au revoir.

REAPER 2 *(Sinisterly):* But *not* goodbye.

REAPER 1 & 2 *(Standing to either side of their escapee, they present him to the audience):*
Give it up for Master François Villon!

As the audience applauds and the Reapers cartwheel offstage left and right, Guillaume leads his son from the scaffold. François reads the letter, then continues to sing.)

VILLON: This letter says I shall not swing today:
No time to celebrate—I must, away.
Banished from the Paris of my birth,
I'll melt away, a snowflake, from this earth.

(He turns to look up at Colin and Guy; then embraces Guillaume, who exits stage right. Villon, however, exits via the audience. He stops and shakes hands with a man sitting on a left aisle seat, to whom he sings the penultimate line of his song.)

VILLON: We all must climb the Reaper's stair...

(Moving forward a few more feet, he shakes hands with a woman, sitting in a right aisle seat, to whom he sings the last line of "The Reaper's Stair.")

VILLON: On your way up, dear sister, say a prayer!

(Villon exits through the theater door. As lights dim, the Reapers re-enter and go to the scaffold. They move it to the left, revealing empty space. They move it to the right, revealing more empty space; then lift the scaffold several feet in the air to show—no Denver!)

REAPERS *(Chanting):* There's no place like Denver... There's no place like Denver....

blackout

SCENE NINE

Stephen Pleshette's Quarters in Denver, Colorado

"Return from Yesteryear" • "Envoi"

In half light, the Reapers remove the gallows, then install what's needed—door, desk, futon, bookcase—to simulate a messy American college student's room. There's a Broncos football pennant on the wall, along with posters of Dylan, Tom Waits, and a LEGALIZE POT placard on a stick. Scene set, the Reapers drag the Student in, unconscious, and put him in a chair, face down at his desk, stage left. As they exit and lights come up, he begins shaking his head, chanting "I am... I am... I am...." Then, suddenly, he sits up and shouts triumphantly.

STUDENT: I am... STEPHEN PLESHETTE!

(Before he has time to collect his wits, there's loud rapping on the door and voices shouting, "Stephen! Are you in there? Open up!" He stumbles to the door, opens it—and in burst Uncle Hank, Aunt Emma, Cousin Frank, and Yvonne, played in modern dress by the Cleric, Old Woman, Nobleman, and Young Woman.)

UNCLE HANK: What's going on, nephew?

BROTHER FRANK: You haven't answered your cell phone for three days.

AUNT EMMA: Since Yvonne was in Chicago at her dad's retirement party, we figured you had gone to the mountains, camping, and had no signal. But when I called Yvonne this morning she said your term paper's due tomorrow and you planned to be in your room working on it up to the last minute.

UNCLE HANK: We were going to report you missing, Steve, but your brother said we should drive up first to see what's what before getting the police involved.

AUNT EMMA: Your uncle got me into the car and we drove up from Fort Collins as fast as we could—Frank going 85 all the way, nearly giving me a heart attack.

YVONNE: I was so worried I booked an earlier flight home, and they picked me up at the airport on their way.

BROTHER FRANK *(Moving his fingers back and forth over Stephen's eyes and whispering so Uncle Frank, Aunt Emma, and Yvonne can't hear):* What's going on, little brother? Have you been smoking weed again?

STEPHEN: I'm sorry I caused such alarm. I got so wrapped up in my paper I lost all sense of time and the battery must have drained down on my phone. I'm fine. Aunt Emma! *(He hugs her warmly)* Uncle Hank! *(He hugs his uncle; then embraces his brother)* Frankie!

YVONNE *(Standing like the cheese, alone, puzzled by his inattention):* Stephen?

(After an awkward pause, she steps forward and gives Stephen a serious kiss, causing a déjà vu moment that makes him respond in kind and then regard her with wonder.)

STEPHEN *(Embarrassed, he fiddles with a sheaf of papers on his desk, and gets another shock):* Uh... my paper's finished! *(Thumbing through it)* I have to read it over for spelling and grammar... but... it looks like an A!

BROTHER FRANK: The radio says it's going to snow tonight—so we can't head back to Fort Collins till morning. How about if we all go out and celebrate your engagement to Yvonne *(She shows off her diamond ring, proudly)* and *(With less enthusiasm)* you finishing your paper on—who's that writer you're bonkers about?

STEPHEN: François Villon.

YVONNE: There's this new French bistro that got a rave review from the *Post*. They don't take reservations, so we'll have to wait for a table.

STEPHEN: What's it called?

YVONNE: The Redwood Burl. The *Post* says they have the best steak tartare in Denver.

STEPHEN: I haven't showered or shaved in three days! Why don't you all go down to the... *(Hesitating)* Redwood Burl... and put our name on the list. I'll freshen up and join you ASAP.

BROTHER FRANK: Sounds like a plan. (*He opens the door and ushers Aunt Emma and Uncle Hank out, but Yvonne lingers*) Come on, Yvonne. You lovebirds aren't hitched yet. Uncle Hank and Aunt Emma are still living in the 15th century when it comes to—you know what. (*He whispers to Stephen*) You'll be a married man soon, bro. Time to stop sowing those wild oats.

STEPHEN: Yvonne! (*She turns back*): When we marry, will you change your name for me?

YVONNE: Of course. I'll be Mrs. Pleshette.

STEPHEN: No. I mean your first name. Just a tiny change. From Yvonne to... (*Blurting*) *Yvette!*

YVONNE: And why should I do *that*?

STEPHEN: Because... (*Desperately*) it's *poetic*. It rhymes with Pleshette.

YVONNE: Yvette Pleshette! I think you've been reading too much François Villon....

(*She walks out, laughing, as Frank winks and closes the door. Stephen begins pacing about the room, singing "Return from Yesteryear" a cappella to the tune of "I Am François."*)

STEPHEN: Alone at last. So many questions.
Was I there? Am I here?
Did I really just return
From—Yesteryear?

But wait! I took dozens of photos on my iPhone to post on Facebook. François, Yvette, The Belle Heulmière, The Pine Cone, The Devil's Fart, Duke Charles, the prison at Meung-sur-Loire. I even got a terrific shot of Guy and Colin, hanging on the gibbet!

(*As Stephen takes his iPhone out of his pants pocket, the Reapers wheel on a huge computer screen and leave it back stage center. Stephen logs on and stares at his phone. What he sees the audience sees in giant letters on the screen.*)



Error #1463
15th Century Photos Not Available for Viewing
in the 21st Century!



STEPHEN: How can this be? I know I took those photos. And I don't remember writing this paper. It's A-plus work! Once Professor Boudreaux reads what—*whoever*—has to say about François, I know I'll get that fellowship to study at the Sorbonne.

(*The Reapers re-enter and remove the computer screen. As Stephen reads the opening lines of his paper out loud, Villon enters, stage right. He regards Stephen from a distance, then walks slowly towards him as lighting begins to simulate snowfall.*)

STEPHEN: "By a single line of verse in Medieval French," William Carlos Williams writes, "the name of Villon goes on living defiantly. What is that secret that has escaped with a mere question, deftly phrased, the profundity of the ages?"

VILLON: Tell me where, or in what land
is Flora, the lovely Roman,
or Archipiades, or Thaïs, or Echo
whose beauty was more than human,
always replying, across river or pool:
But where are the snows of yesteryear?

(Snow-light is at its maximum as Villon reaches and addresses Stephen, who continues to read the paper silently, unaware of the poet's presence.)

VILLON: Prince, do not ask in a week
where they are, or in a year.
The only answer you will get is:
Where are the snows of yesteryear?

(Villon exits, stage left, as snow-light lets up. Alarmed, Stephen suddenly drops the paper and jumps up from his desk.)

STEPHEN: They're waiting for me at The Redwood Burl! I need to shower!

(As he pulls his shirt off, something falls out of his pocket onto the floor, the orchestra providing clinking sounds. He picks it up and finds the large gold coin that Colin slipped into his pocket at the College of Navarre. Ecstatic, he goes into the audience and walks along the front row, exhibiting the coin triumphantly. On his way back, he gives the coin to a man or woman in a center seat. Back on stage, he turns to imaginary gallows back stage and shouts.)

STEPHEN: Colin de Cayeux! Can you hear me? I just gave your fool's gold away to a man [or woman] who will auction it at Sotheby's for millions. But I want you to know—tonight and forever—Yvette... Yvonne... is mine. *(He turns to the audience)* Now, I'm going to take my first shower—in seven years!

(As Stephen exits stage right, lights dim and snowlight begins to fall again. François re-enters stage left and stops by the desk. He picks up Stephen's paper and thumbs through it. Then, putting it down with a smile, he strolls to the footlights, snow falling all around him, as he sings "Envoi" a cappella to the tune of "I Am François.")

VILLON: I leave you with this April question:
Do last year's snowflakes disappear?
Or will you find them in the blossoms
Of Spring next year?

BLACKOUT

(Lights up. Curtain calls as orchestra plays "Language Lesson.")

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