

**THE TWELVE DAYS OF
CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE**

BY
NORA LOUISE SYRAN

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE

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THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE

CAST OF 25 CHARACTERS

A PERDRIX IN A PEAR TREE

MOTHER (F 40-50)
ANGLOPHONE PARTNER (M/F 40-60)

TWO TURTLE DOVES

HOLLY (F 30s)
FRENCH PARTNER (M/F 30-40)

THREE FRENCH HENS

LAURE (F 40-50)
HOLLY (F 30)
FAITH (F 50-60)
WAITER (M 30)

FOUR CALLING BIRDS

INTELLECTUAL DOG WALKER (M/F 40-60)
MOTHER DOG WALKER (F 40-50)
FORMAL DOG WALKER (F 40-50)
KIND DOG WALKER (F 30-40)
HUNTER (M 30-60)

FIVE GOLDEN RINGS

YOUNGER SHOPPER (M/F 20-40)
OLDER SHOPPER (M/F 50-60)

SIX GEESE A LAYING

NURSE 1 (M/F 30-50)
NURSE 2 (M/F 40-60)
NORMA JEAN (F 30-40)
PHILIPPE (M 30-40)

SEVEN SWANS A SWIMMING

PARTNER 1 (M/F 30-50)

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PARTNER 2 (M/F 30-50)

EIGHT MAIDS A MILKING

MILKMAID (F 40)

NINE LADIES DANCING

ALTAR GUILD WOMAN 1 (F 30-40)

ALTAR GUILD WOMAN 2 (F 40-50)

ALTAR GUILD WOMAN 3 (F 50-60)

FRENCH ANGLICAN PRIEST (M 30-50)

TEN LORDS A LEAPING

Same casting as the previous plays.

ELEVEN PIPERS PIPING

MUSIC TEACHER (M/F 60s)

TWELVE DRUMMERS DRUMMING

HOLLY (F 30s)

FRENCH PARTNER (M/F 30-50)

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Suggested casting for 6 PLAYERS (2M, 2F)

MALE ACTOR (40-50s)

FRENCH PARTNER, HUNTER, NURSE, PARTNER 2

MALE ACTOR (30s)

WAITER, PHILIPPE,
FATHER EMMANUEL

FEMALE ACTOR (30s)

HOLLY
KIND DOG WALKER
YOUNGER SHOPPER
ALTAR GUILD WOMAN 1

FEMALE ACTOR (40s)

LAURE
FORMAL DOG WALKER
NORMA-JEAN
MILKMAID

FEMALE ACTOR (40-50s)

MOTHER
OLDER SHOPPER
NURSE
PARTNER 1
ALTAR GUILD WOMAN 2

FEMALE ACTOR (50s-60s)

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER
FAITH
INTELLECTUAL DOG WALKER
ALTAR GUIDE WOMAN 3
MUSIC TEACHER

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DAY ONE

A PERDRIX IN A PEAR TREE

France. Countryside. Provence. Just before the winter holidays. An Anglophone MOTHER pits plums at a sink. From time to time, she looks through a window at her garden. ANGLOPHONE PARTNER peels potatoes near her. Intermittent rifle shots sound in the distance. Holiday music from the radio plays softly.

MOTHER. She's back again, but...

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. I'm telling you; partridges don't live in trees. *(Pause.)* We're empty nesters; she's a ground nester. *(Teasingly.)* She wouldn't be nesting in a wild plum tree anyway... A pear tree, maybe?

MOTHER. Ha, ha, ha... Funny.

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. Hey, how much jam are you making?

MOTHER. You know Patrick loves it. I thought he could take a few jars back to school with him *(Sighs. Looking over her partner's potatoes.)* How many potatoes do you think he can eat? *(Looking up.)* They might not make their nests in trees but she's there now. Look at her. Poor thing.

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. Smart thing. She's hiding from the hunters.

MOTHER. Did they get that boar?

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. Philippe said the hunter came by with a whole leg, including the hoof—

MOTHER. That was kind of—

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ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. All bloody and wrapped in an old towel. Dripping with blood. Gave him instructions to hang it in his garage—

MOTHER. Did he?

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. His wife threw it out.

MOTHER. Don't blame her. (*Sound of a rifle shot close by.*) Oh, I wish they wouldn't fire so close! (*Looks out.*) Oh, she's flown off!

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. Sign up in the village says they're doing "une abattage."

MOTHER. "Un..." It's masculine.

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. Of course, it is... A slaughter.

MOTHER. 'Tis the season... Poor boars...

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. People are fed up having their vegetable patches and swimming pools dug up— Wait, look! She's there. On the ground. Safe. (*Pause.*) According to Greek mythology, the first partridge appeared when Daedalus pushed his nephew off the sacred hill of Athena.

MOTHER. Why did he do that?

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. Jealousy. Perdix—

MOTHER. That's like the French for partridge!

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. Perdix was a talented inventor. Because Athena saved Perdix by turning him into a partridge, they say the bird remembers his fall and avoids high places.

MOTHER. Poor bird.

ANGLOPHONE PARTNER. Smart bird. (*Pause.*) She's safe with us. (*"The Twelve Days of Christmas" plays softly in the background as the couple looks out the window at the bird, safe on their property. Curtain.*)

DAY TWO TWO TURTLE DOVES

An apartment in Paris. December. HOLLY tries to fall asleep. A string of soft white lights illuminates her bed. Sound of a pigeon cooing loudly outside her window.

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HOLLY. Oh...! Shut up! (*She puts a pillow over her head to try to drown out the cooing. The cooing increases.*) Oh for—! You're not going to find a mate at this time of year, so shut up! (*The pigeon coos mournfully in reply.*) We're both on our own this Christmas. Deal with it. Now, go to sleep... Please... (*She grabs her phone and headphones, puts on holiday music, and closes her eyes. "Silent Night" plays softly. The sound of the pigeon intensifies. As the sounds increase, the lights fade. Silence. FRENCH PARTNER joins her and lies by her side. Holly shifts slightly, but her eyes remain closed.*)

FRENCH PARTNER. (*Softly sings "In the Bleak Midwinter" mispronouncing some words, which adds to the sweetness of the Rossetti classic.*) IN ZE BLEAK MIDWINTER / FROSTY WIND MADE MOANS / EARTH STOOD 'ARD AS IRON / WATER LIKE A STONE.

HOLLY. (*Wakes, removes her headphones. FRENCH PARTNER leaves her side. Lights return to their original state. "Silent Night" plays.*) Is someone there? (*The pigeon coos softly in reply and she laughs to herself.*) Oh God... Of course, no one's there... Nobody's going to sing us to sleep. Stop cooing. (*She replaces her headphones and closes her eyes. "Silent Night" plays softly again. The sound of the pigeon intensifies. As the sounds increase, the lights fade once again. Silence. French Partner rejoins her. Lying side by side. Holly shifts slightly, turning to face her French Partner, but her eyes remain closed. French Partner continues to sing "In the Bleak Midwinter."*)

FRENCH PARTNER. (*Singing softly.*) SNOW 'AD FALLEN / SNOW ON SNOW / SNOW ON SNOW / IN ZE BLEAK MIDWINTER / LONG, LONG AGO. (*Holly removes her headphones. French Partner leaves her side. Lights return to their original state. "Silent Night" plays. The cooing of the pigeon continues.*)

HOLLY. What are you doing out there? I told you, no one's coming. Stop calling for them! And go to sleep. (*She replaces her headphones and closes her eyes. "Silent Night" plays softly once more. The cooing of the pigeon intensifies. As the sounds increase, the lights fade once again. Silence. French Partner lies by her side again and continues singing "In the Bleak Midwinter."*)

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FRENCH PARTNER. (*Singing softly.*) IF I WERE A WISE MAN / I WOULD DO MY PART / BUT WHAT CAN I GIVE 'ER / GIVE 'ER MY HEART. (*Holly shifts, turning to face her French Partner. This time she opens her eyes and smiles. Silence. Curtain.*)

DAY THREE THREE FRENCH HENS

Paris. A busy cafe. Three seated women drink champagne. They are Parisians, but while LAURE is French, HOLLY is American and FAITH is English. "The Holly and the Ivy" plays in the background but is drowned out by chatter, dishes, and a French WAITER, who crosses back and forth with a tray.

HOLLY. Well, here's to your new—old—store! To Faith! (*They clink champagne glasses.*) Well done, getting it open in time for the holidays!

LAURE. The front window—the display—looks fantastique!

FAITH. Thanks, to you, Laure! And Holly... I would never have found the location without you. Oh, thank you, Ladies... It's so exciting.

LAURE. (*Raising her glass.*) To "Friperie de Foy"! (*The glasses clink.*)

HOLLY. Faith's Charity Shop!

FAITH. Oh, such a fuss... I know it's just a charity shop full of old things—

HOLLY. Just a charity shop? Come on... It's a good thing. I love my new—well, my new, old coat. I don't know what I'm more excited about: (*Seriously.*) wearing something "sustainable" or (*Excitedly.*) that for five euros I look like Emily in that show on Netflix!

LAURE. Oui! Exactement! 'Olly in Paris! (*Holly hops up and takes a turn in a flowing coat and matching shawl. Her friends applaud. The Waiter rushes past with a tray in hand. Charming, smiling.*)

WAITER. Magnifique, Mademoiselle!

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HOLLY. Merci, Monsieur. (*Conspiratorially.*) I wouldn't believe him if I thought he was expecting a tip! Let's leave him a "pourboire" shall we? Even after all these years, it just feels weird not leaving something...

LAURE. Mais bien sûr we'll leave a tip! It's Christmas. He's— How you say—? Run off his feet.

FAITH. He's gorgeous...

LAURE. (*Laure checks out the Waiter without embarrassment. Matter-of-factly.*) He's 'alf your age.

FAITH. I wasn't thinking of me. I was thinking of Holly... (*Pause.*)

HOLLY. Me? I'm—not ready yet. To move on without... Still one can always have hope. (*Changing the subject.*) Frank's what, six years younger than you?

FAITH. (*Cheekily.*) Seven.

HOLLY. You cougar, you...

FAITH. He's French. Look at Macron! Marrying his teacher. (*Pause.*) She had a husband and a life—

LAURE. The French don't care. It's a *private* life.

FAITH. (*Pause.*) Well, at least Frank will be happy I'm not sitting around the house all depressed again this year making Bûche de Noël. I've a purpose to my life now.

LAURE. You've always 'ad a purpose to your life, Faith! (*Music plays clearly in the background. The refrain of "The Holly and the Ivy": THE RISING OF THE SUN / AND THE RUNNING OF THE DEER / THE PLAYING OF THE MERRY ORGAN / SWEET SINGING IN THE CHOIR.*)

WAITER. Et voilà, mesdames! Mini Bûches de Noël pralinées—

HOLLY. Surprise! (*The Waiter serves the desserts and fills their glasses. The women ooh and ahh with delight.*)

FAITH. Oh, Holly you shouldn't have— (*Giggling.*) But I'm glad you did!

(*They begin to eat their desserts.*)

LAURE. You make your own Bûche de Noël? With all the pâtisseries in Paris?

HOLLY. See! I'm not the only one impressed! Made 'em and gave 'em all away—

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FAITH. (*Humbly.*) To Charity. But that was last year! This year, I have my shop. “Friperie de Foy” That’s me! Foy. Faith. A new start with old things!

LAURE. (*She leads the others in lifting their glasses once again.*) To Faith!

HOLLY. Hope!

ALL THREE LADIES. And Charity! (*They clink glasses. Curtain.*)

DAY FOUR FOUR CALLING BIRDS

The French countryside. Four DOG WALKERS are out walking their dogs in the wintertime. Sounds of dogs off stage barking, scratching, and the tinkle of a bell attached to one of the dog’s collars. A HUNTER hides in his blind, rifle in hand.

INTELLECTUAL. Here, boy! Yoo-hoo!

FORMAL WOMAN. (*She is quite formal.*) Ling-ling!

MOTHER. Ranger! (*Whistles.*) Ranger!

KIND WOMAN. (*She is a kind soul.*) Lookout! (*The other three jump in fright and duck, expecting a shot to be fired.*)

INTELLECTUAL. Oh, my good—!

KIND WOMAN. Oh, God! Sorry. I was calling my dog. (*Awkwardly.*) Lookout.

MOTHER. For crying out loud, you nearly gave me a heart attack! It’s hunting season you know—

FORMAL WOMAN. Yes, you might want to consider changing his name—

KIND WOMAN. Her name. It’s her name—

INTELLECTUAL. A rose by any other name—

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MOTHER. Oh, for crying out loud... Give the Shakespeare a rest, will you? No one gets it. Not the French and nobody who names their dog “Lookout”—

KIND WOMAN. I didn’t name her. The animal shelter did. Or the hunter who left her. It was half rubbed out on her tag. It’s something like (*Struggling with the pronunciation.*) “Loup Coûte,” but I can’t pronounce that, so it’s “Lookout.”

FORMAL WOMAN. She seems to be missing a leg.

KIND WOMAN. Hunting dog. Got her foot in a trap, the vet said, and the hunter left her for dead. They had to amputate.

INTELLECTUAL. That’s horrible— (*A shower of sticks, stones and dirt, as from a dog scratching the ground behind itself, flies onto stage.*) Look out!

MOTHER. (*Eyes narrowed*) Not you, too!

INTELLECTUAL. No, look out for the crapnel! Sorry! (*Scolding.*) Here boy! Stop it! (*Pause.*) Shrapnel... Crapnel.

FORMAL WOMAN. Charming.

KIND WOMAN. The bell on the collar’s a good idea and I like Ling-Ling’s red sweater—

FORMAL WOMAN. She looks like a fawn otherwise—

KIND WOMAN. Yeah...That hunter’s awfully close. What are they hunting out here? Those look like deer tracks...

MOTHER. Or boar...

FORMAL WOMAN. Pheasants... My villa’s full of them! They hide out in our garden during hunting season.

KIND WOMAN. Wow. Boar, deer, pheasants—

INTELLECTUAL. And a partridge in a pear tree— (*They jump at the sound of the rifle going off just behind them.*)

HUNTER. Ahh! Merde! Au secours—!

KIND WOMAN. What’s happened?

FORMAL WOMAN. He seems to have shot his toe off.

INTELLECTUAL. The cat will mew and dog will have his day.

MOTHER. (*Laughing.*) Now, that one, I got. Oh, for— We’d better help him to his car. (*The opening to “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”*)

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plays as they help him: GOD REST YOU MERRY, GENTLEMEN / LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY. Curtain.)

DAY FIVE FIVE GOLDEN RINGS

France. A busy grocery store full of the sounds of the holiday season: music, chatter, and the ding of a supermarket slot machine. YOUNGER SHOPPER, rushed, clutching a bag of clementines and a bottle of champagne, with a receipt crumpled around the bottle's neck, heads toward the exit. Near the exit, an OLDER SHOPPER fumbles through her purse for her receipt to place beneath the scanner of the digital slot machine to try to win a little something for the holidays.

YOUNGER SHOPPER. Oh, so many people— (*Younger finds the way past the slot machine blocked by the Older Shopper.*) Oh, come on... (*Low voice.*) Just move it, will you? (*Younger moves to go around, but notices the slot machine, looks down at the receipt crumpled around the champagne bottle, and stops. Older, removing a carefully folded receipt in her purse, moves unhurriedly.*) Why not? (*Younger slips in and places the crumpled receipt under the scanner. The slot machine spins, whirs, and dings. They stand transfixed until it suddenly stops, then plays a merry, winning tune.*)

OLDER SHOPPER. (*With genuine delight.*) Oh! You won! (*Younger is amused, and softens as the machine spits out a coupon.*)

YOUNGER SHOPPER. I never win. Five euros. Wow... (*Younger starts to leave as Older moves to place her receipt under the scanner.*)

OLDER SHOPPER. I never win either, but here's hoping— (*Younger stops and turns.*)

YOUNGER SHOPPER. But you have won! Here. (*Before Older can place her receipt under the scanner, Younger hands her the winning coupon for five euros.*)

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OLDER SHOPPER. But, no... I couldn't. (*Confused, Older looks down at the coupon while Younger leaves. "We Wish you a Merry Christmas" plays over the store's sound system. Curtain.*)

DAY SIX SIX GEESE A-LAYING

Nice, France. Christmas Eve. A maternity ward. The soft music of the holiday season playing in the background is punctuated by the sounds of women giving birth and the cries of newborn babies. Two pragmatic FRENCH NURSES talk over the knees of an American, NORMA-JEAN, who breathes steadily, trying to stay calm. The nurses move in and out of the scene speaking/singing lines from the French song: "Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella."

NURSE 1. (*Singing.*) BRING A TORCH, JEANETTE, ISABELLA.

NURSE 2. (*Singing.*) BRING A TORCH, TO THE STABLE CALL.
(*The nurses look through Norma-Jean's chart and exchange worried glances.*)

NURSE 1. C'est quoi le problème?

NURSE 2. Finalement le médecin a demandé un déclenchement.

NORMA-JEAN. A what? I don't understand! (*Pronouncing the "lench" like wrench.*) A de-clench-ment? Philippe! (*Philippe raps politely on the door, then comes rushing in.*)

NURSE 1. (*Singing.*) WHO KNOCKS ON A DOOR LIKE THAT?

PHILIPPE. Désolé! (*Anxiously.*) Jeanette! (*Sound of a woman crying out in pain. The nurses barely look up as they are quite immune to the noise and chaos.*)

NURSE 2. (*Singing.*) IT IS WRONG TO TALK SO LOUD.

PHILIPPE. The doctor is recommending a déclenchement.

NORMA-JEAN. What the hell is that?

PHILIPPE. Uh, uh... They are going to force the baby to come out early.

NORMA-JEAN. No! No, no—

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PHILIPPE. But Jeanette... The baby... It's for his—

NORMA-JEAN. Or her—!

PHILIPPE. Good. He. Le bébé. C'est masculin... Grammar, Jeanette...

NORMA-JEAN. This is not the time for a French lesson!

PHILIPPE. (*Emphasizing.*) *Le bébé* needs some motivation to... move.

NORMA-JEAN. No, no! I will not have a baby born on Christmas day!

NURSE 1. C'est quoi le problème?

NORMA-JEAN. The problem? That kid will never have a normal birthday. It'll always be, here's your present: remember it's your birthday and your Christmas present. No, no, no!

PHILIPPE. Jeanette... This is, uh, absurde.

NURSE 2. Jeanette? (*Looking at the chart.*) C'est qui Norma-Jean Green, alors?

NORMA-JEAN. Me! C'est moi! Norma-Jean Green.

PHILIPPE. Jeanette... It's for the good of the baby. Trust the doctor.

NORMA-JEAN. What doctor? I haven't seen a doctor yet—

(*Cry from within of another woman in labor and then the cry of a baby.*)

NURSE 1. (*Making a knocking gesture.*) TOC! TOC! OPEN UP THE DOOR FOR US!

NURSE 2. (*Making a knocking gesture.*) TOC! TOC! TO GO AND SEE THE BABY. (*The nurses leave, this time in a flurry of excitement.*)

NORMA-JEAN. Oh my God! I can't do this— And besides I'm Jewish!

PHILIPPE. You're Jewish?

NORMA-JEAN. Sort of... Oh my God, what have we done?

PHILIPPE. Uh—

NORMA-JEAN. You're Catholic...

PHILIPPE. Sort of... Norma-Jean...?

NORMA-JEAN. I was named after Marilyn Monroe. She converted to Judaism when she married Arthur Miller.

PHILIPPE. I will never ask you to convert to Catholique— Uh... Church.

NORMA-JEAN. I know, I know— You're an atheist!

PHILIPPE. So... The baby can be born on Christmas! No presents! No problème—

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(The nurses return from their rounds full of the joy at the sight of a healthy baby.)

NURSE 1. *(Singing.)* AH! AH! BEAUTIFUL IS THE MOTHER!

NURSE 2. *(Singing.)* AH! AH! BEAUTIFUL IS THE CHILD. *(A baby cries in the background.)*

NORMA-JEAN. According to the papers, we're not even married!

PHILIPPE. Who needs to be married to have a baby?

NURSE 1. *(Reading official papers.)* Donc, c'est Madame Norma-Jean Renault?

NORMA-JEAN. Oh, God! Not again!

PHILIPPE & NORMA-JEAN. Green! Norma-Jean Green!

NURSE 2. *(Uncomprehendingly.)* Donc... Mademoiselle Green.

NORMA-JEAN. No! Madame! I'm married—

NURSE 1. But you're not *Madame* Renault?

NURSE 2. *(Singing. Finger to lips to call for silence.)* CHUT! CHUT!

NORMA-JEAN. That's my mother-in-law! I just want to keep my name! *(To Philippe.)* The baby can have yours! No problem... But we can't have a baby yet, Philippe—

PHILIPPE. It's a bit too late for that, I think.

NORMA-JEAN. No, no, no! We have to wait! We haven't even agreed on a name!

PHILIPPE. Mais, you didn't want to know if it's a boy or a girl...

NURSE 1. *(Looking at the chart.)* C'est un...

NURSE 2 & PHILIPPE. *(Singing. Again for silence.)* CHUT! CHUT!

NORMA-JEAN. Promise me if I'm out of it and you need to go register her, that you won't give her some stupid name we haven't agreed on!

PHILIPPE. Shh... The doctor is coming—

NORMA-JEAN. Promise!

PHILIPPE. I promise, ma chérie—

NORMA-JEAN. Emilie, you know, from work? Her husband went to the town hall while she was drugged out of her mind from the pain killers and he registered some stupid name their baby's now stuck with forever! *(A third woman cries out in pain, humorously mirroring Norma-Jean's frustration. The nurses rush out again.)*

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PHILIPPE. I promise. The baby will be called whatever you wish, ma petite Jeanette.

NORMA-JEAN. No silly, girly name. Something strong. Something wise. A name that lasts through time...religions...male or female—

PHILIPPE. Non, non! Not “woke” again—

NORMA-JEAN. No, no, think bigger, Philippe! I’m not being “woke!” I just don’t want our child to be teased forever. I grew up with a girl called Chandra. Lear. Chandra Lear. No joke. Who does that to their child?

PHILIPPE. Elon Musk—

NORMA-JEAN. No ridiculous names! We’re not calling him (*She affects a French accent.*) Rudolphe! And he’s not going to be born at Christmastime. Period

PHILIPPE. Jeanette— (*Cries of a baby. The carol “Un flambeau, Jeanette, Isabella” plays in the background. The nurses return full of more joy.*)

NORMA-JEAN. We’re not ready to have a baby! It’s all too complicated—

PHILIPPE. So is the pregnancy, Jeanette. Trust in the doctors.

NORMA-JEAN. I am not ready yet! Je ne peux pas—!

NURSE 1. (*Singing.*) OH! HOW HIS CHEEKS ARE ROSY!

NURSE 2. (*Singing.*) AH! AH! HOW HE SHINES LIKE A STAR!
(*Cries of another baby.*)

NORMA-JEAN. Get me out of here before that doctor comes—

PHILIPPE. Shh... Jeanette... Listen. (*The Nurses sing along with the carol.*)

NURSES. (*Singing softly.*) BRING A TORCH, JEANETTE,
ISABELLA / BRING A TORCH TO THE STABLE CALL... (*Their voices fade as the music continues underneath.*)

PHILIPPE. (*Slowly.*) In English, it’s “Bring a Torch, Jeanette and—”

NORMA-JEAN. (*Delighted.*) Isabella!

PHILIPPE. (*Nodding in agreement.*) Or something...gender neutral...Isa?

NORMA-JEAN. Oh, Philippe... (*The music fades as they gaze, lovingly, at one another and the lights fade. Curtain.*)

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DAY SEVEN SEVEN SWANS A-SWIMMING

Paris. The left bank of the Seine overlooking Notre Dame. A good-looking couple walks along the river. They are dressed well for an evening out, but while PARTNER 1 is uncomfortable in formal wear, PARTNER 2 is totally at ease.

PARTNER 1. You're breaking up with me on Christmas Eve? Who does that?

PARTNER 2. I hadn't planned to—

PARTNER 1. You take me for a walk along the Seine after a (*Mocking slightly.*) super fancy dinner at *Le Cheval Blanc*—

PARTNER 2. I hadn't planned to end our—

PARTNER 1. Walk and talk all the way to view Notre Dame on Christmas Eve, and now— God, just look at it! Now, thanks to you, whenever I look at “Our Lady—” Ugh!

PARTNER 2. Who knew stone could burn? (*Pause.*) Seemed pretty solid to me. (*Pause.*) It got so hot, it melted—

PARTNER 1. (*Abruptly.*) Is this about the dessert? (*Defensively.*) All I told the waiter was they'd baked the crème brûlée for just a bit too long— It was all curdled! You can't be so squeamish about complaining when things aren't—

PARTNER 2. I'm not ending our relationship because of the crème brûlée.

PARTNER 1. And okay, so I picked up the fork from the floor—

PARTNER 2. I'm not—

PARTNER 1. I was hungry. What did you want me to do? Sit there and time how long it took them to come and pick it up? What are you, a food critic for the Michelin guide?

PARTNER 2. You're the one complaining about the crème brûlée!

PARTNER 1. I needed my fork—

PARTNER 2. It fell on the ground!

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PARTNER 1. So, it *is* the fork! You're ending a relationship because of a fork?

PARTNER 2. Yes. (*Pause.*) I mean, no. Not over a fork. It's just, you don't do that— Not there. Not at *Le Cheval Blanc*!

PARTNER 1. (*Openly mocking.*) Ooh... (*Roughly.*) So, take me to *Courtepaille* next year for a burger! I hate sitting in that stuffy, old place trying to work out which fork to use next and wiping the drips off my wine glass so I don't stain the tablecloth!

PARTNER 2. (*Turns to look out across the river to Notre Dame.*) I'm glad they've raised the money for her. (*Sighs.*) Fires break out. They said it started probably because of the renovation work. How ironic. But if the foundations are strong, you can rebuild. And it will look exactly the same! Well, at least on the outside.

PARTNER 1. You really want them to build it exactly like it was before?

PARTNER 2. Yeah. The inside wasn't really damaged. I don't see the point of changing anything. (*Horried.*) From the plans I saw online, they're thinking of turning it into... Disneyland!

PARTNER 1. (*Blissfully unaware of Partner 2's scorn and genuinely excited.*) I know! From what I saw, it's going to look like— Like Superman's crystal palace!

PARTNER 2. Exactly. Tacky! Modern projections in the chapels? They're going to rip out the confessionals to make more room for the tourists!

PARTNER 1. You're gonna miss the confessionals? You're not even Catholic! (*Pause.*) So go on then, if you need a confessional... Confess. Why are you ending "us?" We have a good thing going... (*Flirtatiously.*) So hot it melted, eh? (*They stand side by side not looking at one another, but out into the distance. "Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly" plays in the background.*)

PARTNER 2. Look, swans!

PARTNER 1. There are so many of them this year... (*Attempt at lightness.*) Seven swans a-swimming... (*Sighs.*) They mate for life, you know.

PARTNER 2. Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE

PARTNER 1. Depends, I guess.

PARTNER 2. (*Pause.*) They're good-looking birds.

PARTNER 1. Probably tasty, too.

PARTNER 2. Ugh... What a thought. They're protected in England you know. It's tradition. Dates back centuries. They're the Queen's birds.

PARTNER 1. So, only she's allowed to eat 'em!

PARTNER 2. (*Horrified.*) Well, I suppose... If she wants to...

PARTNER 1. Didn't one of her castles burn down?

PARTNER 2. Yes, in her *annus horribilis*. Windsor. But it didn't totally burn down. It's all fine now. (*Pause.*) Well, they say a fire's a chance to start over...

PARTNER 1. Charles and Diana's marriage collapsed that year, too. And Andrew and Fergie's— What year was that? Ninety-two?

PARTNER 2. Charles never loved Diana. His swan for life is Camilla. But it's not always easy to see.

PARTNER 1. What's hard to see?

PARTNER 2. The foundations. Spot the cracks. (*Turning to face Partner 1.*) Is it really worth rebuilding or best just to start all over again? (*Turning toward Notre Dame.*) Her foundations are strong. And they'll build that spire straight up into the sky again.

PARTNER 1. (*Sighs.*) You can have your old spindly spire but promise me we'll have the floodlights.

PARTNER 2. Sure. (*Teasingly.*) And the tacky light show, too...

PARTNER 1. I love the light show!

PARTNER 2. (*Laughing.*) I know you do. (*Seriously.*) And you'll find someone who loves it just as much as you do.

PARTNER 1. It's been a good year.

PARTNER 2. Yes. It's been a good year. (*Curtain.*)

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