

LEGACY OF LIGHT

By Karen Zacarías

SETTING:

FRANCE 1700's: the costumes are full French Pre-revolutionary

NEW JERSEY: Now

The set is simple and abstract:

The play should never stop because of the set.

Furniture that works in both eras

An apple tree.

Light

and some darkness too.

CHARACTERS:

EMILIE du CHÂTELET- Beautiful intelligent woman. A scientist. Age 42

VOLTAIRE – Emilie's lover; Playwright and scientist-wannabe. Age 54

SAINT-LAMBERT- Emilie's handsome younger lover. Also plays **LEWIS**

OLIVIA- Modern professional woman. A scientist. Age 42. Also plays **WET NURSE**

MILLIE- Modern 21 year-old woman. Italian descent. Also plays **PAULINE**

PETER- Olivia's husband. Age 44. Also plays **MONSIEUR DU CHÂTELET**

Many of Voltaire's actual quotations are peppered throughout the play.

ACT I: SCENE I- EMILIE's ROOM

(ST LAMBERT and EMILIE lie exhausted after passionate love-making)

SAINT LAMBERT

Incredible! What do you do to me, Emilie?

EMILIE

Jean Francois-

SAINT LAMBERT

My brow is still moist from the excitement.

EMILIE

The miracles of the body.

SAINT LAMBERT

Of your body, Madame.

(He kisses EMILIE)

SAINT LAMBERT

Feel my chest, it's about to burst with passion.

EMILIE

My dear poet, your heart is still beating quite fast.

SAINT LAMBERT

Thank goodness, I am young and strong.

EMILIE

Yes. Thank God for that.

(THEY kiss again)

SAINT LAMBERT

I see stars when I kiss you.

EMILIE

Ah, don't tease me.

SAINT LAMBERT

My beautiful lady Astronomer.

(They kiss)

SAINT LAMBERT
Oh Emilie...

EMILIE
Jean-François.

SAINT LAMBERT
Emilie! The heat of your skin...the light of your eyes.

EMILIE
Mon cher, you are making me blush!

SAINT LAMBERT
Your blushing body is my universe.

(HE kisses her neck)

SAINT LAMBERT
I came to the country to learn from a master. And yet, it was a mistress who taught me with the loveliest lessons.

EMILIE
And now the King has appointed you poet of his court.

SAINT LAMBERT
You will inspire every verse I write in Paris.

EMILIE
It's a pity you have to leave tomorrow.

SAINT LAMBERT
If only we could keep the dawn at bay.

(He kisses her)

SAINT LAMBERT
I adore you...

EMILIE
Merci. Merci Beaucoup

SAINT LAMBERT
You are my Aphrodite!

EMILIE
(laughs) Oh, Jean-François!

SAINT LAMBERT
Emilie. Emilie-

VOLTAIRE (Off stage)
Em-ilie!

(They stop)

EMILIE
Oh no. Not now.

ST. LAMBERT
It's Voltaire! Voltaire!

EMILIE
Calm down.

ST LAMBERT
Voltaire! Voltaire is looking for you.

EMILIE
I will reason with him.

ST LAMBERT
Reason with Voltaire? About this?

VOLTAIRE (Opens the door)
Emilie! ...St Lambert? Oh!!!

SAINT LAMBERT
Monsieur Voltaire.!!!

EMILIE
Voltaire...my love.

VOLTAIRE
Good God! I cannot believe this!

EMILIE
Voltaire-

VOLTAIRE

You and Saint Lambert?

ST. LAMBERT

Monsieur Voltaire, I never meant-

EMILIE

Voltaire, calm down.

VOLTAIRE

Calm down? My heart is breaking. My soul recoils. Madame, you told me you were in your room, occupied with scientific experiments!

EMILIE

Voltaire, please!

VOLTAIRE

Instead I find you very occupied...with my pupil.

SAINT LAMBERT

Pardon me, Monsieur. I can only imagine how this must look.

VOLTAIRE

I see the woman I most adore betraying me for the carnal pleasure of...of...a PUPPY!

EMILIE

Voltaire!

ST LAMBERT

Monsieur! Hence you forget, I am a man with a title.

VOLTAIRE

That does not entitle you to court my lady!

EMILIE

Voltaire -

VOLTAIRE

Imagine what your husband would say about this, Madame?

EMILIE

Do not bring the Marquis into this discussion. This is between you and me. Entre nous.

VOLTAIRE

St Lambert, you came here to learn from me. I have endured your insufferable arrogance and your inferior verse. And how do you repay me? You steal my muse.

EMILIE

Voltaire, really-

VOLTAIRE

I demand satisfaction.

EMILIE

What?!

ST LAMBERT

Do you wish to fight?

VOLTAIRE

If your swordplay is as deft as your wordplay, then most certainly.

(ST LAMBERT draws his sword).

EMILIE

Voltaire you abhor violence!

(VOLTAIRE draws his)

ST. LAMBERT

You are a man of a certain ripe age, Monsieur

VOLTAIRE

And you're not yet the ripe age of a man,

EMILIE

You must stop this.

ST LAMBERT

En garde.

VOLTAIRE

I have been imprisoned in the Bastille, banished to England, and had my plays produced at the Comedie Française. I have no fear. En garde.

(They begin to fight)

EMILIE

Oh, ce n'est pas possible!

ST. LAMBERT

Beware, Monsieur Voltaire, for I am a highly trained fighter.

VOLTAIRE

Beware, St. Lambert, for I am a highly trained thinker. (He does something clever to avoid the blade)

EMILIE

Then think, Voltaire! You could get hurt or killed!

VOLTAIRE

Then they will say I died for love.

(Still fighting)

EMILIE

No, they will say you died for your pride and vanity.

VOLTAIRE

Fine, that too.

(LAMBERT almost strikes VOLTAIRE)

EMILIE

Careful! Jean-François, don't hurt him...

ST. LAMBERT

He attacks me! I must respond.

EMILIE

This is madness.

VOLTAIRE

Au contraire, see how courtly and civilized we are?

EMILIE

You are primitive and stupid.

ST. Lambert-

Voilà.

VOLTAIRE

Oh!

EMILIE

You'll do anything for attention, even if it harms you.

VOLTAIRE

HA

ST. LAMBERT

HA!

EMILIE

HA HA on you both.

(EMILIE has grabbed her sword and deftly disarms or separates both men)

Let us act like rational thinking beings shall we?

VOLTAIRE

First, I need to breathe.

ST LAMBERT

You know Monsieur Voltaire, I am a great admirer of your poems and plays.

VOLTAIRE

Of course you are.

EMILIE

Perhaps we should give Voltaire some room to catch his breath, mon cher. Perhaps you should go for a walk-

ST. LAMBERT

And get some fresh air!

EMILIE

Thank you, my love. (EMILIE kisses ST. LAMBERT)

(ST. LAMBERT gives VOLTAIRE a slight awkward bow)

ST. LAMBERT

Monsieur Voltaire-

(ST. LAMBERT exits)

EMILIE
Are you all right?

VOLTAIRE
No! I'm not all right! My heart is breaking!

EMILIE
Breathe.

VOLTAIRE
Saint Lambert?

EMILIE
Breathe.

VOLTAIRE
Saint Lambert!!

EMILIE
Breathe.

VOLTAIRE
SAINT LAMBERT!!!!

EMILIE
Calm down.

VOLTAIRE
You replace me...with him? With that little puppy!

EMILIE
He is handsome; he is young.

VOLTAIRE
Poison daggers are piercing my bleeding heart.

EMILIE
Enough theatrics. You are being unreasonable and unjust.

VOLTAIRE
Emilie, my entire life is dedicated to reason and justice.

EMILIE
Then treat my behavior with the same fair tenderness you treat your own. I know about the other ladies in your life.

VOLTAIRE

I beg your pardon?

EMILIE

Your letters to them are beautiful. (She pulls some letters out of her desk)

VOLTAIRE

(Beat) Who sent them to you?

EMILIE

An anonymous “friend” who wants to harm you and make me feel like a fool. And this is why I continue to tell you, my love, be careful of what you write...people are using everything you pen in an effort to harm you. To banish you. Good God, it’s a constant battle having to protect you from yourself.

VOLTAIRE

Why didn’t you say anything to me?

EMILIE

I will not beg any man to love me. Not even you.

VOLTAIRE

Forgive me, Emilie.

EMILIE

Remember how it was with us in the beginning? The passionate nights without sleep, the stolen kisses in dark hallways, the long fiery talks?

VOLTAIRE

Yes...I do.

EMILIE

Being with you is like being filled with light. With possibility.

VOLTAIRE

Our souls were made for each other.

EMILIE

Then forgive me and forgive Saint-Lambert for I’m certain he’d rather not be the man who stabbed France’s favorite poet.

VOLTAIRE

We are all full of weakness and errors, let us mutually pardon each other our follies. It is the first law of nature.

EMILIE

Who would have imagined the first law of nature would be forgiveness? I would have thought the first law of nature would be change.

ACT I: SCENE II

(PETER enters his home with a Grocery bag)

PETER (singing)

“She Blinded me with science” Do-do do.

She blinded me - with SCIENCE

And hit me with technology

(He turns on the light. OLIVIA is sitting on the couch with a box on her lap)

Good Heavens, Olivia! You scared me!

OLIVIA

Sorry.

PETER

What are you doing sitting here alone in the dark?

OLIVIA

Nothing. Just thinking. You were singing our song!

PETER

Was I?

OLIVIA

I could have gone to the grocery store.

PETER

You haven't been to the grocery store in seven years.

OLIVIA

True.

PETER

And you're never home this early.

OLIVIA

I know. Always at work.

PETER

Is everything OK? You seem...

OLIVIA

I'm what?

PETER

You seem a little dazed.

OLIVIA

Dazed. Yes. But very happy.

PETER

Really?

OLIVIA

Yes. Really. How was your day?

PETER

Well, the school finally got those little pencils I ordered and Billy was able to grip one correctly. And suddenly his scrawls turned into legible letters. I was right! That kid doesn't have a learning disability; he has a fine motor problem. Billy wrote the best letter B ever. Three months of struggling and then today. He did it.

OLIVIA

So today is the day Billy wrote his name.

PETER

Amazing that something as simple as a pencil can make a difference, you know.

OLIVIA

Peter, I think I found it.

PETER

Found it? Olivia...

(She brings out a photograph)

OLIVIA

My team wants to be very careful before an announcement is made...but I have every reason to believe I've discovered...the first evidence of a planet in formation.

PETER

A planet in formation. Where?

OLIVIA

See that little little dot?

PETER

Barely...

OLIVIA

That's it. It's beyond our solar system...but not too far away...it orbits the blue star Vega. Of course the possibility that it might be a brown dwarf can't be entirely ruled out- but our calculations of its trajectory, its' color, its' temperature, the way it moves, of the proximity of a stellar nursery. If my hypothesis is correct... This is the embryonic core of a planet.

PETER

Olivia!

OLIVIA

I've named her Vega-B.

PETER

It has a name? This is huge!

OLIVIA

This is everything I've ever wanted.

PETER

Olivia, you are going to win a Nobel Prize.

OLIVIA

Peter, only two women have ever won the Nobel Prize in Physics.

PETER

You are going to be the third. First Billy, now this. Unbelievable.

OLIVIA

Now, we have to continue to observe, measure, calculate and predict...and wait to see if it's correct.

PETER

Wait? How long?!!!

OLIVIA

Oh...a million years, depending

PETER

Olivia, that's a long time.

OLIVIA

To us. But to the universe, it's nothing. (Beat. Looks at the photograph)
By the way. I totaled the car.

PETER
What?

OLIVIA
Smashed.

PETER
What? Are you OK?

OLIVIA
Just five stitches.

PETER
Where?

OLIVIA
Here. You can't see because of my hair. They wanted to shave it. Can you believe it? They wanted to shave my hair. After all I've done to grow it out. But I urged them otherwise. I can be persuasive that way.

PETER
Totally totaled?

OLIVIA
Yes.

PETER
Why didn't you call me?

OLIVIA
Because I wanted to surprise you.

PETER
Surprise me more?

OLIVIA
I had to buy you something. I took a taxi. Then I walked home.
(She hands him a gift she pulls out of her bag)
Open it. It's for you.

PETER
You hate shopping.

OLIVIA
I know. Open it.

PETER
What is it?

OLIVIA
It's something you truly want, but do not have.

PETER
A wrist watch walkie talkie?

OLIVIA
Open it.

(PETER does. He pulls out some baby booties)

PETER
Oh.

OLIVIA
For you.

PETER
(Beat) A little small, don't you think?

OLIVIA
I want to have a baby.

PETER
(Beat) Oh, Olivia...

OLIVIA
Start where we stopped...

PETER
Olivia...sweetie... the baby part might have already passed us by.

OLIVIA
No! Don't say that. No. It hasn't ...

PETER
I thought we made our peace with it.

OLIVIA
Peace?

PETER

I have my students. You have your work. We have our friends.

OLIVIA

I don't want peace. I want a noisy, kicking, burping child.

PETER

Olivia, sweetie, there are certain facts...

OLIVIA

Facts! I know the facts. But facts are...fixed...they aren't knowledge. And I know...in my profession, that if you just look at an equation, a problem long enough, and do the math in your head, and dream about it...and focus...suddenly, when you least expect it...the perspective will shift...and light will shine and you will see a way.

PETER

And that's what happened to you today?

OLIVIA

The car was spinning and the metal was compressing and the glass was breaking, I had this still moment...and I conceived an idea.

(He hugs her and kisses her head)

OLIVIA

Peter, think about it. If a galaxy can have a baby, why can't we?