Monsieur Léotard
by Dave Carley

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Cast

DOMENICA – 20 - a woman scorned once too often. Now she’s hell-bent on suicide, or at least creating a little scandal. Beautiful and tragic.
JULES – 24 – Parisian trapeze superstar and intermittently attentive husband of Domenica. A hunk of an homme.
Father EUSTACHE – older – Priest. Domenica’s pragmatic spiritual guide. Probably has enjoyed his food over the years.

Scene and Time

Paris. On a bridge or high wall above the Seine. 1862.

Plot Synopsis

He was the original daring young man on a flying trapeze. In order to better perform his acts of aerial athleticism, Jules Léotard encased his gorgeous physique in a flexible, body-revealing costume that set Parisienne hearts aflutter. Soon M. Léotard was not only the nation’s top athlete – he was also ravishing half of Paris.

Jules Léotard the trapezist was eventually nudged out by other, more daring performers. He died in 1870 at age 32, officially of smallpox but more probably from something venereal.

Jules Léotard left a small legacy: that sexy outfit eponymously named in his honour – and a very bitter wife. And, if this short play is to be believed, he very nearly didn’t leave the latter...

Eponymy:

*Monsieur Léotard* is one of a series of Eponymy plays. Others feature the Standhal Syndrome, De Clérambault’s Disease, Kirtland’s Warbler and gender-swapping members of an obscure 1800s religious sect, The Muggletonians. More at <http://davecarley.com/plays-short/eponomy/>

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Lights come up on DOMENICA, standing upstage. She is wearing a leotard and a showy wig from another era. A beauty mark or three.

DOMENICA rushes to the edge of the stage. It is a determined rush but ends in uncertainty. She may stop once during her forward charge in order to strike a tragic pose.

At the edge of the stage she stops and peers down.

DOMENICA: Bernardine, Celestine, vixen Victorine!
Scholastique, Veronique, curly Marcelline!

Idolette, Pascalette, rubber legged Adriette!
Isabel, Annabelle, flossy drossed Juliette!

Olympiade sweating through marathons of love -
With my Jules! God strike you below! From above!

With dramatic flair DOMENICA tears off a bracelet or an earring and tosses it down to the river. She watches a long time and then there is a faint splash. She storms back upstage, where she turns again to face the audience, her visage a crowd of emotions. She takes another deep breath and runs hard towards the edge of the stage before skidding to a halt.

She begins pulling letters out of her leotard.

Stuffed ‘neath his mattress lay the truth of my Jules
Billet a doux - sent by soft-headed fools.

 Aglantine clucking, ‘Make me a woman again!
 Put my eggs in your basket. I’ll be your fair hen!’

Marie begging, ‘I worship your golden calves!
Your red tongue, your pink sabre – Jules, split me in halves!

DOMENICA throws the letters down into the river, and starts back upstage again. Once there she martials her courage and begins walking back to the edge.

Jules Léotard, strutting cock of the Paris soir,
Swinging his way through a thousand boudoirs.

Well Jules, your long-suffering wife is depressed.
 She’s made peace with God. I have final-confessed!

 ‘Father Eustache! I wed a monster you won’t let me divorce!
 So I’ll marry River Seine, before this day runs its course.

This time she strides purposefully towards the edge and looks like she’s about to go over for sure. But she is also a mistress of the false exits.

 I’ll ease into the river, so to keep my hair in place.
 Why surrender beauty when sealing his disgrace?

 To you, O murky Seine, I commit my betrayed soul!
 From hell I’ll watch as scandal makes heads roll.

I’m going! I’m going! Going with determination!
The Drowning of Domenica will transfix the nation!

DOMENICA starts easing herself over, holding on to her wig. She plugs her nose and prepares to drop when she is distracted by the dramatic arrival of JULES, preferably by trapeze but tumbling on stage would do the trick as well. If no actual trapeze :) then a trapeze handle would suffice.

JULES rolls to a halt and admires himself, perhaps in the reflection of the Seine.

JULES: I swing and I flex, a thousand women sigh!
All my life’s a circus - I can tell you why:

I invented clothes for work - they hug my physique
And as clothes for play? Les dames go knee-weak.

When I say ‘for play’, I mean much play and with many.
The sex work of Jules? Vidi, vici, veni!

JULES notices DOMENICA.

JULES: Domenica! Why are you so sadly standing there?
DOMENICA: Your infidelities cause me existential despair.

JULES: But I love you, petit soufflé, please come hither.
DOMENICA: Your soufflé is falling, and taking your name with her.

DOMENICA starts to jump and JULES rushes in and grabs her.

DOMENICA: Unhand me you monster! Let me drown in my sorrow!
JULES: Come home to our bed! We’ll make love til tomorrow!

DOMENICA: Too late! I made peace with God, via my Priest!
JULES: Father Eustache? That dolt - waddling in from the east?

Dramatic entrance. Father EUSTACHE in black soutane. He might be a large man but he can move in haste when he believes he has a suicidal sheep in his flock.

EUSTACHE: Your rescuer is here! ‘C’est moi’ states Eustache!
DOMENICA: But Father, I confessed – my suicide you’d crash?
JULES: You’re in the nick of time – she wants to splish splash!

EUSTACHE: Hey! Grant me my couplets, you’ve both had yours.
Let’s hear from the virtuous, enough from the whores.

In an ancient convention beaucoup dramatique
The maiden is saved at the moment climactique

My lamb Domenica has been serially betrayed -
I’d have gotten here sooner but I was waylaid.

By the delivery of my stretchy new clerical habit
When a fad passes by – even a priest will nab it.

Father EUSTACHE drops his soutane and, underneath, he too sports a leotard.

JULES: Father Eustache! On my copyright you’re infringing!
DOMENICA: Father E! It’s nice, but on good taste you’re impinging!
EUSTACHE: The Bishop loves me in it, so both stop your damn whingeing.

JULES: What! The Bishop! He’s torn a page from my book?!
DOMENICA: I heard he favours pink silk – does he wield a big crook?
EUSTACHE: An all-nighter with his mitre - oh, my heavens they shook.

EUSTACHE: But enough of the Church in its unvestment glory!
JULES: Let’s stop your life divestment – can’t I just say sorry?
DOMENICA: You worry what the press will do with this story.

DOMENICA: When I drown my sorrows in the Seine it’ll be
JULES: The scandal du jour! The real victim here is me!
EUSTACHE: It’s a pyrrhic win if you die – I have a better idee. A.

EUSTACHE: No scandal tops eloping with a priest to the hereafter!
JULES: You’d run off with that oaf? There is nothing dafter!
DOMENICA: You’re brilliant Father! His fame will drown in laughter!

DOMENICA: Let’s go!
EUSTACHE: Ho ho!
JULES: Mais no!

EUSTACHE and DOMENICA run and waddle off. JULES is left alone.

JULES: Forgive me dear audience, but is it not passing odd -
when a God of a Man - loses to a Man of God?

 Perhaps it is I who should cut bait and go swim
 Despite my ethereal beauty, and my aerial vim.

JULES some posing. He can’t help realizing how beautiful he looks. Looks down at water.

 But lo - as I look down and see my reflection
 My muscular heart beats, rippling my skintight confection

 I can’t help but note I could swoop o’er this river
 It’s just a hundred yards wide, that’s three swings and a shiver

 So I lost my wife to a priest? Daring Léotard will still please
 In his eponymous outfit - and on his flying trapeze.

An effect. Perhaps he tumbles off the stage. Or even trapezes out if it’s a truly big budget production.

The End.