

At His Majesty's Pleasure

a feature film - written by Gaby Santinelli

based on - Le Roi S'amuse - by Victor Hugo



When The King of France defiles his fester's teenage daughter without knowing her true identity, a fatal curse shatters the lives of both the fester and his beloved child.

Plot Summary I

It's the year 1517, and morally-ambiguous, rookie KING FRANÇOIS I is in a pickle. He must not only quickly produce a male heir with his pious wife, QUEEN CLAUDE. But he must also, as per Royal French tradition, appoint a Royal Mistress, and one that his picky mother LOUISE approves of. While 'Kings will be Kings', and he is easily swayed by 'anything in a heavy brocade frock', none of the well-groomed aristocratic women on offer really do it for François, if he's being perfectly honest.

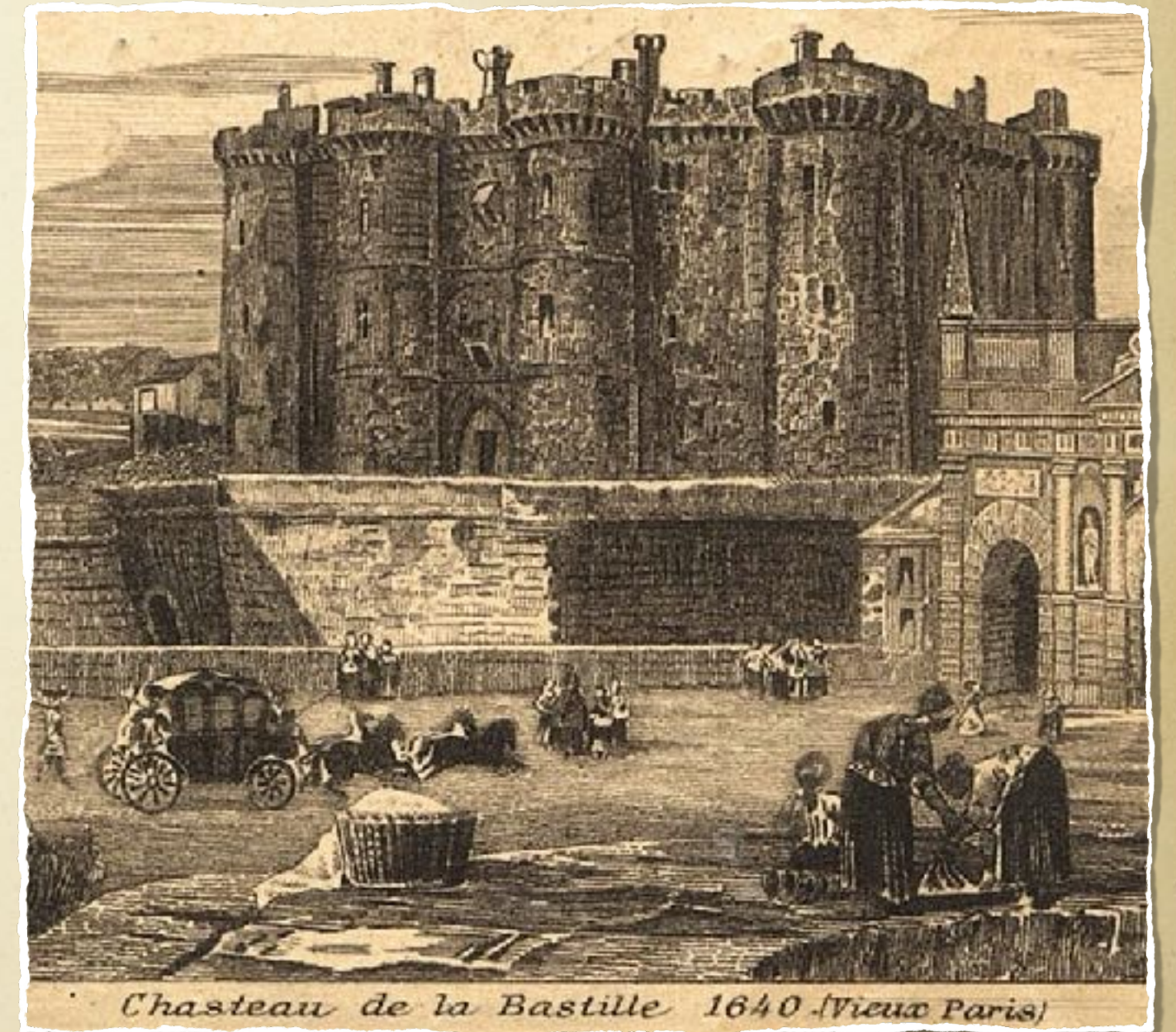
To escape his stifling court, not to mention the rampant debauchery, François dresses down as a struggling student to attend Mass amongst the Parisian Bourgeoisie. There, he sees a young maiden, BLANCHE: she's so angelic, so unlike the worldly women of court, he cannot help but be drawn to her wholesomeness. However, she is guarded by a stern minder so...he sends his young Squire to gather intelligence on Blanche's coordinates, Renaissance style: on a galloping steed!



Plot Summary II

Back at court, the infamous court jester TRIBOULET blatantly encourages François to kidnap the naïve maiden he's smitten with to execute his Lordly Right. One mistaken identity leads to another and, by the time The King is able to be with Blanche, she shocks him by declining the offer to become Royal Mistress. Despite all the perks, she fell in love with a student, not a king. But the biggest blow of all is that Blanche is secretly Triboulet's convent-reared daughter; The Jester is apoplectic at his own cruelly ironic misstep and attempts to have the King assassinated to pay for defiling daughter Blanche.

But melodrama will melodrama, and through more mistaken identities, it is Blanche, not the King, who falls victim to the hit-man's knife. As Triboulet is carted off to Bastille Prison, the King gallops off to welcome his newborn son. When he learns of Blanche's demise, his heart is beyond broken...but whether he's learned his lesson is another story entirely...



Ensemble I

The KING'S FAMILY

KING FRANÇOIS I, 23 - not born to be King = a steep learning curve for a morally-ambiguous rookie ruler

QUEEN CLAUDE, 18 - pious, long-suffering, ever-pregnant wife of François I

Princess **CHARLOTTE**, 18 months - François & Claude's one surviving daughter

Princess **RENÉE**, 7 - Queen Claude's precocious little sister

LOUISE of Savoy, 41 - domineering, ladder-climbing mother of François I

The KING's GUEST

Leonardo **DA VINCI**, 65 - sells Mona Lisa to François; lives out his final days at Château d'Amboise

OUTSIDE the CASTLE

BLANCHE, 15 - a devout, bourgeois maiden, raised in a convent

DAME BÉRARDE, 45 - Blanche's street-wise minder; not averse to a good bribe

OTSANDO, 35 - Romani; pub-owner & hired assassin

MAGDALENA, 30 - Otsando's 'sister' & tavern dancer

Ensemble II

The COURT of FRANÇOIS I

TRIBOULET, 38 - notoriously cheeky Court Jester; our tragic hero

THOMAS Boleyn, 40 - Ambassador to Henry VIII; father of:

MARY Boleyn, 17 - naïve Lady-in-waiting; The King's current casual plaything

ANNE Boleyn, 16 - The Queen's Maid of Honor; has a good head on her shoulders

SAINT-VALLIER, 42 - overly-protective father of:

DIANE de Poitiers, 17 - a renowned beauty & shrewd Lady-in-waiting, married to:

Louis de **BRÉZÉ**, 56, Diane's adoring, tolerant older husband

BRION, 25 - childhood friend of François; a hotheaded, horny bachelor

MONTMORENCY, 24 - Captain of the Bastille; another horny bachelor

MAROT, 21, royal poet to Queen Claude, a Sodomite...also a bachelor

COSSÉ, 13 - The King's upwardly mobile Squire, obviously a bachelor



Synopsis

Synopsis I

Rookie **KING FRANÇOIS I** was not born to rule France.

Carefully groomed by his ambitious mother, **LOUISE**, he embraces Humanism, which favors Artistic & Scientific enquiry over the Divine ... and affords him many freedoms.

At the tender age of 9, François even appoints the town clown **TRIBOULET** to be his patented Fool...to spite his impudent Pages, and to start throwing his weight around.

While he aspires to courtly life, Triboulet feels the sting of relinquishing family life in order to ascend to privileged status in young François' court.

He follows King François on a military conquest, meets the Pope and his nemesis Leonardo da Vinci, and above all, enjoys the right to keep the young ruler in check with cheeky wit and biting insight.



Synopsis II

But to be crowned King, François was forced to marry his pious cousin, **QUEEN CLAUDE** ... who's now perpetually pregnant.

The Queen 'entertains' herself, her Ladies & her sister with a dull book, outlining rather limited Medieval prospects for women:

...they are destined to become Maidens, Wives or Widows.

Queen Claude has given birth to two girls, but only **CHARLOTTE** has survived.

So, the pressure's on the scoliosis-ridden Queen to produce a male heir ... and quickly.



Synopsis III

By contrast, boisterous François is...unfocused, and has yet to appoint his *Official Mistress*, a title complete with entourage and apartments.

He's lost interest in his current fling, naïve **MARY BOLEYN**.

Mary's über-clever sister **ANNE BOLEYN** will never yield her maidenhead without diplomatic assurances.

And despite his virile vigour, François cannot secure a French Lady whom his shrewd mother Louise approves of.

Until he names his chief *Maîtresse-en-titre*, the position remains wide open. Even his bachelor buddies are stuck in libido limbo, unable to move forward ... in short, the Court hangs in chaos.



Synopsis IV

Bounding about, François takes *His Lordly Right* to a whole new level, scoping out potential Mistresses wherever he goes.

From shrewd noble beauty **DIANE de POITIERS**...

...to a bourgeois maiden, **BLANCHE**, whom François glimpses at Mass while slumming it as a *poor student*, Nicolas.

Above all, François is so enthralled with a painting of a virtuous Italian noblewoman that he buys **MONA LISA** from his house guest & architect, **LEONARDO da VINCI**.

Unsurprisingly, he blames women!, and drunkenly belts out:
Women often change; foolish is the man who trusts her.
A woman is often nothing more than a feather on the wind.



Synopsis V

When the King's mother leaves Paris with da Vinci, the Court grows increasingly debauched.

Goaded by his notorious Jester **TRIBOULET**, François sets his sights on Diane, whose overly-protective father, **SAINT-VALLIER**, and well-meaning older husband, **BRÉZÉ**, block the King's nefarious exploits.

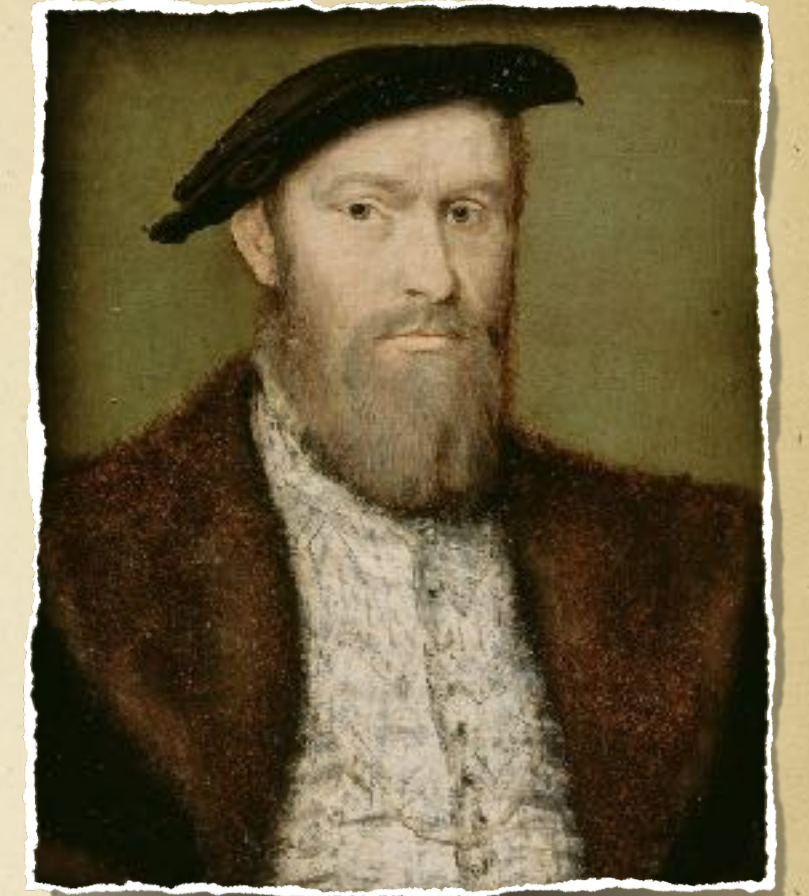
Triboulet suggests kidnapping Diane, to then elevate her to *Official Mistress*. Intrigued but non-committal, The King remains determined to conquer virginal Blanche first.

He even enters a bet with Triboulet: can the King seduce the sheltered, bourgeois girl (**who believes François is the poor student, Nicolas ... not The King of France!*)



Synopsis VI

However, Triboulet is despised by François' hunky, horny, hotheaded bachelor brigade, **MONTMORENCY & BRION**, who, out of idle spite, plot to abduct this mysterious maiden.



Upon further inspection, it turns out that the girl lives with Triboulet, in a secluded house, guarded by a no-nonsense minder. *The Nobles assume she's the Jester's Mistress ... who else could she be?*

Surely a teenage beauty makes a better plaything for a King than his Fool? The Nobles plan to teach the Jester a lesson, when...



Pious SAINT-VALLIER claims that his daughter, DIANE, has been *unofficially* seduced by The King! Diane's distraught dad breaks up a rowdy party, cursing both the King and his Jester.

Synopsis VI

Deeply shaken by the older man's curse, Triboulet rushes home, only to encounter a swarthy Romani hit-man, **OTSANDO**, in a back alley.

Otsando intuits the Jester's grievances, and offers his "services". Triboulet is tempted, but declines.

The Jester returns home, where he conceals not his Mistress, but...his teenage daughter, Blanche!

**yes, she's the very same Blanche with whom The King is infatuated!*



Synopsis VII

Knowing lascivious Nobles firsthand, Triboulet only permits Blanche out to attend Mass with streetwise **DAME BÉRARDE**, whom he grills about who might follow them home.

Blanche gently enquires about their family. Triboulet sent Blanche to a convent after the death of her mother CLAIRE, and he still keeps Blanche's true identity under wraps, even to Blanche herself! Likewise, while Blanche adores her father, she never reveals her love for "Nicolas"... Just then, Triboulet hears noises outside, and dashes off to investigate...

...at which point King François, *disguised as Nicolas*, slips into the misty courtyard to profess his love for Blanche. Stunned that he would take such a risk to woo her, she warns that her overly-protective father is nearby. Believing her, François escapes back out into the fog.

Meanwhile, Triboulet encounters the spying Nobles, who claim they intend to abduct *Diane*. But in fact, *they came to kidnap Blanche*, whom they still believe to be Triboulet's mistress. In the end, the Nobles carry Blanche off into the night as a gift for The King.

Upon his return, Triboulet can't find Blanche! And Dame Bérarde is bound and gagged to her knitting chair! Fearing the worst for his daughter's virtue, the Jester sets out to rescue Blanche - and races back to his office: the treacherous Louvre Fortress.



Synopsis VIII

The next morning, The Courtiers prevent Triboulet from entering The King's chambers...where hélas!, BLANCHE has indeed been seduced by François.

While she's more in love with him than ever, she asserts that she can never become Official Mistress because she fell in love with a *poor student*, not The King of France.

François is shocked: *no one has ever rejected him*. Despite his heartfelt claims of enduring love, Blanche flees, leaving the King devastated: he really does love her.

Blanche reveals her downfall to her apoplectic father, who swears to take revenge.

Just then, Diane's father Saint-Vallier is marched through the gallery under armed guard, headed for Bastille Prison for daring to stand up for his daughter, Diane.

Saint-Vallier fears that The King will never learn his lesson, but...father to father, Triboulet vows that Saint-Vallier's curse will act only upon The King, not himself.



Synopsis IX

Meanwhile, heavily pregnant Queen Claude is sadly resigned to her husband's ongoing debaucheries.

She departs for her confinement with her three Ladies (Mary & Anne, and Diane), her toddler Charlotte, and her precocious young sister, **PRINCESS RENÉE**.

The Queen's female entourage escapes the vicissitudes of Paris, to await the birth of The King's third child at **CHÂTEAU D'AMBOISE**.

Without his mother, wife, or even Leonardo on site, François is further released from his moral moorings...



Synopsis X

In Paris, Triboulet pays Otsando a deposit for the assassination of King François.

Right on cue, François arrives at Otsando's pub, *now dressed as a Soldier*. He carouses with Otsando's sultry "sister" **MAGDALENA**, who is meant to entrap the King. However, Magdalena is utterly smitten with virile François.

After François passes out, Magdalena begs Otsando to spare the handsome *Soldier*. Otsando proposes that, instead of killing the *Soldier*, he will murder the next stranger who enters, and deliver a random corpse in a sack to the Jester.

But Triboulet simultaneously schemed to prove to Blanche that her lover is untrue. Naïve Blanche is crushed to witness François seduce stunning Magdalena.

When Blanche overhears that François is to be murdered, she vows to save his life by sacrificing her own. She prays for God's mercy and, disguised as a *Page*, Blanche bravely enters the pub.



Synopsis XI

At the stroke of midnight, Triboulet triumphantly returns to collect his quarry. Otsando offers to deposit the body bag into the River Seine. But the Jester refuses: *Oh no! He will dump the King's corpse into its watery grave all by himself!*

Just then, he hears The King's voice, singing in the distance: *Women often change; foolish is the man who trusts her. A woman is often nothing more than a feather on the wind.*

Triboulet's blood turns to ice: *If The King is not dead, then ... whose body is in the sack?!*

Lightning flashes over The Seine as the Jester rips opens the sack to discover...*his mortally wounded daughter inside!* He begs Blanche not to leave him alone. But after pleading forgiveness for betraying him, she sighs her last angelic breath, and dies.

A crowd gathers by the river, drawn by Triboulet's shrieks. Lanterns shine down on the tortured Jester, sprawled in the mud: *I've killed my only child!*



Synopsis XII



While Triboulet is carted off to a lonely cell in **THE BASTILLE**...

François gallops off to Château Amboise to ecstatically greet his long-anticipated baby boy, the Dauphin of France.



Upon learning of Blanche's untimely demise, The King's bubble bursts. He truly loved her, something he had never known before...

...although he finally appoints Countess Françoise de Foix and Anne de Pisseleu d'Heilly, Duchess of Étampes as his Official Royal Mistresses.



Synopsis XIII

Throughout the irreverent twists-n-turns of Victor Hugo's classic morality tale, MONA LISA serves as a touchstone for what's good, lasting and true.

In the end, Lisa alone survives ... still in The Louvre!

...albeit in a climate-controlled gallery, behind bulletproof glass...

...where generations of schoolgirls may gaze upon her, hoping to glean a dash of her centuries-old wisdom.





The Creative Team

Gaby Santinelli - screenwriter

- Gaby trained as a classical actress & operatic soprano in Chicago & New York before relocating to London to pursue a stage, screen & studio career. She also became a **dual US-UK citizen**.
- Gaby performed at the National Theatre & West End in *Jerry Springer The Opera* (Best Supporting Performance **Olivier Award**; cast album), and in **The Phantom of the Opera** as **Carlotta** (250 perfs).
- Gaby toured with Robert Wilson's avant garde masterpiece, *The Black Rider* (Barbican; Sydney, San Fran, L.A.), and featured in Gilbert & Sullivan operettas with D'Oyly Carte at The Savoy / West End.
- Roles: Blondchen (*Abduction from the Seraglio*, Covent Garden), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), Papagena & 1st Lady (*Die Zauberflöte*), Musetta (*La Bohème*), Masha (*Three Sisters* Mamet version), Gertrude (*An Ideal Husband*), Jenny (*Company*) ... and Gilda's aria *Caro Nome*, from her favorite Verdi opera, *Rigoletto!*
- Screenwriting came after a big move to LA. Gaby's growing collection of features & TV pilots are just waiting to be produced! Her forté is creating distinct characters within ensemble-driven social satires.
- Gaby joined University of Southern California's School of Dramatic Arts Performance Faculty in 2017



*For more information
please contact*

Gaby Santinelli

- email: info@gabysantinelli.com
- [website](#)
- [IMDb pro](#)

