

THE LITTLE FRENCHY FILES

CAST

NURSE

LITTLE FRENCHY, a chimpanzee (played by a human)

DR. SAHIN, university teacher and animal researcher

WILLIAM HERMANN, executive, The Foster Foundation

JIM PEDNICK, Little Frenchy's trainer

(LITTLE FRENCHY's cage TBD - will be laid out pre-show/at intermission if necessary.

One ottoman/circus style block will also be placed upstage)

NURSE wheels out file table

NURSE brings and sets out chair

NURSE then brings out LITTLE FRENCHY, rocking as he walks, on a leash; puts him into cage, undoes leash;

LITTLE FRENCHY rocks in his cage to his own tune, which he will unless otherwise indicated

NURSE sits with him; pets him carefully; tries to catch his eye. LITTLE FRENCHY remains lost. NURSE exits.

LITTLE FRENCHY rocks

SFX: A bit of FRENCHY's memory music

Cross fade of lights

(From offstage we hear SAHIN before SAHIN and HERMANN enter, SAHIN with clipboard, HERMANN with coffee cup and proposal folder)

SAHIN: They have this stuffed filet, they stuff it with crab (they fly it in daily) ...just amazing, with this sauce, mushrooms...I know you'll love it. (as they approach cage)

SAHIN: Well, here we are. Ta Da! (smiles to herself) The fabulous Little Frenchy!

(HERMANN watches FRENCHY, then looks to her.)

SAHIN: I know.

HERMANN: He's...

SAHIN: Yes, he is.

HERMANN: So...(looks to SAHIN)

SAHIN: So, the fabulous Little Frenchy. The now-retired star of the Amendallini Brothers Circus.

HERMANN: I hadn't heard of it.

SAHIN: No reason you should. Shabby little attraction. A few overweight acrobats, couple of sad clowns, one rather anemic elephant, and...a chimpanzee act. They tour smaller towns in South America.

(they stare for a few seconds)

SAHIN: Frenchy was marked as a future star from infancy. He was intelligent, friendly, smaller than average...all characteristics of a chimp...with "star" potential.

HERMANN: Performing chimps, I know, usually have...as opposed to thinking they might be coddled, or raised in luxury...

(SAHIN nods)

HERMANN: It's a difficult life, right from infancy, correct?

SAHIN: They're taken from their mothers, very soon after birth. Raised apart from any natural environment, even an artificial one like a zoo. Where at least they could learn behavior patterns from other chimps.

HERMANN: And then their training...difficult, too...?

SAHIN: Oh, yes...

HERMANN: Based on punishment, isn't it?

SAHIN: Punishment. Fear. Deprivation. After all, they're training...they're forcing these animals to do unnatural acts.

HERMANN: (striking him as a harsh word) Unnatural?

SAHIN: It's all unnatural, isn't it? Dancing, climbing on cue, throwing balls, catching rings...

HERMANN: Is any...Was any of it...fun...for him?

SAHIN: No. No. (pause) Standing, upright, as they're forced to do. Chimps don't stand. Those teeth you see when they stand and take a bow...that's not a smile, that's a grimace. They're in pain.

HERMANN: And you said in your proposal that even when he started performing...as the star of the show...especially as the star...things were even more...

SAHIN: ...even more difficult. Not only was he separated from his species in a natural setting...as a featured performer, as a star...he was ostracized by other performing chimps. They'd hit him, spit at him, throw feces, steal food...

HERMANN: But onstage...

SAHIN: On stage all the chimps behave out of fear, unless they could get in a slug or two when the trainer wasn't looking. Frenchy was always separated from the others between shows. Isolated.

HERMANN: And all performing chimps have to retire at a certain age, right?

SAHIN: All chimps who work...for people, with people...as research subjects, with NASA, entertainment...have to stop around the age of 6, or 7 latest. They're too strong, too strong-minded. They can't be controlled.

HERMANN: And they can live to be...50, 60?

SAHIN: Yes. As you well know, there are many fine sanctuaries springing up now, funded by the government or foundations like yours. We really admire the sanctuaries The Foster Foundation has helped establish.

HERMANN: Thank you.

SAHIN: There are some remarkable stories of chimps starting life over, even flourishing.

HERMANN: But little Frenchy...?

SAHIN: It's...He's a remarkable phenomenon. A chimpanzee, who is a star of a circus or animal show, a featured performer...isolated, hated by other chimps, of course, but it's more than that. They're forced to learn and then perform actions that may be, psychically as well as physically, well beyond their natural

capabilities, or certainly their natural inclinations. They're the focus of attention, of love, from audiences, for performing these...tricks...that they only learned after enduring pain, true torture. The combination of the confusion of their lives, the repetition of painful acts, the hatred of the other chimps, alienation from their natural environment, of course, and, yes, their status, as a star, as the constant center of attention...this often, for star performing chimps, results in madness. For Frenchy, his breakdown started as they usually do, with acts of defiance, of violence. Towards his trainer, towards other chimps, climaxing with a leap into an audience, injuring several people, some children. Chimps are almost never aggressive in the wild. But there's many, many cases of them turning against trainers, and handlers.

And then, for Frenchy, an abrupt and dramatic withdrawal. Into this...into some world of his own.

HERMANN: And where he's remained.

SAHIN: (nods) For several months now.

HERMANN: (after a pause as they regard FRENCHY.) Our foundation has looked at your proposal for research funding carefully. But I'd like to hear from you what...

SAHIN: (in a rush) We need the funding for adequate staff to monitor Frenchy. To see what changes behavior modification might bring about. We need funding for the time to study and write the comparative data, and eventually the reports. Funding to place him in different environments, perhaps with other chimps, to see what effect it might have. And funding for...exploratory medication...surgery, if necessary.

HERMANN: Yes, the surgery...

SAHIN: Mr. Hermann, this is a quite rare opportunity. Seldom has anyone been able to obtain such a perfect and unique specimen, one who's breakdown was suffered such a short time before research could commence. This research could unlock doors of insight into not only animal behavior, but, also, the human brain. High performance individuals – for example, young adult high achieving individuals highly trained people, brilliant minds, operating under great amounts of stress, both personal and professional, geniuses – in such areas as sports, entertainment, business, – many, many of whom succumb to the pressure, and get into serious self-destruction, or break down, or at least suffer, often enormously. This research could be a key to identifying underlying factors, not to mention brain and biological effects, and result in preventing these breakdowns, or at least suggesting adequate treatment. Of course, our research is being coordinated closely with the Psychology Department on campus. And of course, you know of their reputation.

HERMANN: Yes, yes. And Frenchy could be key to this research?

SAHIN: Vital. He's a perfect specimen. (Noticing HERMANN almost unperceptively shaking his head.) I know. He's suffered...enough. But, he'll waste away like this. With our proposal, he could make a real contribution. And, who knows, maybe something we do will help him.

HERMANN: (referring to proposal) And one of the reasons he's such a perfect specimen is that, actually, Frenchy was raised in conditions somewhat kinder and gentler than the average performing chimp,

SAHIN: Yes, at the age of about 10 months, his trainer altered his usual methods. He stopped the punishment, and became much more humane towards Frenchy. That's another reason why Frenchy is so right for this study. His upbringing had many more characteristics of a human child's first years.

HERMANN: You had said I could speak to the trainer.

SAHIN: Mr. Pednick, yes.

HERMANN: I'd like to do that. Dr. Sahin, we are very interested in funding your proposal. Not only because of the Psychology Department's excellent reputation, but also your past work.

SAHIN: Thank you.

HERMANN: Plus, of course, the possible benefits of this study. But, frankly, much of it troubles us. The possible surgery, on a creature who's already endured so much...

SAHIN: The surgery is a last resort possibility...

HERMANN: Yes. But, in any case, I would like to speak with Mr....(checks proposal) Pednick.

SAHIN: That will be arranged.

HERMANN: Thank you.

SAHIN: We can see him tomorrow. He's been standing by for this possibility. So, perhaps we're finished here today. Can we get you back to your hotel, so you can freshen up before dinner?

HERMANN: Yes, great. Thanks.

(SAHIN, HERMANN begin to move out)

SAHIN: The restaurant's just a few blocks from campus. And I promise you, you will be impressed, even though we're just a little college town...

HERMANN: Oh, I'm sure. I'm looking forward to it...

(Lights out except for spot on Little FRENCHY.)

SFX: FRENCHY'S memory music

(NURSE enters; watches, tries to pet FRENCHY. Then leaves)

SAHIN and PEDNICK enter.

SAHIN: This way, Mr. Pednick. Mr. Hermann should be along shortly.

(PEDNICK, stops, stares at FRENCHY. Goes closer. Kneels by him.)

PEDNICK: Frenchy. French. Kai. Kai. (after a bit, stands, but his focus will be on FRENCHY for much of beginning of this scene.)

(HERMANN enters)

SAHIN: Mr. Pednick, this is Mr. William Hermann, of The Foster Foundation.

HERMANN: Mr. Pednick.

PEDNICK: Jim. It's Jim.

HERMANN: Call me Bill. (they shake hands)

(uncomfortable silence as PEDNICK regards FRENCHY.)

SAHIN: Mr. Pednick. Jim. The Foster Foundation, which Mr. Hermann represents, has funded groundbreaking research into animal behavior and wellness. They're very interested in Frenchy, and are considering funding a program in which we might be able to help him.

(PEDNICK stares at SAHIN, HERMANN, back to FRENCHY.)

HERMANN: Dr. Sahin, If possible, I'd like to conduct this interview in private... if I may...

SAHIN: Fine. I'll be back soon.

HERMANN: Jim...Thank you for coming...(pause)...tell me about Frenchy. When...where...did you first...encounter him.

PEDNICK: Gombe...Tanzania now. Every few years I go with people to collect...chimps.

HERMANN: That's not exactly legal, is it?

PEDNICK: Not anymore. We bring them back through Costa Rica.

HERMANN: Is that where you train them?

PEDNICK: No, Curitiba, Brazil. South of Rio. Base camp for the circus.

HERMANN: Did you recognize Frenchy right away as a talent?

PEDNICK: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. He was a smart one. Most, not all, but most of the chimps we use in shows are female. But, once in a while, you get a male, like Frenchy, that's something else.

HERMANN: I understand you altered your...usual training methods with Frenchy.

PEDNICK: Yeah. Look, I know you don't approve of me...

HERMANN: Mr. Pednick

PEDNICK: ...or what I do or how I do it...

HERMANN: ...Jim...

PEDNICK: Look, I work with animals. They're my business. My livelihood.

HERMANN: Jim, I'm not here about what you do...It's Frenchy that we're...

PEDNICK: Yeah. Yeah. I know. (pause) Sorry. (pause) Look, I was raised in a circus family. My parents worked with cats...the big cats...I grew up with animals. Lions, tigers and bears all around me from the time I was a baby.

HERMANN: Must have been an exciting childhood.

PEDNICK: The best. No school. Not much anyway. A big show every night. Interesting people.

HERMANN: I bet.

PEDNICK: You grow up quick.

HERMANN: And you got to work with the animals...

PEDNICK: Yeah, helped my folks out. From when I was just a little guy. Feeding, cleaning cages, learned from the ground up. I liked the cats, but... maybe cause I was around 'em when I was a little guy, I liked the chimps right from the start. Used to hang around 'em, play with 'em.

HERMANN: When did you start working with chimps?

PEDNICK: I was a teenager. My parents retired. I hooked on with another circus. Did shit jobs at first. Literally.

(HERMANN returns a questioning look.)

PEDNICK: I pulled the elephants for two years. Assisted in the shows... backstage...

HERMANN: You pulled them...?

PEDNICK: Mmm, I don't know how much of this you want me to go into. Mmm..y'know for elephant shows, you don't want any...accidents up there. Especially for elephant shows. All shows really, but especially elephant shows. So before every show a couple of us had to...put on some rubber gloves...pull 'em.

HERMANN: Mnh.

PEDNICK: Yeah. Got a little ugly. But, hey, I was still in show business.

(They both laugh at old joke.)

PEDNICK; But then I got a shot to get in on the chimp show – as an onstage assistant, to a real old-timer – Pierre Chirac. (laughs at memory) La Grand Pierre. He'd presented animals all over the world. Been in the business 50 years when he took me on.

HERMANN: He taught you then.

PEDNICK: Everything. He...died on the job. Ticker. Died right in the cage.

Chimp sat with him for a couple of hours, till somebody found him. I took over the act.

HERMANN: Jim, training methods for chimps, and other animals for that matter...

PEDNICK: Yeah, yeah, I know. Listen, that's the way. That's the way you train them, there's no other way. You gotta be hard. What looks like cruel, sometimes. That's what gets you a show. And that's what the people want.

HERMANN: But, I understand, you went about it a little differently with Frenchy.

PEDNICK: Yeah, I did. (pause) I don't know. Maybe I've been at this too long. Maybe I'm gettin' old, feeble. Frenchy was just...he was different. I'd be workin' with him...you know, the usual...hittin' him, gettin' him to do things... and he'd look up with...he knew. He knew what was going on. And when he looked at me, it was like I could hear him...talkin' to me. I swear. Sayin...like... it's ok. I know we have to do this. It's ok. He'd say, look, though, I'm learnin', I can do it. I'm learnin' fast. See. You don't have to hit me, man. I'll do it. I'll do it for you.

(HERMANN is delighted by the story)

PEDNICK: But just to set the record straight. Man. I am a pro. 25 years of my own chimp show. It's not an easy way to make a buck, but I do it. Put two kids thru college. I do what I have to do. Frenchy's successor? Ivan. The tolerable. Stupid damn ape. I have to beat him like hell to make him get out of bed. (laughs) But, Frenchy... it was true, man. He learned fast. And after a while, I didn't have to do...anything...just show him what I wanted. He was the best. The best, smartest, fastest learner I ever saw.

HERMANN: And he went on to the circus?

PEDNICK: Oh, yeah. And they loved him. He not only did everything – put on a great show – but he had this something special, something extra. Personality. Charisma. Star power. People loved him. The kids – loved him.

HERMANN: But things can get rough for the star of the show, huh?

PEDNICK: Yeah.

HERMANN: Have you seen this happen with other, featured chimps?

PEDNICK: Most of them. I tried to get around it with French. Started gettin'

ready to take him out of the show. But it was tough. The circus wanted him. People wanted to see him. I tried. But it wasn't in time. I saw it coming. And then it...hit him.

HERMANN: I heard about the attack on the audience.

PEDNICK: Wasn't really an attack. He'd go in the audience as part of the show anyway. It was...frustration, pressure building up. Performing every day, every night. Two, three times a day, most days. Years and years of it. Well, just a few years for French. But that was enough.

These chimps – these star chimps – Frenchy, Mr. Moke (laughs), Jimmy. It's tough for 'em, man.

They're the center of attention, all day, every day. People, kids, goin' at 'em. Everybody just puts their – everything – on to 'em. If people are miserable, angry, lonely, whatever, they all just put it all on the chimp. And the chimp has to take it. And give back – fun, love, entertainment, whatever.

It's tough.

Can't get along with the other chimps. You know that. They hate him.

The only thing they have – Mr. Moke, French – all of 'em – was me.

I guess I was able to...to forget...the other guys...once they were gone. There were always other chimps comin' along. Show must go on.

But maybe I'm getting' near to the end of the road myself. Not there yet. But near.

Don't really have it in me anymore, to have another chimp comin' up. French might have been the end.

Maybe I had it in mind, maybe Frenchy and I could...y'now...retire together. Go somewhere...permanent off-season.

Didn't work out. Didn't pull the trigger...soon enough. Always had to have one more gig. One more payday.

Sad story, huh? That's show biz.

HERMANN: So you sold...him...

PEDNICK: Yeah, I sold him. To the university. All the chimps, all of 'em, have to go when they get to 6, 7. Somewhere. Smaller zoos, if they've got the temperament. Labs sometimes.

HERMANN: But, the "star" chimps, like Frenchy...

PEDNICK: Yeah. (Pause) Y'know, sometimes, ya figure, ya find it might be best...under the circumstances...to just...put them down.

HERMANN: (talking a breath) So...you're ok with what the university might have in mind for Frenchy. Medication. Possibly surgery.

PEDNICK: (after a silence) How you're gonna stop 'em?

HERMANN: Well, it's up to me to recommend funding for what they hope to do. I want to make sure we do the right thing.

PEDNICK: (after another long stare at FRENCHY) Yeah? And what's that?

HERMANN: (after a pause) Jim, I want to thank you for coming in. And for... being so...cooperative. How 'bout we go see Dr. Sahin now?

PEDNICK: Mind if I stay in here a few minutes.

HERMANN: No...I guess not. No, that'll be fine. We'll be back in a few soon.
(HERMANN exits)

MUSIC: FRENCHY's memory music

PEDNICK: (circling; attempts to pet; couple of "kai"'s, couple of "French"'s.)
Damn You! You little bastard! Remember when I used to tell you that?
I could carry you in one hand when I found you. You were the goofiest lookin' little monkey I ever saw.
But, man, you had a head on you. You were stubborn as a...you were a tough little monkey.
But, once we got going, you could get that work done, couldn't ya? You were gonna be the best. The best ever!
Remember that first show? I told 'em. I told 'em...we got something special here. Just watch.

MUSIC: Performance Circus music

PEDNICK: Senioritas e Senioras! Ladies and gentlemen! Boys and Girls of all ages! The Amendallini Brothers Circus takes great pride in presenting a new performer who we are sure will join the ranks of your all-time favorites. Please join me, (gesturing to, touching other chimps already on stage) and Bobby, and Suzie, and Tubby, and Cisco, in welcoming the newest member of La Grand Pierre's Chimpanzee Extravaganza – Here he is – Without further ado - The Fabulous Little Frenchy!!!

(FRENCHY stands up, gives chimp smile, waves to audience)

PEDNICK (kneeling) Come over here, Frenchy! (FRENCHY perches on his knee)

Let's properly introduce you to the good people. How old are you, Frenchy?
(FRENCHY holds up one finger) One? (FRENCHY crooks finger) And a half?
(FRENCHY vigorously nods). Ladies and Gentlemen, (standing, FRENCHY is

off, does a forward roll, comes up in a “Ta Da” pose) Little Frenchy!!!
Frenchy’s a good boy, aren’t ya, French? (FRENCHY nods vigorously.) And you know why? (Following, FRENCHY makes appropriate gestures) Because he sees no evil...he hears no evil...and he speaks no evil! Good boy, Little Frenchy! (Another FRENCHY bow.)

Now, folks, Little Frenchy has lots of friends, like (FRENCHY will go from chimp to chimp here, giving a few second looks as he gets close to them) Bobby, Suzie, Tubby and Cisco. (FRENCHY mimes hugging Cisco). Awwwhh! But he always likes making new friends, don’t you, Frenchy? (FRENCHY nods vigorously, then goes to front row of audience, shakes a couple of hands) Ah, now there’s a new friend. And another new friend. (FRENCHY then hugs audience member) And there’s a special new friend. Ladies and gentlemen, Little Frenchy! (FRENCHY takes another bow.)

(Pause)

Little Frenchy! (FRENCHY takes another bow. Then just stands.) Frenchy would ride motorcycles; climb on ropes over the audience, do acrobatics high in the sky. He did some magic. (laughs) The old flower trick. And then at the end, big finish, Frenchy and Suzie would get married...in this little ceremony type thing...audiences loved it. That was the big picture pose, y’know. (mimes taking a photo)

MUSIC starts to wind down.

The Fabulous Little Frenchy. (music is replaced by FRENCHY memory music)

French. (FRENCHY slowly retreats to his cage position, his rocking. PEDNICK stares at him, Walks slowly, determinedly over to him; kneels by him; puts hands out to him – to hug? To strangle?)

(SAHIN and HERMANN enter.)

SAHIN: Mr. Pednick.

PEDNICK: (rising) Thanks. Thanks for letting me see him.

SAHIN: Mr. Pednick, you know we want only the best for Frenchy. We want to help him. But we also think, with his, and your, cooperation, we can help others, too.

(PEDNICK seems to have gone back into daze we saw when he first came into the scene).

Of course, it’s Mr. Hermann’s and The Foster Foundation’s decision as to funding for this process. We’re confident that he’s going to recommend funding. But... he wants to make sure you’re comfortable with this.

PEDNICK: (to HERMANN) What about you? Are you comfortable with this?

HERMANN: Like every...important decision, there are different angles, different points-of-view. I don't think any of us want Frenchy to suffer anymore. But...none of us want him to...suffer...anymore, if you see what I mean. Dr. Sahin's program may be his best hope.

SAHIN: Mr. Pednick, Frenchy's condition has great promise to reveal new findings in similar conditions in human beings, as well. We'll be getting input and cooperation from the psychology department here at the school, which, you may or may not know, is one of the best in the country. They could help us understand people, who are like Frenchy in their own way, young, talented, but pushed beyond normal limits, into a kind of...mental or psychic or spiritual challenge. You know, of course, that just a 1.23 percent difference separates Frenchy's genes from ours.

PEDNICK: 1.23, 1.24. I knew it was something like that.

SAHIN: Technically, Mr. Pednick, we don't need your permission to work with Frenchy. After all, you sold him to us. But given how...special...he was, is... Mr. Hermann would like your input into our plans.

PEDNICK: (after a long pause, stare at FRENCHY; softly) Could I help?

SAHIN: What?

PEDNICK: Doctor. I'm pretty sure I'm not going back to the circus. The chimps I have left...I've already made arrangements for them. To good shelters, sanctuaries.
I wouldn't need any pay. I don't know anything about your work, or...research or whatever.
But I know chimps. And I know Frenchy.

(SAHIN, HERMANN look to each other)

I know I've done a lot of...things that you might question. I can't change 'em. I can't go back.
But maybe I can help...for for the future.
People want these shows, animal shows. They love them. But maybe they're just not right. Maybe we should try to see if we can't do something about them.
Huh?
I don't know. Maybe we can do that.
Oh, and people, too. This might help people, of course.
Y'know, we try to make them seem more human for these shows – dress 'em up

in silly clothes, have 'em ride bikes, smoke cigars...but maybe...maybe they can help us be more human.

(SAHIN, HERMANN look to each other again).

HERMANN: Jim, I think that your idea could be a possibility. There could be a stipend, funding for...an expert adviser. What do you think, Dr. Sahin? That would be an addition, of course, to the funds already requested. Dr. Sahin?

SAHIN: Yes, I think that's...possible. Mr. Pednick, let us think this through and, very soon, get back to you with some...details?

PEDNICK: All right.

SAHIN: All right, then? Well, I guess that wraps us up here, then, yes?

PEDNICK: (keeping HERMANN in the loop here) Dr. Sahin. One thing. You're going to try some different things with Frenchy right? Put him in a sanctuary, try him with some other chimps, see what happens. Before you'd move on to medication and such, right? Before surgery, right?

SAHIN: Well, yes...

PEDNICK: Good, good. Because...I've been kicking this around, y'now, and...well, I just have a few ideas about some things we could try,

SAHIN: Of course...

PEDNICK: Just, a number of ideas...things we might try, before we'd ever go for...something like surgery. Y'know?

SAHIN: Yes. I see. (smiles tightly)

PEDNICK: Thank you. (Sahin starts to walk away.) Looking forward to working with you.

HERMANN: Mr. Pednick...Jim (hold out his hand to shake). It was a pleasure.

PEDNICK: Likewise. (to HERMANN) Got another gig.

SAHIN: Gentlemen? Shall we? (moves toward door; As HERMANN starts to leave stage, he gestures to PEDNICK and...)

HERMANN: After you...

(PEDNICK gestures towards FRENCHY.)

HERMANN: Oh...sure...(he exits)

PEDNICK: So...French...looks like we're going to be working together again...
huh?

(after a short pet) Don't worry. (Looks around room) It's going to be cool.

You'll see.

Catch you soon.

PEDNICK exits. Light Shift.

ATTENDANT comes in, does her usual thing with FRENCHY. As she's leaving,
he puts grabs her hand. She stops, confused, almost frightened at first. Then she
takes his hand, pats it. Pats him. Leaves, smiling.

Lights Fade. END

Curtain Call music: There's No Business Like Show Business