

# *Introduction*

This play was inspired by many different things, the most obvious of which are David Hirson's *La Bête*, and Moliere's work in general. I've taken the idea of one location to the extreme, and created a world where the characters couldn't leave if they wanted to—The two main men are trapped inside a room with no idea how they got in there and no exit. However, the play should be viewed as having *three* characters, regardless of what the actual character list states. In addition to Grégoire and Arnaud, there is also the character of the room itself. That is the reason for the intricacies of the stage direction. It must be made clear that these objects are not appearing for the sake of entering existence; they are being introduced into the environment by the room itself in a desire to create conflict between its two prisoners. This is the reasoning for the two different stage directions every time an object enters, leaving very little room for alternative ideas. In an ideal performance, objects slide in through the side curtains, come up through the floor, and fall down from the ceiling, as if sliding out of the very surfaces of the room. Understanding this can't always be done, I introduced the idea of the man in black: a physical manifestation of the room who delivers objects to the characters. *La Chambre Vivant* translates into English as the Living Room, but means a room that is alive, not the typical idea of a central room in a house.

## La Chambre Vivant

### **Characters**

GRÉGOIRE, the man on stage left

ARNAUD, the man on stage right

*[The play opens to a bare stage, apart from a box of chalk at center stage and two men; GRÉGOIRE and ARNAUD, at stage left and stage right respectively. They are both asleep on their respective sides. GRÉGOIRE is leaning against the wall upstage, looking more like a resting traveller than a sleeping man. ARNAUD is sprawled out downstage right as if he has had a rather fitful dream about chasing a small animal—perhaps a wombat. The stage left and stage right exits are nothing more than two large black curtains, each divided down the center to allow objects to enter. It should be clear, however, that during the course of the play these are not curtains, but walls, much like the large black wall that is the upstage backdrop. They wake up simultaneously, and speak.]*

BOTH Well this is strange—

GRÉGOIRE —Hey, wait, who are you?!

ARNAUD And where are we? That really matters too!

GRÉGOIRE No, wait up, I asked you my question first.

And really, I think that what here is worse

Is that I don't know you; we're strangers, aren't we?

ARNAUD That's worse to you, but it's not worse to me.

*[ARNAUD stands and walks to the stage right curtain, tentatively touching it.]*

I don't know if you know, but we're trapped in here.

These walls have no doors or exits, I fear;

Though if it will help you, my name is Arnaud,

So now, what is yours? I'd really like to know,

Since after all we're trapped here together:

Birds of a kind, two of a feather!

Or was it... birds of a feather and two of a kind...?

My memory's not that reliable, you'll find,

So, please do forgive me if I forget

Your name which you still haven't told me yet.

GRÉGOIRE My name is Grégoire, and you're really quite odd.

And since you're no friend of mine, I need no façade

So I will be honest, I already don't like you.

Yes, yes, I know, it's ridiculous, but it's true

I have judged you already as lower than I

Because you really are the strangest guy

That I've ever met and I'm already frustrated

And with my luck, of course it was fated

That I would get stuck in some room with a twist!

*[Notices the box of chalk on the floor, and goes to pick it up]*

But here's the solution! Yes! This is it!

Do you see, right here, what I've got in my hand?

It's a small box of chalk, and surely even you'll understand

What it is that I am about to propose now to you.

It's really quite simple, just watch what I do.

*[Takes a piece of chalk out of the box and draws a line down center stage, separating GRÉGOIRE on stage left from ARNAUD on stage right.]*

I've drawn this line here, right down the middle

Of the room—here's the rules, it's really no riddle:

You stay on your half and I'll stay on mine.

Follow that rule, and we'll get along fine.

ARNAUD      *[Thinking it out]* I stay over here... You stay over there...

*[Realizes:]* But wait... You've more room! That's really not fair!

Let me draw the line! I wa—*[Tries to cross the line, instead hits his face; the line has created an invisible wall between the two sides.]*

GRÉGOIRE                              —Oh, what's this?

What absolute enchantment! Oh, what bliss!

It appears that this line is magic! *[Hits the wall with his hands]* You see?

It has created a wall here between you and me.

Oh, thank the lord! And though we're still stuck

Now that we're separate, I don't give a fuck.

ARNAUD      Aw, c'mon, there's no need to be mean,

And I'm sure there are mysteries that we still haven't seen.

This room has a strange, magic feel in the air!

*[Suddenly, by some means of stage magic, a chair appears in the center of the stage. If it can be afforded, it's recommended that it rises up from the floor. If this is not possible, a man dressed entirely in black may enter from either side with the chair and place it in the center of the room—it is important if this method is used that neither character notices him.]*

Like that! Somehow, we've gotten a chair!

*[GRÉGOIRE lunges at the chair and pulls it over to his side.]*

GRÉGOIRE      This chair is mine, yes, it's just been decided.

I mean, we could share were this room still undivided.

But with this wall up, I'm afraid it can't work.

So you'll just have to wait—

ARNAUD                              —Wow, you're really a jerk.

I mean, we've been in this room now for maybe two minutes—

I guess it's been longer since we *arrived* in it—  
But we've been awake now for a small span of time  
And really... Ugh... I guess that what I'm  
Trying to say is that you are too quick  
To decide what to do and to be such a dick  
To me when I have done nothing to you!  
Have you stopped yet to realize that I'm stuck here too,  
With no way to get out?—maybe I'd like that chair!  
And you didn't even ask before you took it just there.

[GRÉGOIRE *smiles—he's listened to none of ARNAUD's complaining, and sits down, contented, on his newly obtained chair. ARNAUD watches GRÉGOIRE, upset, then sits, defeated, on the stage floor.*]

You know you're just rude!

GRÉGOIRE [*sarcastically*] Oh, are you still talking?

If only this wall could shield me from your squawking!

Yes, I took the chair, now get over it!

It's not like it serves any use but to sit.

It's no good for sleeping, can't be used for food.

And really, no matter how long we feud

The truth of this situation is simple and grim

[*To himself*] [Especially since I am stuck here with him]

Without some source of food here we won't last the week,

And at this rate, the chance for survival is bleak.

ARNAUD C'mon now, Greggy-Poo, that's no way to be!

We should look on the bright si—

GRÉGOIRE —What did you just call me?

ARNAUD [*going on*] We should look on the bright side, not impending doom.

After all, this really is a marvelous room

Who knows? Maybe soon something new will appear

And provide us with something more useful while we're

Waiting around, and then, Bam! Surprise!

[*Once again, if it can be afforded, a filled picnic basket should rise out of the floor at this point at center of the room, in the same position as the chair. If not, at this moment, the man dressed in black should place it down in the*

*aforementioned place.]*

Like that! It's appeared right in front of our eyes!

[*Beat. Then ARNAUD jumps on the basket, pulling it just over to his side of the line and lifting the lid to reveal the food inside. The handle on GRÉGOIRE's side of the line remains over the line in GRÉGOIRE's area of the stage. Smiling, ARNAUD removes an apple from the basket. As this happens, GRÉGOIRE moves silently toward the line. ARNAUD is still intrigued by his apple as GRÉGOIRE grabs the handle of the basket that remained on his side of the line and pulls it full force onto his side, so that ARNAUD cannot get to it.*]

Hey, wait, give that back! You can't have it all!

GRÉGOIRE And yet, you just tried to pull it to your side of the wall!

What hypocrisy—and anyways, the truth of the matter

Is I don't have it all, so you, stop your chatter!

You've taken your apple, I've taken the rest.

And I think this arrangement really is best.

ARNAUD And of course you would you crazy old bat!

I'll be left here starving while you're getting fat

On the vast stores of food that are left still inside.

It's almost as if you'd prefer if I died!

[*Beat*]

GRÉGOIRE [*lying; he believes that the objects cannot pass back through the wall—he is speaking merely to get ARNAUD off his back.*]

Alright, if you want, you can ask me for more.

But I still don't trust you so I'd much rather store

The food here on my side of the wall than on yours

At least in that case there won't be any wars

About you not handing over any food to me

Surely you understand what I mean?

ARNAUD [*facing away from GRÉGOIRE*] —Yeah, I see

What you're saying... Alright, you can have it.

But on the condition that it's evenly split

Between you and me, and I still get what I need.

That means neither you nor I will give into greed

When it comes to this food, is that alright?

GRÉGOIRE [*stuffing his face*] Yeah sure, since there isn't enough for the night  
In this basket, we really will need something more  
To survive the days of being trapped we still have left in store.

ARNAUD Now now, you don't know how long we'll be here.  
Maybe in a few minutes a door will appear  
On one of these walls and we'll both be set free  
And that'll be the last that you hear from me.

GRÉGOIRE There's something here you must not understand;  
This could never play out the way that you've planned  
I'm here on my side, and you're trapped on yours,  
So unless for some reason this room gets *two* doors  
One of us will always be here, stuck,  
And that one person really is fucked.  
To be here 'til they die trapped behind this wall  
With a door on the other side would be no fun at all.  
Waiting here, dying, with freedom so close  
You stare at the door for hours until—adios!

[*ARNAUD just stares at him, silenced by both his pessimism at the fact that GRÉGOIRE is correct. They both sit again, ARNAUD on the floor, GRÉGOIRE on his chair. They remain silent until suddenly, a small six-chamber revolver falls from the sky into ARNAUD's lap. If the man in black method is being used, he should stand behind ARNAUD, and likewise drop the revolver into his lap. ARNAUD stares at it. GRÉGOIRE has not seen it, but he has heard it fall.*]

Arnaud, what was that? Surely you heard that sound.  
It was like... something metal hitting the ground.  
Have you gotten something new that I didn't see?  
What is it, Arnaud? C'mon show me!

[*ARNAUD holds up the revolver. GRÉGOIRE jumps out of his chair.*]

Now, Now, Arnaud, put that thing down.  
There's really no use in waving it around,  
There's no way that anything could get through this wall—  
ARNAUD I don't believe you. Otherwise, why would this fall?  
Not to mention—That theory? We really should test it  
And I have just the way—I bet by now you've guessed it.

It'll just take a second and then it's all done.

If other things can get through, then so will this gun!

*[ARNAUD slides the revolver across the floor at the wall. As he predicted, the gun goes through the wall and over the line without a hitch. ARNAUD looks pleased with himself—GRÉGOIRE lunges at the gun.]*

GRÉGOIRE    Good lord man, you really are dumb!

For although you obviously did not succumb

To the temptations of power that this gun represents

I'm not so stupid, and I'll make you resent

How you gave me this gun. Do you really not recall

How only one of us will get out, if any at all?

And now that I have the power to choose

Which of us is going to live as well as who's

Going to die here before we get free

I'll let you know, I'd much rather it be you than me!

*[GRÉGOIRE raises the gun towards ARNAUD, bracing himself for the shot. ARNAUD doesn't even flinch. GRÉGOIRE pulls the trigger and six bullets fall onto ARNAUD's head, either from the ceiling or dropped by the man in black, whichever method is being used. GRÉGOIRE checks the gun—it is unloaded. They stare at each other in silence, and then ARNAUD speaks in a firm, yet pained voice.]*

ARNAUD    Did you think that was your only option? Am I really that bad?

Would you, maybe, if possible, much rather have had

Some person you knew to be trapped with for however long?

And if you did, would you stop and think, perhaps it was wrong

To raise a pistol at someone just as trapped here as you

Who had no say in the matter, and woke up here too

With no knowledge of how he got here or how to get out?

Cause if that had been the case, I seriously doubt

That you would be so quick to threaten their life.

You'd be sitting here together without worry or strife—

No line down the center of the room to divide

One from another, your side from their side.

Look I get it, you don't like me, it's painfully clear.



You put on that dazzling display of joy  
I can say that I've fallen hard for your ploy.

ARNAUD *[blind to the sarcasm]* Wow really? You're kidding!

GRÉGOIRE

Of course I am!

And really, this optimism? I don't give a damn  
If I'm down or I'm pissed off about all of this shit  
Cause being happy or mad won't change our lot one bit  
We'll still be stuck here if I smile or I frown  
And it won't chase you away; you'll still be around  
No matter what I do, 'cause it's up to the room  
As to who gets to stay here and who meets their doom.

ARNAUD We've been getting things quickly of late, and yet  
There's still more to appear here to help us, I bet.  
So that's why I'm positive. I know we'll be fine.  
And staying happy keeps you from going out of your mind.  
That's why I recommended it. You don't need to listen  
To me, but the secrets that still remain hidden  
Will save us yet, believe me or not  
But I'll keep optimism. It's all that I've got,  
Except six bullets on the floor here and also this apple.  
Without being happy, my mind would be as fragile  
As yours is, and be prone to random violent fits,  
And that'll make this situation quite a bit worse than its  
Been. The both of us threatening to kill?  
Once is enough—I've had my fill.

GRÉGOIRE No, no really, by all means be happy  
The point I'm making is this, don't go getting all sappy  
With me, I don't care for looking on bright sides.  
I bitch and I moan, but I go with the tides.  
If I'm feeling angry, I let myself anger  
And I feel no regret about doing so after.

*[No matter which method had been used previously, from here on out all items should be delivered by the man in black character. At this moment, he walks on stage, carrying two small trinkets; a snow globe in one hand and a colorful*

*rubber ball in the other. He walks on upstage right, behind ARNAUD until he reaches the line that still divides the room in half. The man walks down it like a tightrope walker until he reaches the midpoint at center stage, where he sits. He places the snow globe to his right on ARNAUD's side of the room, and places the rubber ball to his left—GRÉGOIRE's side. He remains there as the men notice the objects appearance.]*

BOTH Good lord, this is strange.

ARNAUD I have déjà vu.

GRÉGOIRE From what you just said, and from this rubber ball, too.

It looks just like one I had as a child  
Every minute I played with this thing, I smiled.  
*[He picks it up, barely believing it's there]*  
I haven't seen it in decades, since I was five or six...  
Good lord, this room really is full of tricks.  
I still can't get out, but my past can get in.  
This room has more power, I think, than it's been  
Showing to us.

ARNAUD I agree with you there.

It summoned this snow globe right out of thin air.  
It's not from the past like that little toy ball  
And yet it still has me under just as much thrall.  
This globe was a gift to my daughter, you see.  
Somehow it's been brought all the way here to me.  
I gave it to her when I saw her last,  
And although I know that's not far in the past  
It feels like it's been ages since we woke up in here  
The minutes have turned into hours, I fear.

*[The man in black stands up as the two men continue staring at their artifacts. He walks over to GRÉGOIRE's side of the line, over to the curtain that marks the stage left 'wall'. He steps through, and pulls a bed onto the stage.]*

GRÉGOIRE Good lord, Arnaud, I think you may be right

The room can provide us with things for the night.  
That being said, I'm frightfully tired  
And now with this bed I've so conveniently acquired,

I'm thinking I'll sleep for a small bit of time.

[GRÉGOIRE climbs into the bed and falls asleep rather quickly]

ARNAUD      Oh, I bet you will, and while you do that I'm  
Sitting here all alone with nothing to do  
I can't even talk or argue with you.  
But since you are sleeping, I think that I'll say  
That I've hated the time I've spent with you today.  
You're the most horrible man I ever have met  
You didn't manage to kill me, and yet  
The fact that you tried, I still cannot forgive.

[The man in black, leaning against the bedpost, smiles and pulls out a chalkboard eraser, tossing it over to ARNAUD's side of the room. ARNAUD stares at it in wonder, and instantly knows what to do.]

And I think you were right. We both cannot live.  
Only one can escape, the other stays trapped.  
When you wake up, you'll regret that you napped.

[ARNAUD erased the line that divides the two sides, and crosses over to GRÉGOIRE's side for the first time since the play began. He treats it like he's breaking into someone's house, sneaking around as quietly as possible. The man in black picks up the box of chalk and drops it down in front of ARNAUD, who picks it up off the floor]

Since it's not my place to decide for you, I'll leave you a choice  
So that when I have left here and begun to rejoice  
In my freedom, I won't be subjected to guilt.

[ARNAUD grabs his apple and places it at the foot of GRÉGOIRE's bed. He then picks up the revolver and one of the six bullets that are strewn about, and loads it into the gun. He places the gun next to the apple, then removes a piece of chalk from the box, and draws a rectangle around GRÉGOIRE's bed, trapping him in the small area of space.

I'll just sow some seeds with this set up I've built.  
And now, I think it's time for me to go.

[ARNAUD goes to the back wall and draws a doorway in chalk, and uses it to exit the room. GRÉGOIRE wakes up when he hears the door close, jumps up, and slams into the wall that has been created around his bed.]

GRÉGOIRE

No!

*[He slams in vain against the walls, then falls back on the bed, his hand brushing against the pistol. The Man in Black walks over to the enclosure, smiling.*

*GRÉGOIRE lifts the revolver up to inspect it, whimpers, and the lights go black.]*

