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SF PERUSALS

Camille

A Travesty on *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas Fils

by Charles Ludlam

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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CAMILLE was produced by the Ridiculous Theatrical Company at the Evergreen Theatre on May 13, 1974. The performance was directed by Charles Ludlam, with sets by Bobjack Callejo, costumes by Mary Brecht, and lighting by Richard Currie. The production stage managers were Richard Gibbs and Doug Schwegler. The cast was as follows:

BARON DE VARVILLE. . . . . John D. Brockmeyer
NANINE. . . . . Jack Mallory
MARGUERITE GAUTIER . . . . . Charles Ludlam
BUTLER . . . . . Stephen Sterne
NICHETTE FONDUE . . . . . George Osterman
OLYMPE DE TAVERNE . . . . . Black-Eyed Susan
SAINT GAUDENS . . . . . Robert Reddy
PRUDENCE DUVERNOY . . . . . Lola Pashalinski
GASTON ROUÉ. . . . . Robert Beers
ARMAND DUVAL. . . . . Bill Vehr
DUVAL SENIOR . . . . . Richard Currie

CHARACTERS

BARON DE VARVILLE, Armand's rival
NANINE, maid
MARGUERITE GAUTIER, a courtesan
JOSEPH, the butler
NICHETTE FONDUE, a childhood friend of Marguerite
OLYMPE DE TAVERNE, Saint Gaudens's mistress
SAINT GAUDENS, a roué
PRUDENCE DUVERNOY, a milliner
GASTON ROUÉ, a playboy
ARMAND DUVAL, Marguerite's lover
DUVAL SR, Armand's father

SETTING

Marguerite's drawing room. Paris.

TIME

1848

ACT I

*(***MARGUERITE***'s drawing room. Paris, 1848.)*

VARVILLE. *(pacing up and down with a bouquet of flowers)* Will she see me?

NANINE. Madame says she wants to be alone.

VARVILLE. So, she's playing cat and mouse, eh? Well, I hope she finds him amusing, whoever he is.

NANINE. Madame is alone. She has seen no one for three days. She's been ill again. It's a pathetic story….

VARVILLE. Oh, yes, that is a pathetic story. Only unfortunately…

NANINE. Unfortunately?

VARVILLE. Unfortunately, I don't believe it.

NANINE. There are enough true things that can be said about Madame, so there's no use your telling things that aren't true. Madame never tells lies.

VARVILLE. *(laughs)* Of course not.

NANINE. During her long illness, Madame accumulated over fifty thousand francs' worth of debts, and that's no lie.

VARVILLE. Bring Madame these flowers and tell her I am offering to pay her debts. Is it my fault I love her?

NANINE. *(taking the flowers)* I don't know. It may be better to owe money to some people than gratitude to others.

*(***NANINE** *exits into* **MARGUERITE***'s room with the flowers. Off:)*

Marguerite, the Baron de Varville is still waiting. He says he is willing to pay all your debts if you will only see him. And he sends these flowers.

VARVILLE. Birds of paradise and aspidistra.

MARGUERITE. Aagh, get them away from me! Get those flowers away from me!

(The bouquet of flowers comes flying out of the door.)

VARVILLE. *(picking them up)* You don't care for them?

MARGUERITE. What do they call me?

VARVILLE. Why…er…ah…you are called many things that one would hesitate to repeat.

MARGUERITE. I mean my name. What is my name?

VARVILLE. Marguerite Gautier.

MARGUERITE. No, no, you fool. I mean by what name am I known in the Bohemian quarter?

VARVILLE. The Lady of the Camellias.

MARGUERITE. *(enters)* Why?

VARVILLE. Because you wear no other flowers?

MARGUERITE. And I can bear no other flowers. Their scent makes me ill. *(coughs)* Now take your birds of paradise and get your ass-padistra out of here.

*(***VARVILLE** *does not move.)*

You're not going?

VARVILLE. No.

MARGUERITE. Then, for God's sake, play the piano, dahling. Your music is your only saving grace.

VARVILLE. *(obeying)* Is it my fault I love you?

MARGUERITE. If I were to listen to everyone who's in love with me, I would have no time for dinner. *(to* **NANINE***)* Did you order dinner?

NANINE. Yes, Madame.

MARGUERITE. *(to* **VARVILLE***)* I let you call on me when I'm in and wait for me when I'm out. But if you insist on talking of nothing but your love, I will withdraw my friendship.

VARVILLE. What have you got against love?

MARGUERITE. I have nothing against love. It just makes such dull conversation.

VARVILLE. And yet, last year at Marienbad you did give me some hope.

MARGUERITE. My dear, that was last year, that was Marienbad. I was ill; I was bored. But this is Paris and I'm very much better, and not at all bored.

NANINE. Marguerite, the doctor called again this morning.

MARGUERITE. What did he say?

NANINE. He said you are to rest as much as possible.

MARGUERITE. Dear doctor, always giving me good advice. *(to* **VARVILLE***)* What's that you're playing?

VARVILLE. A rhapsody by Rauschenberg.

MARGUERITE. It's charming.

VARVILLE. Listen, Marguerite, I have eighty thousand francs.

MARGUERITE. How nice. I have a hundred thousand.

VARVILLE. Your indifference to me is like a camellia, no scent and no thorns.

MARGUERITE. *(aside to* **NANINE***)* He is the most persistent man in Paris. He insists on loving me.

NANINE. *(confidentially)* He has eighty thousand francs.

MARGUERITE. How he bores me with his eighty thousand francs.

(The bell rings. **BUTLER** *goes to the door.)*

BUTLER. *(announcing)* Nichette Fondue.

NICHETTE. Marguerite!

MARGUERITE. Nichette!

NICHETTE. You're looking well.

MARGUERITE. I always look well when I'm near death. Will you stay for supper?

NICHETTE. I can't. Gustave is waiting downstairs.

MARGUERITE. Oh, Nichette, you're still seeing that Gustave?

NICHETTE. Yes. He's been promoted to com*p*troller!

MARGUERITE. Oh, Nichette, you can do much better than a comptroller!

NICHETTE. But I never want to do better than Gustave. I love him.

MARGUERITE. Nichette, you're a very pretty girl, but a very bad businesswoman.

NICHETTE. You'll see, Marguerite. One of these days you'll fall like a ton of bricks.

MARGUERITE. Me, fall in love? No, no, Nichette!

NICHETTE. Toodle-oo, Marguerite.

MARGUERITE. Ta-ta, Nichette.

(bell)

BUTLER. *(announcing)* Madame Olympe de Taverné. Monsieur Saint Gaudens.

MARGUERITE. At last, Olympe. I thought you weren't coming.

OLYMPE. Blame it on Saint Gaudens. It's his fault.

SAINT GAUDENS. It's always my fault. Good evening, Marguerite. Good evening, Varville.

OLYMPE. I just found out today that Saint Gaudens is of Polish extraction.

MARGUERITE. No.

OLYMPE. His dentist is Polish. *(aside to* **MARGUERITE***)* Did you invite Gaylord?

MARGUERITE. I thought you would bring him.

OLYMPE. With Saint Gaudens? You know how jealous he is.

MARGUERITE. I thought you had him trained.

OLYMPE. You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

MARGUERITE. I like older men. They're so…grateful.

OLYMPE. And they have so much…poise.

SAINT GAUDENS. Is Varville staying for supper?

MARGUERITE. No, he isn't. He's being punished for bringing me the wrong flowers.

SAINT GAUDENS. Didn't he bring camellias?

MARGUERITE. No, he didn't.

OLYMPE. How gouache of him. He committed a real false pah!

SAINT GAUDENS. Varville's in the doghouse.

MARGUERITE. *(yelling out the window)* Prudence!

PRUDENCE. *(off)* What do you want?

MARGUERITE. I want you to come over here at once.

PRUDENCE. Why?

MARGUERITE. Because it's my birthday and the Baron de Varville is still here, and he's boring me to death.

PRUDENCE. I have two young gentlemen here who have asked me out to supper.

MARGUERITE. Well, bring them over here to supper. Anything is better than the Baron. Who are they?

PRUDENCE. You know one of them, Gaston Roué.

MARGUERITE. Of course I know him. And the other?

PRUDENCE. A friend of his.

MARGUERITE. Come on over, dahlings, there's plenty of food here.

OLYMPE. It's so convenient to have Prudence living just across the courtyard.

MARGUERITE. Yes, she delivers my gossip fresh every morning.

SAINT GAUDENS. Who is this Prudence?

OLYMPE. She was once a kept woman who tried to go on the stage and failed. So, relying on her acquaintance with fashionable people, she opened a milliner's shop.

MARGUERITE. And nobody buys her hats but me.

OLYMPE. But you never wear them.

MARGUERITE. Dahling, they're beastly. I wouldn't wear one to a dogfight. But I adore Prudence, and she is hard up. *(coughs a little)* It's cold this evening.

(A bell rings.)

BUTLER. *(at the door)* Madame Prudence Duvernoy, Monsieur Gaston Roué, and Monsieur Armand Duval.

PRUDENCE. *(barges in wearing a big hat)* The classy way they announce people here! I knew this party was going to be piss elegant!

GASTON. *(to* **MARGUERITE**, *kissing her hand)* I trust you are well, Madame.

MARGUERITE. Quite well, thank you. And you?

PRUDENCE. Gee, the classy way they talk here! Marguerite, I want to present to you Monsieur Armand Duval, the man who is more in love with you than any man in Paris.

MARGUERITE. Nanine, set two more places. I hope his great passion hasn't spoiled Monsieur Duval's appetite.

ARMAND. Please accept this book as a remembrance of your birthday.

MARGUERITE. *Manon Lescaut?*

ARMAND. Yes. The story of a woman who brightened her wit with champagne, and her eyes with tears.

MARGUERITE. It's not a sad story, is it? I don't like sad thoughts.

ARMAND. It has a sad ending.

MARGUERITE. Well, I'll read it, but I won't read the ending.

SAINT GAUDENS. My dear Gaston, I'm so glad to see you!

GASTON. Saint Gaudens…as young as ever!

SAINT GAUDENS. Younger. Only my teeth are aging.

GASTON. And your love affairs – prospering?

SAINT GAUDENS. Well, there's Olympe here.

GASTON. So, you've taken up with this little trollop, eh?

OLYMPE. Watch who you call little.

MARGUERITE. *(to* **NANINE**, *who is setting the table)* Not the Melmac, Nanine, the Limoges.

GASTON. Whatever became of Beatrice?

SAINT GAUDENS. I gave her up. Her lover was a banker but she loved me for myself alone. But, still, the affair required a lot of hiding in cupboards, prowling about the back stairs, and waiting in the street.

GASTON. Which gave you rheumatism.

SAINT GAUDENS. Not a bit, but times change. We none of us grows any younger.

GASTON. *(to* **MARGUERITE***)* Isn't he wonderful?

MARGUERITE. We are all growing old at exactly the same rate so there will be no sympathy for anyone, do you hear? *(to* **ARMAND**) Are you following me?

ARMAND. Yes.

SAINT GAUDENS. *(to* **ARMAND***)* Are you related to Monsieur Duval, the receiver general?

ARMAND. Yes, sir, he is my father. Do you know him?

SAINT GAUDENS. I met him years ago at the Marchioness Fanzeepanzee's summer house, with your mother whom I remember as a very beautiful and charming fairy of a woman. You take after your mother.

ARMAND. My mother died three years ago.

SAINT GAUDENS. Forgive me.

ARMAND. I am always glad to be reminded of my mother.

SAINT GAUDENS. Are you an only son?

ARMAND. I have one sister….

*(***ARMAND***,* **SAINT GAUDENS***, and* **OLYMPE** *join* **VARVILLE** *at the piano.)*

MARGUERITE. *(aside to* **GASTON**) I think your friend is charming.

GASTON. He is and, what's more, he adores you. Doesn't he, Prudence?

PRUDENCE. What?

GASTON. I was telling Marguerite that Armand is madly in love with her.

PRUDENCE. He's got it bad and that ain't good. Ah, l'amour, l'amour!

GASTON. He loves you so much, my dear, that he doesn't dare tell you about it.

MARGUERITE. Varville, please!

VARVILLE. *(banging the piano keys)* You told me to play the piano.

MARGUERITE. When I am alone with you, not when I have friends.

PRUDENCE. He's loved you for two years.

MARGUERITE. Quite an old story, then.

GASTON. Armand simply lives at Gustave's and Nichette's to hear them talk about you.

PRUDENCE. I want something to drink.

OLYMPE. Look, I found some champagne.

*(***PRUDENCE, GASTON,** *and* **OLYMPE** *get involved in opening the bottle of champagne.)*

NANINE. *(taking* **MARGUERITE** *aside)* Marguerite, when you were ill a year ago, remember I told you of a young man who called to inquire after you every day but wouldn't leave his name?

MARGUERITE. I remember.

NANINE. *(pointing discreetly)* That's him. Armand Duval.

MARGUERITE. How nice of him. *(calling across the room)* Monsieur Duval, do you know what I have just been hearing? That you called to inquire after me every day when I was ill.

ARMAND. It's quite true.

MARGUERITE. Then the least I can do is thank you. Did you hear that, Varville? *You* never did that for me, did you?

VARVILLE. I have only known you for a year.

MARGUERITE. Don't be ridiculous, this young gentleman has only known me for five minutes.

BUTLER. *(enters with boar's head on platter)* Dinner is served. *(exits)*

PRUDENCE. Here is supper. I'm famished.

VARVILLE. I have no luck. Good-bye, Marguerite Gautier, Lady of the Camellias. *(kisses her hand)*

MARGUERITE. Good-bye. When shall we see you again?

VARVILLE. Whenever you wish. *(bowing)* Gentlemen. *(exits)*

SAINT GAUDENS. Good-bye, Varville, old boy. Better luck next time.

MARGUERITE. Let's eat!

(They rush madly to the table.)

PRUDENCE. You really are too hard on the Baron, dear. You could end up a baroness if you played your cards right. We're none of us getting any younger, and it's time you settled something about your future – while you still have one!

OLYMPE. I simply adore the Baron. He's rich, handsome, wealthy, talented, and he's got money! Do you know that he's just written a book?

MARGUERITE. Really?

GASTON. Ah, yes, his memoirs are considered the breviary of The Decadence.

PRUDENCE. And he's got eighty thousand francs.

MARGUERITE. How he bores me with his eighty thousand francs.

OLYMPE. Eighty thousand francs! I wish someone would offer to bore me that way! Do you know what Saint Gaudens gave me for my birthday? A coupé! But he didn't give me any horses to go with it!

PRUDENCE. Still, a coupé is a coupé is a coupé!

ALL. *(clinking glasses simultaneously)* Touché!

SAINT GAUDENS. I'm ruined. Why can't I be loved for myself alone?

OLYMPE. *(shrieking with laughter)* The idea!

MARGUERITE. Oh, come on Saint Gaudens, come and get your MDA.

SAINT GAUDENS. What's MDA?

MARGUERITE. Monsieur, don't ask.

PRUDENCE. What are those little fellows?

GASTON. Partridges.

PRUDENCE. *(to* **BUTLER***)* You can put some on my plate.

GASTON. Some? Partridges aren't oysters, you know.

PRUDENCE. Well, they're not much bigger than oysters.

GASTON. What a birdlike appetite. Now we know who ruined Saint Gaudens…she did!

PRUDENCE. She! She! Is that any way to talk of a lady? Why in my day…

GASTON. We needn't go back to Louis the Fifteenth! Marguerite, fill Armand's glass. He's looking sad.

SAINT GAUDENS. This dinner is delicious.

PRUDENCE. I want another drink.

MARGUERITE. Gaston, play the piano. Come on, Saint Gaudens, sing us a song.

SAINT GAUDENS. How can I sing when I'm having my supper?

MARGUERITE. Sing for your supper.

PRUDENCE. I want another drink!

*(***SAINT GAUDENS** *begins to sing "Plaisir d'Amour.")*

MARGUERITE. No, no, not that one! Let's have something gay, dahling.

*(***SAINT GAUDENS** *sings "Frère Jacques" and all join him, singing in rounds.)*

ALL. Bravo! Bravo! *(taps glasses with silverware)* Toast!

GASTON. *(making a toast)* Ah, life is short and sweet and Prudence is short and fat.

(All clink their glasses together and drink.)

PRUDENCE. *(quite drunk)* I want another drink!

OLYMPE. Fat, fair, and forty!

PRUDENCE. All right, smart ass, how old do you think I am? I'm…thirty-six!

(riotous laughter)

GASTON. But you don't look a day over forty!

PRUDENCE. I've been told I have the skin of a thirteen-year old.

OLYMPE. Well, you better give it back, you're getting it wrinkled.

*(***PRUDENCE** *grimaces and then more riotous laughter.)*

*(***PRUDENCE** *hits* **GASTON** *over the head with a partridge.* **SAINT GAUDENS** *whispers in* **OLYMPE***'s ear.)*

OLYMPE. *(shrieking with laughter)* That's the funniest story I've ever heard in my life!

PRUDENCE. Tell me! Tell me! *(motioning to* **SAINT GAUDENS***)* Whisper in my ear.

MARGUERITE. That isn't fair. Tell us all. We want to hear it too.

PRUDENCE. *(laughing almost uncontrollably)* I know what's coming, but do go on.

MARGUERITE. I want to hear it too.

SAINT GAUDENS. You tell her, Gaston.

GASTON. Ah, but you tell it so much better than I do.

SAINT GAUDENS. But it's your story.

GASTON. But I like to hear you tell it.

MARGUERITE. *(shouts in a masculine voice)* Let's have the story, man. Out with it!

OLYMPE. If Saint Gaudens won't tell it, I will.

SAINT GAUDENS. *(cupping his hand over her mouth)* I'll tell it! I'll tell it! Well, you remember that awful divorce last year of Odile de Lille and that stockbroker of hers. Well, last week I saw her at the Ballet Gala at the Opera. They were doing *Zinnia, The Mute Girl of Cincinnati.* And who should arrive in the next box but Odile's ex! And he leaned over and said in a very loud voice, "Odile, my dear, how does your new husband like that worn-out twat of yours?" And she said –

OLYMPE. *(breaking loose and interrupting)* "He likes it fine, once he gets past the worn-out part!"

(Everyone laughs uproariously except **ARMAND***.)*

MARGUERITE. Monsieur Duval, you're not laughing. Don't you like Gaston's jokes?

ARMAND. I have heard Gaston's jokes. In fact, he learned some of them from me. But I would rather they were not repeated in your presence.

*(***OLYPME** *does a spit take.)*

MARGUERITE. Come now, I'm not a colonel's daughter just out of the convent.

SAINT GAUDENS. Who hasn't been deceived? One's friends and one's mistresses are always deceiving one.

PRUDENCE. Ah yes, just as in *Berenice* by Racine…

*(***PRUDENCE** *takes center stage, gesturing madly and emitting Gallic gutturals. The others look at her in wonderment.)*

MARGUERITE. Oh, she's acting.

PRUDENCE. Oh, mon pauvre chevrolet. J'aime le chateaubriand. Oh, le coq au vin, le coq au vin, sur le table avec les pommes frites.

(Standing at the table, she leans back on top of it, in a kind of reverie. **GASTON** *throws a pie in her face. Everyone laughs.)*

MARGUERITE. Bravo, Saint Gaudens. You are a hero and we are all in love with you. All those madly in love with Saint Gaudens hold up your hands. *(to* **SAINT GAUDENS***)* Well, hold up your hand, dahling. Unanimous. Prudence, my dear, you really ought to stick to Maeterlinck. You will always be remembered for your *Joiselle.* Gaston, play something for Saint Gaudens to dance to.

GASTON. I don't know anything but St. Vitus' Dance.

MARGUERITE. Then we'll have St. Vitus' Dance. Come on, Saint Gaudens…Armand, move the table.

PRUDENCE. But I haven't finished.

OLYMPE. Do I have to dance with Saint Gaudens?

MARGUERITE. No, I'm going to. Come along, little Saint Gaudens.

ARMAND. Aren't you afraid that you're not well enough to dance?

MARGUERITE. I'm not afraid of anything except being bored.

OLYMPE. Come, Armand.

SAINT GAUDENS. Your hollandaise was divine, my dear.

MARGUERITE. It's especially good around the Jewish hollandaise.

(All dance to the music that **GASTON** *plays.* **MARGUERITE** *coughs. The music stops. All look to her.)*

SAINT GAUDENS. What's the matter?

MARGUERITE. Nothing. I lost my breath.

ARMAND. *(going to her)* Are you all right?

MARGUERITE. Yes. It's nothing. Don't stop. *(Starts to dance again and then falls.)*

ARMAND. Stop, Gaston.

PRUDENCE. Marguerite is ill.

MARGUERITE. It's nothing. *(falls again)*

ARMAND. *(catching her)* The party's over.

PRUDENCE. She's always ill just when everybody is having a good time.

OLYMPE. You can never have any fun here.

PRUDENCE. Let's go somewhere else. Let's go to my place. Wait a minute! I'm just beginning to get hungry again! Bring the food with us. Forward…march!

GASTON. *(to* **ARMAND**) She's been laughing too much and she's spitting up blood. It's nothing. It happens to her every day.

(Exit all with the food except **MARGUERITE** *and* **ARMAND**.*)*

MARGUERITE. *(looking a mirror)* How pale I look!

ARMAND. You're killing yourself.

MARGUERITE. If I am, you're the only one who objects. The others don't worry about me.

ARMAND. The others don't love you as I do.

MARGUERITE. Ah yes, I had forgotten that great love of yours.

ARMAND. You laugh at it.

MARGUERITE. I've heard it too many times to laugh anymore. It's an old joke and the joke is on me.

ARMAND. Promise.

MARGUERITE. What?

ARMAND. To take care of yourself.

MARGUERITE. My good man, if I were to begin to take care of myself, I would die. Don't you see that it is only the feverish life I live that keeps me alive? The moment that I am no longer amusing to people, they leave me, and the long days are followed by longer nights. I know, I was in bed for two months and after three weeks, no one came near me.

ARMAND. Those people are horrible.

MARGUERITE. They're the only friends I have and I'm no better than they are.

ARMAND. Don't say that. Let me take you away from all this. We could go to the country where I would take care of you like a brother. I'd never leave you and I would cure you. Then, when you were strong again, you could return to this life if you wished, but I don't think you would want to.

MARGUERITE. How depressing. I don't like sad thoughts.

ARMAND. Have you no heart, Marguerite?

MARGUERITE. I'm traveling light, no heart.

ARMAND. Have you never been in love with anyone?

MARGUERITE. *(exaggerating the word)* Nevvv…aaiirr!!!!!!

ARMAND. Thank God!

MARGUERITE. You're a strange boy. You've drunk too much wine and that has made you sentimental. Tomorrow it will be a different story.

ARMAND. Was it wine that brought me here every day when you were ill?

MARGUERITE. No, that couldn't have been wine. But why didn't you come up?

ARMAND. What right had I?

MARGUERITE. Since when are men so formal with women like me!

ARMAND. And I was afraid.

MARGUERITE. Afraid?

ARMAND. Afraid that you would grant me too promptly that which I wanted to win through long suffering and great sacrifice. Imagination lends too much poetry to the senses, and the desires of the body make concessions to the dreams of the soul. I would rather die for your love than pay fifty francs for it.

MARGUERITE. So, it's as bad as that! And you would look after me?

ARMAND. Yes.

MARGUERITE. You would stay with me all day long?

ARMAND. Yes.

MARGUERITE. And even all night?

ARMAND. As long as I didn't weary you.

MARGUERITE. And what does this great devotion come from!

ARMAND. The irresistible sympathy which I have for you.

MARGUERITE. So you are in love with me. Why don't you just say it? It's much more simple.

ARMAND. If I say it, it will not be today.

MARGUERITE. Never say it.

ARMAND. Why?

MARGUERITE. Because only two things can come of it. Either I shall not accept – then you will have a grudge against me – or I shall accept, and you will have a mistress who is sad or gay with a gaiety sadder than grief, who spits up blood and spends a hundred thousand francs a year. That is all very well for a rich old man like the Baron, but it is very bad for a young man like you.… If what you say is true, go away at once. Love me a little less or understand me a little better. I'm not worth much. You're too young and sensitive to live in a world like ours. Love some other woman and marry… I'm trying to be honest with you.

ARMAND. What if I were to tell you that I've spent whole nights beneath your windows and that for two months I've treasured a glove you dropped.

MARGUERITE. I should not believe you.

ARMAND. You're right to laugh at me. I'm a fool. There's nothing else to do but laugh at me.

MARGUERITE. Armand, can't we just be friends?

ARMAND. That's too much, and not enough. Don't you believe in love, Marguerite?

MARGUERITE. I don't know what it is. It's hard to believe in it if you've never had it.

ARMAND. *(crushing her in his embrace)* Let me make you believe. We'll rent a country house. Fresh air and good food will make you well in no time.

MARGUERITE. But that takes money.

ARMAND. I have money.

MARGUERITE. How much?

ARMAND. I have seven thousand francs a year.

MARGUERITE. *(pulling away from him and laughing)* I spend more than that in a week. And I've never been too particular where it came from, as I guess you know.

ARMAND. Don't talk like that!

MARGUERITE. It's true. The hard cold facts are we need hard cold cash. Why, the rental of a country house. horses, and a carriage to get around, to get us there and back…Enough for the table, even simple food costs money…No servants except for Nanine… *(handing him a pen and paper)* Oh, I'm no good at arithmetic. You figure it out.

*(***ARMAND** *sits down at the desk and begins figuring. A knock at the door.* **NANINE** *enters with an enormous bouquet of red camellias.)*

NANINE. *(aside to* **MARGUERITE***)* The Baron de Varville sent these. Looks like he's learned his lesson. They're camellias this time.

ARMAND. *(finishing the sum)* Eighty thousand francs.

NANINE. He's waiting downstairs.

MARGUERITE. What did you say?

ARMAND. I said we'll need eighty thousand francs.

NANINE. I said the Baron de Varville is waiting downstairs.

ARMAND. But don't worry, darling, I'll get it somewhere.

MARGUERITE. Eighty thousand francs.

*(***ARMAND** *tries to take* **MARGUERITE** *in his arms but she resists)*

Take this camellia and bring it back to me when it dies.

(She hands **ARMAND** *a flower and he kisses it.)*

ARMAND. When will that be?

MARGUERITE. How long does it take a flower to wither? A morning, an evening. Tomorrow night.

ARMAND. *(crushing the flower in his hand)* Here, it's dead already.

MARGUERITE. No, no, impossible. I wear red camellias when I've got the rag on…when the moon is not favorable to pleasure. I'll be wearing white ones tomorrow.

ARMAND. I can't wait. Let me sleep here tonight beside you like your brother or at the foot of your bed like your dog. But let me wait here until the camellias turn white.

MARGUERITE. You put tears on my hand. Yes. Yes. No! Yes!

ARMAND. *(overjoyed)* You'll take me? Like this, at a moment's notice?

MARGUERITE. Does it seem strange to you? *(taking his hand and placing it on her heart)* Feel my heart beating. I shall not live as long as others so I have promised myself to live more quickly.

ARMAND. Don't talk like that, I beg of you.

MARGUERITE. But however short a time I have to live, I shall yet live longer than your love.

ARMAND. I thought you didn't like sad thoughts.

MARGUERITE. I don't. But they come sometimes.

(Bell rings.)

NANINE. *(enters whispering)* Madame, the Baron is waiting. Shall I send him away?

MARGUERITE. *(aside to* **NANINE***)* Tell him to wait. *(to* **ARMAND***)* Armand, would you run out and get me some marrons glacés? I suddenly have the maddest craving for marrons glacés.

ARMAND. Aren't there any in the house?

MARGUERITE. No, and nothing but marrons glacés will do. Please go out and get me some.

ARMAND. Marguerite, is something wrong? I feel you're trying to get rid of me.

MARGUERITE. Now what on earth gave you that idea? Come back at midnight, and I'll be waiting for you.

ARMAND. How do I know you'll let me in when I come back?

MARGUERITE. *(giving him a key)* I'll give you the key and you can let yourself in. Now go, quickly.

*(***ARMAND** *starts out the door.* **MARGUERITE** *blocks his way and shows him another)* No, this way.

*(***ARMAND** *rushes out. There is a pause.* **ARMAND** *rushes in again.)*

ARMAND. I love you. *(exits)*

MARGUERITE. *(to* **NANINE**) Is it possible that he does love me? Or can I even be sure that I love him, I who have never loved? Show the Baron in, Nanine.

NANINE. I shall pray for you, Madame.

MARGUERITE. Why?

NANINE. Because you are in danger.

MARGUERITE. Oh pooh. Lying keeps my teeth white. Send the Baron in, Nanine.

(The **BARON** *enters.)*

Baron!

VARVILLE. You kept me waiting long enough.

MARGUERITE. Hello, you. I have just been putting my account books in order. *(showing him the book)* See?

VARVILLE. Lovely.

MARGUERITE. But, look at all these bills. I have eighty thousand francs' worth of debts. Will you lend me the money?

VARVILLE. No.

MARGUERITE. What will I do?

VARVILLE. Come with me to Siberia *(***MARGUERITE** *coughs)* and I'll give you all the money you want.

MARGUERITE. If you are my friend, why won't you give it me now?

VARVILLE. Because if I do, you may no longer have any use for me. It has been months since we've as much as spent a night together.

*(***VARVILLE** *plants a kiss on* **MARGUERITE***'s arm. Lipstick is left. She wipes it off and sprays it with an atomizer.)*

Until we do, your bills will go unpaid.

*(***MARGUERITE** *sits down at the piano and begins to play Chopin.* **VARVILLE** *looks over the papers on the desk. He finds the sheet on which* **ARMAND** *was doing the sum and picks it up.)*

What's this? "House: thirty thousand francs; horses and carriage: twenty thousand… Nanine, Marguerite, and myself… thirty thousand… Who is this "myself"?

MARGUERITE. *(still playing)* Myself, of course. My doctor insists that I go to the country this summer for my health. That's why I asked you for the eighty thousand francs. I'm afraid of getting sick again. I know how it bores you.

VARVILLE. This note says, "Nanine, Marguerite, *and myself…*" A summer in the country, away from the glamour of Paris, living quietly with the cows and the chickens sounds very unlike you, my dear.

MARGUERITE. But, it's true.

VARVILLE. You can't fool me. I know you've found a playmate for this rustic holiday.

MARGUERITE. *(stops playing suddenly)* Damn Chopin and all his sharps and flats!

VARVILLE. I'm afraid your mind isn't on it, my dear.

MARGUERITE. You know quite well that I could never play it.

VARVILLE. Let me spend the night and you can have all the money you need.

MARGUERITE. Only if you will play the piano for me. *(rings for* **NANINE***)*

VARVILLE. *(bitterly)* My one merit. *(begins to play)*

MARGUERITE. *(aside to* **NANINE***)* Bolt the door and don't answer it, no matter what happens.

NANINE. Yes, Madame. *(exits)*

VARVILLE. Are you two through whispering over there?

MARGUERITE. I was just giving some orders to Nanine.

VARVILLE. Yes, I'm sure you were. *(Continues playing. The doorbell rings.)* Someday I'm going to get temperamental and complain when doorbells ring while I am trying to play.

MARGUERITE. *(pulling out whip and masks of black leather)* Did the doorbell ring? I didn't hear it.

VARVILLE. *(continuing to play)* Does my music shut out the world for you, my dear?

MARGUERITE. You play beautifully. *(puts on mask)*

VARVILLE. You lie beautifully.

MARGUERITE. *(masking* **VARVILLE***)* Thank you, that's more than I deserve.

VARVILLE. Oh, no, it's not half as much as you deserve. *(They laugh. Doorbell. The clock begins striking twelve.)* I wonder who it could be at this hour.

MARGUERITE. *(handcuffs* **VARVILLE** *to the piano and pulls a dildo out of the bag)* If I told you, you wouldn't believe me.

VARVILLE. Try me.

MARGUERITE. *(whipping him)* I could say that someone has found the wrong door. *(laughs)*

VARVILLE. *(laughing)* The wrong door! That's a good one!

MARGUERITE. Or I could say, it was the great love of my life.

VARVILLE. The great romance of your life! *(laughs)*

MARGUERITE. That might have been! *(starts to whip piano)*

(They both laugh – she ironically, he bitterly – as the curtain falls.)

ACT II

Scene One

(A country house at Auteuil. A room looking out on a garden.)

ARMAND. Where is Marguerite?

PRUDENCE. She is in the garden picking strawberries with Nichette, who has come to spend the day with her. I'm just going to join them.

ARMAND. One moment, Prudence. A week ago, Marguerite gave you some diamond bracelets to have reset. What has become of them?

PRUDENCE. Well, that's a long story. I…er…I…ah…

ARMAND. Come, tell me frankly. Where are Marguerite's bracelets?

PRUDENCE. Do you want the truth?

ARMAND. Of course I want the truth.

PRUDENCE. Sold.

ARMAND. Her gowns?

PRUDENCE. Sold.

ARMAND. Her horses and her jewels?

PRUDENCE. Sold and pawned.

ARMAND. Who has sold and pawned them?

PRUDENCE. I did.

ARMAND. Why did you not tell me?

PRUDENCE. Marguerite made me promise not to.

ARMAND. And where has all the money gone?

PRUDENCE. In payments. Ah, my dear fellow, she didn't want to tell you. Marguerite's creditors went to the Baron de Varville to settle, and he had them thrown

out of his house. They wanted their money. I gave them part payment out of the few thousand francs you gave me. But, someone told them that Marguerite had been abandoned by the Baron and was living with a penniless young man. They stormed her house and ripped off all of her goods. Marguerite wanted to sell everything, but it was too late. So rather than ask you for the money, she sold her horses, her carriage, her gowns, and her jewels. Here are the receipts and the pawn tickets. *(gives him the receipts)*

ARMAND. How much money is needed?

PRUDENCE. Fifty thousand francs. Ah, I hate to say I told you so. You think it is enough to be in love, and go to the country, and live on air. You'll soon find out that someone has to pay the rent on your pastoral dream! Ah, l'amour, l'amour. Toujours l'amour! Yecch.

ARMAND. Ask our creditors for a fortnight's grace. I will pay.

PRUDENCE. Are you going to borrow the money?

ARMAND. Yes. I suspected something of the kind and have written to my solicitor.

PRUDENCE. No, Armand, you'll only quarrel with your father and ruin your whole future.

ARMAND. Hush, she's coming.

*(***MARGUERITE** *enters wearing wooden shoes.)*

I want you to scold Prudence for me, dearest!

MARGUERITE. Why?

ARMAND. She forgot to bring me my mail, so I shall have to go to Paris to get it myself. I didn't give anyone our address here because I wanted to be left in peace. I'll be gone only a couple of hours.

MARGUERITE. Yes, go dear, but do come back quickly.

ARMAND. I shall drive in and be back in an hour.

MARGUERITE. And take care of yourself.

ARMAND. And you too. Take care of her, Prudence.

MARGUERITE. Each moment will be an eternity.

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