

MASSENET

MANON

Libretto by

Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille

English Version by Donald Pippin

@ 2010 Donald Pippin
Exclusive Agent: Pocket Opera Inc.
San Francisco, California

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any manner whatever without permission, except for brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANON LESCAUT

THE CHEVALIER DES GRIEUX

THE COUNT DES GRIEUX, his father

LESCAUT, Manon's cousin

GUILLOT MORFONTAINE, an elderly nobleman

BRETIGNY, a tax collector, obviously rich

POUSSETTE, JAVOTTE, ROSETTE, actresses all

INNKEEPER, SERGEANT, GUARDSMEN, MAID,
PORTER at the Seminary, VILLAGERS, GAMBLERS

ACT I – The courtyard of an inn at Amiens

ACT II – An apartment in Paris

ACT III – Reception room of the Seminary of St. Sulpice

ACT IV – The Hotel Transylvania in Paris

ACT V – On the road to Le Havre

MASSENET

MANON

English Version by Donald Pippin

We are soon to have the pleasure of meeting an exceptionally pretty, thoroughly captivating fifteen year old girl, away from home for the first time in her life, bursting with energy and excitement, enthralled by a world she has never seen before. Her name is Manon Lescaut, loosened from the ironclad grip of her hidebound parents who frown upon laughter and seem to equate pleasure and sin. Today is her first taste of freedom, so thrilling that she nearly forgets that in all probability it will be her last for years to come. At her father's insistence, much against her will, she is bound for what she envisions, not without reason, as a juvenile prison policed by ferocious watch dogs in human shape, with massive walls, locked doors and barred windows. Otherwise known as a convent.

The journey has brought her to a crossroads, in more ways than one: a courtyard in front of an inn not far from Paris, a rest station for horses and travelers alike. Here she is scheduled to meet an older hitherto unseen cousin, whose assignment is to see that she gets to the convent. A wise precaution, but hardly the best man for the job – a blustery, devil-may-care sort, easily waylaid by the lure of dice and drink. True to form, he leaves her unguarded for a few fateful hours, foolishly supposing that a word of admonition will suffice to hold her in check during his absence.

As you might expect, naïve and irresistibly attractive, left on her own, she is almost instantly targeted by three men. There's Guillot, a wealthy nobleman, getting along in years but still something of a roué. He promptly offers her his own private carriage, adding with the equivalent of an aristocratic wink that it will be waiting just for her whenever she wishes to claim it. Also Bretigny, even wealthier, a tax collector who evidently has his own ideas about where the money should go. He has observed this rather crass interchange disapprovingly, but don't be fooled. He has designs of his own. Ah, but the third! Young, handsome, passionate Chevalier Des Grieux, heading for home, hoping to make amends with his disgruntled father, the Count, by promising hereafter to be an obedient son. Like Manon, he does not look forward to reaching his destination. But from the moment the two exchange glances, everything changes. "Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?" Shakespeare, I believe.

So on the one hand, a roguish cousin expected back any minute to escort her to the convent; on the other hand, a private carriage, obviously provided by providence, waiting to whisk the two sweethearts off to Paris. Which will it be? Paris or the convent? I leave the question for the moment unanswered.

ACT 1

Scene: an inn courtyard in Amiens.

GUILLOT

Hello! Hey! Anybody there?
Does no one stir? Does no one care?
We'll die before they deign to answer.

BRETIGNY

We want some food!

GUILLOT

And wine as well.

BRETIGNY

They shrug it off while we are starving.

BOTH

Ye gods! They should all burn in hell.

GUILLOT

I am Guillot – why go further?
Full of anger and disgust –
The way they treat the upper crust.

BRETIGNY

Lazy louts I would like to murder.

GUILLOT

Go ahead...

BOTH

Better dead!

POUSSETTE,

from a window, laughing
You rave and rant but still no food.

GUILLOT

To get attention ...

BRETIGNY

To get attention ...

GUILLOT

What must we do?

POUSSETTE

Bow down and grovel ...

OTHER GIRLS

Demand and threaten ...

Invoke the devil.

QUINTET

We call and call to our host –

Waste of time and labors lost.

And still in vain we entreat:

Hurry, hurry, we are starving!

Have a heart, we want to eat!

BRETIGNY

Our cries for help go unattended.

GIRLS

No one responded?

BRETIGNY

They are stone deaf or absent-minded.

GIRLS

Then try again!

GUILLOT

A futile fight

Will only whet the appetite.

QUINTET

We call and call to our host –

(The innkeeper appears)

BRETIGNY

Here at last, the guilty party!

GUILLOT

I demand explanation!

INNKEEPER, *all smiles*

Dear, dear! Have I made you wait?

Why stand around out here?

Come in and have a bite. (*exeunt*)

Lescaut enters, accompanied by two guardsmen

LESCAUT

Is this the inn, the carriage station
Where the coach from Arras
Soon is due to arrive?

GUARDSMEN

The very spot.

LESCAUT,

dismissing them with a meager tip
Goodbye.

GUARDSMEN,

looking askance at the money
Mister, you must be joking.
No doubt you mistook it for more.

LESCAUT

Of course! You go ahead.
There's a tavern close by down the road
Serving claret so fine, so rare.
Here I must stay to greet my cousin,
A darling I've never seen before.
But later, you gamblers beware!

GUARDSMEN

Don't you forget!

LESCAUT

Doubting my word? You go too far!

GUARDSMEN

But sir!

LESCAUT

No offense! Friends will seldom find me stalling
When dice and cards are calling.
Away! To the tavern close by
Serving claret so fine, so rare.
Here I must stay to greet my cousin,
But later, you gamblers beware!
Gamblers beware! I'm there to play!

(he guardsmen leave and the coach arrives bearing Manon, whom Lescaut is quick to spot.)

VILLAGERS

Here they are! Here they are!

LESCAUT

No doubt about it!
This captivating child is my fun-loving cousin.
(To Manon) I am Lescaut.

MANON

Ah! My escort! Give me a kiss.

LESCAUT

Happy to oblige. Any time!
*(My word! Those soft and lovely features!
I\'n proud to say we\'re blood related!)*

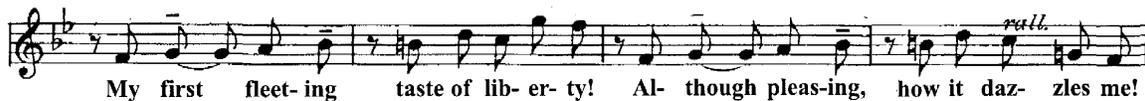
MANON

Ah! Was I rude? Do forgive my country ways.

LESCAUT

(How fresh and charming!)

MANON



My first fleet-ing taste of lib-er-ty! Al-though pleas-ing, how it daz-zles me!

Free as a bird, though not for long –
Pleasure and panic seem to collide.
With mixed feelings, I am overcome --
Excitement, fluster and confusion.
Till now I've never been away from home.

The whistle blew, the carriage rattled,
Eyes open wide, I soon would see
Tiny towns, giant trees, vast meadows!
A merry crowd packed inside –
Ah, cousin! I was overcome –
My first full day away from home.

Villages I saw whizzing past me ...
The countryside that I adore.
So happy, I nearly forgot
The convent I was headed for,
The place of dread that lay ahead.

The amazing new world full of wonder!
Now do not laugh, but swept away
I even thought that like a swallow,
I, too, could fly to paradise.
Absurd, but true! Then, a moment later.
I broke down in tears, sobbing in despair.
All of a sudden,
I was laughing, laughing hard! Ha! Ha! Ha!
Elated, yet who could tell me why?

I beg you try to understand
Forgive a girl still green.
My first fleeting taste of liberty!
With strange feelings, I'm overcome.
A mix of rapture and confusion ...
Till now I've never been away from home.

LESCAUT: Wait right here and behave yourself while I go look for your luggage.

CHORUS

If we're to know,
Stand by, hush and lie low..

GUILLOT: (*returning in high dudgeon*) Curses on that innkeeper!
Obviously, we get no wine today. (*spotting Manon*) Good lord! What do I see?
Mademoiselle! Hm .. hm ...Dear lady! (My brain is doing somersaults ...)

MANON: (This man is bizarre!)

GUILLOT: Mademoiselle, now listen well:
Guillot by name, of wide acclaim,
Of ripened years but far from old,
My treasure chest is filled with gold.
I'd give it all, you may be sure,
For one soft whisper of I' amour.
I've had my say, it's now your turn.

MANON: (*on the verge of laughter*) (An odd approach, but live and learn.)

BRETIGNY: Well, well, Guillot! What is it this time? A lightning flash? A new romance?

GUILLOT: Go to the devil, all of you!

POUSETTE: So past the prime, have you no shame?

JAVOTTE: Falling in love ...absurd! Taboo!

ROSETTE: Obscene! A disgrace!

BRETIGNY: (The fool for once, by happenstance,

Has stumbled on a treasure trove.
I've never seen a brighter smile
Or half so fair a face.

THREE GIRLS

Turn away, Guillot, think again!
Your pursuit is sad or insane,
Leading up to bitter, bitter pain.
Turn away, or you may
Come to rue the day.
We beg you turn away
Or you will rue the day.

BRETUGNY: Come along, old Romeo. It's getting late and time to go.

GUILLOT: (*impatiently*) Coming, coming! Yes, I heard.

BRETIGNY: Guillot, just leave that girl alone.

GUILLOT: (*to Manon*) But first, If I might have a word ...

My pretty, kindly lend an ear.
Expect my carriage to appear.
It will be waiting just for you ...
I need not tell you what to do.

Lescaut enters.

LESCAUT: (*brusquely*) What do you want?

GUILLOT: Who, me?

LESCAUT: You spoke, I believe?

GUILLOT: Haven't said a word ...

GIRLS and BRETIGNY

Turn away, Guillot, think again, *etc.*

All exit except Manon and Lescaut.

LESCAUT, *with severity*

He spoke to you just now?

MANON

No fault of mine, I assure you.

LESCAUT

Of course not. You have my trust,
And you would never think of letting me down.

Two guardsmen enter.

GUARDSMAN

We're off ... you're coming, too?

ANOTHER

We go to pay respect to the cards and the dice.

LESCAUT

Agreed! But allow me first to address her
As a wise and kindly professor
And take my leave with some wholesome advice.

GUARDSMAN

We could do with some wisdom.

LESCAUT, *with self-importance*
(to Manon) I'm expected sharply at ten.
Against my will, I'm obligated
To discuss with these gentlemen
Strategic matters long debated.
Here you must remain.
I'll return without delay.



Till then stay mum and don't complain; let's see how well you can behave.

Bear in mind I'm counted on to save
The family honor, the family honor.
And if perchance some nervy guy
Starts approaching with sly advances
Turn around without a word
And walk away, no backward glances.

On your own, be good while I'm gone. I shall return.
For me, comply and don't complain.
Let's see how well you can behave.
Bear in mind, I'm counted on
To save the family honor.
Men, come along! We'll know in a little while
Whom the goddess of luck
Will favor with a smile.

(to Manon) Behave yourself, till I return..
(He leaves with the two guardsmen.)

MANON

I'm told to wait, and so I must,
Like a dog on a chain.
Bound and tied, coldly staring,

Silly thoughts nearly driving me out of my mind.
Why do I dream?

(gazing enviously at three young ladies who have caught her eye)

What gorgeous gowns those three are wearing!
And the jewels so dazzling, the style so refined!
See! Even the youngest attired
In the latest from Milan or Paris –
Frills that I have so long been denied.

For shame, Manon! Beware the devil!
Idle dreams you must learn to ignore.
Leave behind your taste for trifles
When you pass through the convent door.
For shame, Manon! Say no, Manon!
Down with desire, down with the devil!

Yet ... am I to blame?
My very soul now set on fire,
I must, I'm bound to feed the flame.
Ah, to live for pleasure and delight,
Allowed to love and dream at leisure!

Ah, too late, Manon! No more to revel,
Left alone but nowhere to hide.
For shame, Manon! Say no, Manon!
Down with desire, down with the devil!

A stranger! Quick, back to the kennel. *(hurrying back to the bench)*

DES GRIEUX, *entering*
My carriage leaves, I stay behind.
Very odd ... why do I still linger?
Tomorrow, at last reconciled,
I'll not resist my father's embraces..
Yes, I can see him smiling,
And I'll prove worthy of his trust.
He'll be kind and indulgent
To an obedient son.

(turning, he sees Manon)

O Lord! Am I dreaming? Or is it delirium?
A vision, a revelation!
Does it mean my life is ending
Or instead, just beginning?
A hand more powerful than mine

Conveys me to heaven or hell,
I know not which. Enslaved, I'm forced to follow.
(spoken) Mademoiselle ...
(*little by little, he draws closer to Manon*)

MANON

Sir?

DES GRIEUX

(*timidly*) Pardon me ... I wonder ... (*breaking off*)
(Overwhelmed! No longer my own master.)
(*to Manon, with increasing ardor*)
I see you for the very first time,
Yet instantly I seem to recognize you,
Knowing not even your name ...

MANON, *simply*

You may call me Manon.

DES GRIEUX

Manon!

MANON

(Gazing with eyes so tender,
He speaks and I melt in surrender.)

DES GRIEUX

You must think me insane,
But no cause for alarm.

MANON

How could anyone fear
Words that warm the heart and enchant with their music?
You must lend me a language so charming,
For a fitting reply

DES GRIEUX

Weaver of magic that stealthily conquers --
A spark of sorcery that kindles life and hope.

MANON

Do go on! I listen enraptured
To passion that pours from your heart.

DES GRIEUX

O Manon! You've taken me captive
To a passion that pours from my heart.
Ah, tell me more!

MANON

I'm a girl, born of simple people,
Though all too weak, not wicked.
But at home they chastise me:
Too vain and shallow,
Too fond of laughter and fun.
So I'm banished and sent to a convent.
There you have the story of Manon --
Of Manon Lescaut.

DES GRIEUX

No! How could any father show so little love,
Consigning beauty, youth and charm
To be buried alive in a dark, icy tomb?

MANON

What can I do? It is the will of God;
I'm a mere humble servant.
When ordered from on high,
One must bow and obey.

DES GRIEUX

No! No! I cannot look on and see your freedom stolen.

MANON

But then?...

DES GRIEUX

You can rely on the word
Of your true Des Grieux.

MANON

(with a burst of joy) If I am spared,
I'll owe my life to you.

DES GRIEUX

Ah! Manon! I'll never let you go!
If need be, I will search
The whole wide world.
Combing the land, I shall hunt till I find you
And carry you off in my arms.

MANON
Farewell to life in the shadows,
To you I owe my invitation to freedom.

DES GRIEUX
Out of the shadows,
To you I owe my invitation to freedom.

(Propitiously, there appears the postboy whom Guillot has instructed to follow Manon's orders.)

MANON, *with a knowing smile*
A stroke of luck! Fate extends a helping hand,
A handsome carriage belonging to a Lord,
The old clown who came on to Manon.
(slyly) Make him pay!

DES GRIEUX
Meaning what?

MANON
We'll perhaps take a ride ...

DES GRIEUX
Right! *(to postboy)* Make way!

MANON
(perturbed) But dare we really do it?

DES GRIEUX
But of course! A gift sent from heaven!
We shall head for Páree!

MANON
You and I?

DES GRIEUX
You and I, fancy free and in love!
Off we go and riding high!
Lovers blessed from above.

BOTH
I foresee happy days ahead.
In Páree! In Páree!

You and I, on the way to Paree!

DES GRIEUX

Soon my name you can claim your own.
Oh, forgive me ...

MANON

In my eyes you can read my heart.
Give the command, I'll go along,
Though I suppose ... it's wrong.

DES GRIEUX

No! We belong in Paree! *etc.*

MANON, *again spotting the three girls*
(*spoken*) There they are!

DES GRIEUX

What's the matter?

MANON

Nothing ... but those gorgeous gowns!

THREE LADIES

Hurry back, Guillot, stay alert!
Stay alert, lest you lose your shirt.
Come back at once, Guillot. Ha ha ha ha!

LESCAUT: (*offstage*) Don't worry, fellows. Tonight you'll be repaid in full.

MANON, *frightened*

It's my cousin back again!

DES GRIEUX

Come! Let's go!

GIRLS (*offstage*)

Come away, Guillot! Come away, come away ...

MANON

If only I could have my way,
I'd be like them and live for pleasure!
Ah! Let's go!

DES GRIEUX

Come! Let's go!

ACT II

The second act, a few months later, takes us to the modestly furnished Parisian apartment where the two lovers are apparently settled down to a blissful life of domestic tranquility. But the alert onlooker may detect a few worrisome dark specks on the horizon. When Des Grieux talks about getting married, doesn't Manon seem a bit less than enthusiastic? And when expensive flowers show up on the little table, is she entirely convincing when she claims that somebody tossed them in through the window? And when Bretigny, the rich tax collector who played a rather passive role in Act One, shows up unexpectedly – and in disguise, no less – is it unfair to surmise that in the intervening months Manon has not gone neglected?

Sure enough, a crisis is in the offing, leading to another life-changing decision. Des Grieux's father, the Count, has gotten wind of his son's disreputable *liaison*, apparently conveyed, and I suspect embellished by Bretigny. Dreading above all else a stain on the family name, worried about his son's future, and with decidedly inflated views on parental privilege, he comes up with a simple but drastic solution – have him kidnapped. Hired help is readily available. Bretigny, letting Manon in on the secret, leaves the choice to her : either warn her beloved of danger pending and thus solidify a relationship that will most certainly guarantee a life of poverty, or stay mum, let nature take its course and reap the fortune, including jewels, that Bretigny is more than willing to provide. What would you do?

Scene: the apartment in Paris of Des Grieux and Manon, several weeks later.

DES GRIEUX, *seated at a desk*
Manon!

MANON, *hovering around him*
Are you afraid that touching my cheek to yours
Will set the room on fire?

DES GRIEUX, *indulgently*
Naughty, naughty, for shame!

MANON
As I was reading over your shoulder
I had to smile when I saw my name.

DES GRIEUX
A letter for my father.
Indiscreetly risking his wrath,

I poured out my heart;
Now I worry ...

MANON

Are you afraid?

DES GRIEUX

Frankly, yes. (*mockingly*) Terrified.

MANON

Well, well. We must read it together.

DES GRIEUX

Just as you say. Sit down, over by me.

MANON, *reading*

“Call her simply Manon,
Yesterday turned sixteen.
She takes the breath away
With her charm, beauty and innocent candor.
No one else has a voice so sweet,
Nor a smile so warm, so soft and tender.”

DES GRIEUX

Nor a smile so warm, so soft and tender.

MANON

Meaning me? Ha! I'd no idea.
But it shows that you are in love.

DES GRIEUX

Me in love? Me in love? Manon! I adore you!

MANON

That said, my dear, let us continue.

DES GRIEUX

“Like the swallow's return on the first day of spring
When the seeds begin to sprout,
She restores life in all of its glory
And breathes a message of hope and cheer
Like the whispered caress of an amorous zephyr.”

MANON

“Like the whispered caress of an amorous zephyr.”

DES GRIEUX

“ ... the caress of an amorous zephyr.”

MANON: We are in love! Isn't that enough?

DES GRIEUX: No! I want you to be my wife.

MANON: Are you sure?

DES GRIEUX: From the bottom of my heart.

MANON: Then give me a kiss. *(they embrace)* Now go send your letter.

DES GRIEUX: I'm on my way! *(he goes toward the door, then stops, disturbed)* What beautiful flowers. Who sent them?

MANON: Can't imagine.

DES GRIEUX: *(gravely)* You don't know?

MANON, *laughing*, Ha, a fine excuse for a quarrel. *(with feigned indifference)* Someone threw them through the window. Do you expect me to throw them back? Of course you're not ... jealous.

DES GRIEUX, *tenderly*, Not in the least. Why should I be?

MANON: And you are right. I am all yours.

(loud voices are heard outside)

DES GRIEUX: Who can be making such a racket?

MAID, *entering in confusion*, Two guardsmen are down below, all heated up. One of them claims to be related.

MANON, *relieved*, Lescaut! Of course, my cousin.

MAID: The other ... just between us ... a gentleman who seems to be in love with you, a tax collector lately seen snooping around.

MANON: Bretigny?

MAID: That's the name. *(the noise from outside increases)*

DES GRIEUX: This is too much. I'll go see for myself.

(As he goes toward the door, it opens. Two men enter.)

LESCAUT

The love birds in their nest,
Hunted down, caught at last!

BRETIGNY,

costumed as a guardsman

Oh, have a heart, Lescaut ... they both are green and tender.

LESCAUT

You would not be so polite
If taken for a ride by a sly seducer.

DES GRIEUX

Hold on! Sir, I demand respect.

LESCAUT

You want respect?

DES GRIEUX

I said respect.

LESCAUT

I'd pay to see you annihilated on the spot!
I stand with pride to vindicate the family honor.
On hand to right a wrong,
I'll see you bite the dust..
You talk about respect --
Is this the time to be politically correct?

BRETIGNY

Easy there.

LESCAUT

The gall!

BRETIGNY

Slow down.

DES GRIEUX

No choice. You force me to chop off your ears.

LESCAUT

Huh! What's that he said?

BRETIGNY, *laughing*

You force him to chop off your ears.

LESCAUT

Who ever heard of a stunt so barbaric?
Does he mean it?

BRETIGNY

So it would seem.

LESCAU

Mighty God! Bloody hell!

BRETIGNY

Buck up!.

QUARTET:

MANON

My darling, I shall die of fear;
Stay close to me.
Too well I know that I'm to blame.
Yet what to do? What's done is done.
For calm relief I lean on you.
Stay by my side.
Those eyes that blaze with fire and anger!
In mortal fear I turn to you.

DES GRIEUX

Manon, fear not, for I am here;
Rely on me.
Not you but I deserve the blame.
Remember, too, what's done is done.
No need to fear, no need to hide.
For you I'll prove myself the stronger;
His anger I shall tame.
Manon, fear not his frown;
Rely on me.

LESCAUT

The lout! Bring on the clown!
The fire is getting out of hand.
The weasel! But hold me down
Till I contain my seething anger.
My temper I must learn to conquer;
With caution we'll proceed as planned.
The weasel! The rat! The serpent!
But fire must not get out of hand.
I want revenge! But hold me down.
With caution we'll proceed as planned.

BRETIGNY

Come, come! Simmer down.
Come on! Try to give a smile.
I can read signs of remorse.
Pause! You can prove who is stronger
With guile, not force.
Hold on! Control the anger.
Come, come! Simmer down.
Lescaut! Let's proceed now as planned.

BRETIGNY

Lescaut! Take advice from a friend;
A lighter touch I recommend.

LESCAUT

Right! Keep it light. (*to Des Grieux*)
The lady's after all my cousin,
So I approach on bended knee.

DES GRIEUX

... on bended knee.

LESCAUT

As you can see,
I now approach on bended knee.
Tell me: I want a brief and simple answer.
Will it be yes? Will it be no?
Do you intend to wed Manon?

BRETIGNY & LESCOUT

Like you, broad minded, nonchalant and debonair,
We never frown upon a love affair.
With candor, speaking man to man,
Like you, broad minded, debonair,
We never frown upon a love affair.

BRETIGNY, *laughing*

And so are you now satisfied?

DES GRIEUX, *also laughing*

Your candor has quite won me over.
In you I can freely confide.
With candor you have won me over.
You never disapprove of love.

BRETIGNY & LESCOUT

We never frown upon a love affair, *etc.*
We never mock, we never scorn true love.

DES GRIEUX

Here's a note I'm sending my father.
Before I close it with a seal,
You will be kind, perhaps, and read it.

LESCAUT

But of course! Not here in the dark.
If I'm to read, I need some light.
Over close by the window is better.
We there can peruse it together.

MANON, *aside to Bretigny*
Why the disguise? Just what do you intend?

BRETIGNY
You are not pleased?

MANON
I am annoyed!
Sir, you know well how much I love him.

BRETIGNY
As a friend, I come to warn you of danger.
Here tonight, plans are laid
To take him by surprise.

MANON
Tonight?

BRETIGNY
As ordered by his father.

MANON
As ordered by his father?

BRETIGNY
Yes. By force, hired hands
Mean to drag him away.

MANON
Ah! Then I must warn him at once.

BRETIGNY
Tipping him off means destitution,
For him, for you, but on the other hand,
Stay mum, hold your tongue and reap a fortune.

QUARTET:

BRETIGNY
You understand: hold your tongue and stay mum!
You must, to reap a fortune.
Manon! Manon! The one hope for your future:
Freedom, comfort and wealth.
Manon! My dear! Give in,
You shall have jewels worthy of royalty,

Pearls and diamonds galore!
You'll have silken gowns fit for a royal]queen.
Give in, and claim your heart's desire.
Stay silent, and reap a fortune.

MANON

Speak softer, please! ... I can't.
Please, not so loud. No, no! Please, not so loud.
This way and that, I'm torn apart.
In despair and confusion,
How can I bear to let him go?
A tug of war between my head and my heart,
Torn between longing and love. No, no!
Tempt me no more, I plead, implore!
Just go away! Go away!

LESCAUT, *reading with Des Grieux*

"Call her simply Manon,
And yesterday turned sixteen;
She takes the breath away ..."
Tender words from the heart!

DES GRIEUX

Words, my friend, spoken by a lover.
I say them softly over and over.

LESCAUT, *laughing*

Even I shed a tear.

DES GRIEUX

Her alone I adore!

LESCAUT

And plan to wed?
(*paraphrasing*) "... a budding rose in spring .. off in flight ..."
(*correcting himself*) "... little bird off in flight ..."
So poetic! Ah, love!

DES GRIEUX

True because I love her.
The words of tender adoration.
Born of adoration, tender adoration,
Sheer adoration!

LESCAUT

"Gentle breeze in the trees ..." (So poetic!)

“And the whispered caresses ...”
L’amour! And soon to wed? (Dream on!)

So inspired! I could do no better.
May I present my compliments to both?
(*to M.*) My cousin! (*To D.G.*) And cousin to be!
You have won my approval.
'Twould be a crime!
No, I would never dream of standing in your way.
Love on! Here take my hand.
(*with exaggerated emotion*) I’m weeping for joy!
(*to Bretigny, with an abrupt change of tone*) Shall we go?

BRETIGNY

Come along.

BRETIGNY & LESCAUT, *as they leave*
As men, broad minded, *etc.*
As man to man,
We never frown upon a love affair.

MANON

Full of pain ... torn apart ...

DES GRIEUX

Soon that happy day, long awaited,
Will come and wake us with a smile.

DES GRIEUX: (*to their maid, who has entered with a lamp*) What is it?

MAID: Suppertime, monsieur.

DES GRIEUX: So it is, and I’ve not yet posted my letter.

MANON: Then do so right away!

DES GRIEUX: (*hesitantly*) Manon ...

MANON: Yes?

DES GRIEUX: I love you, I adore you! And you ... Do you feel the same way?

MANON: Rest assured, my dear, I love you, too.

DES GRIEUX: If so, you might at least promise ...

MANON: Promise what?

DES GRIEUX: Nothing ... nothing at all ... I’ll go send my letter ...
(*he leaves*)

MANON, *alone*

I can’t! But I must! Now or never!

To betray my only love!

I know that he will suffer,

So I brood and go back and forth ...
No, no! Shallow and unworthy of love,
The voice of temptation is luring me on.

As I try to resist, it cries,
“Manon, you will have jewels!
Diamonds fit for a queen!”

Me, a toy made of tinsel,
Flimsy and fragile at best,
Yet ... even I shed tears now already flowing,
Mourning lost dreams of yesterday.
Will new pleasures bring consolation
For the love I cast away?



Goodbye, our pretty little table.
At times our entire universe.
To most, some junk to be discarded;
To crazy lovers, a hallowed shrine.

Goodbye, our pretty little table.
Here late at night, with candle glowing,
A single glass our lips would share,
Lips searching and reaching for kisses.

Poor wounded friend who loved me so!
Goodbye, our pretty little table. Goodbye ...

He's back! Let not my pallid cheek betray me now.

DES GRIEUX

Darling, at last! Home and alone together!
My dear, you are crying!

MANON

No!

DES GRIEUX

Your hand even trembling ...

MANON, *forcing a smile*

Let us enjoy our meal.

DES GRIEUX

You're right. I tend to worry.
But joy is like a winged swallow
And if not today, tomorrow
May take off for new horizons.
To the table!

MANON

To the table!

DES GRIEUX

Now perfect calm, childish fears laid to rest.
We are here alone, you and I.
Dear, just now, coming home,
I soon was lost in dreaming ...

MANON, *aside, bitterly*

(Alas! My dream is nearly over.)

DES GRIEUX



When I close my eyes, I seem to see a house by a garden, plain & simple,

Nestled snug beneath a lofty tree;
A running brook through a meadow
Where ferns and wild flowers grow.
Blended with the scented breezes,
One can hear the nightingale.

Call it paradise? Oh, no!
Call it empty, void and lonely
Without my darling, my one, my only –
Ah, Manon!

MANON

Just a dream, air and vapor.

DES GRIEUX

No! A realm where dreams prevail,
If you are there, O Manon!

(*a knock at the door*)

MANON, *spoken*

O Lord! Here so soon!

DES GRIEUX

Who's there?

(with good humor) We're in no mood for nosy intruders.

I'll send them off on their way.

I'll not be long.

MANON, *greatly perturbed.*

Adieu ...

DES GRIEUX

Adieu?

MANON

No! You mustn't leave!

DES GRIEUX

Why not?

MANON

Stay! I beg you not to open that door.

Stay here with me in your arms.

DES GRIEUX

My child! *(gently freeing himself)* Please, let go.

MANON

No!

DES GRIEUX

What's the matter?

MANON

I can't explain ...

DES GRIEUX

People unknown knock at the door.

I'll send them on the run,

Forthrightly but politely.

I'll return and we'll laugh

At your much ado about nothing.

(he goes out. There is a sound of struggle, then the rumble of carriage wheels. Manon rushes to the window.)

MANON, *in great distress*

My God,, what have I done?

ACT III, SCENE II

Several years have gone by. Devastated and disillusioned, disgusted with the world at large, bitterly aware of Manon's perfidy, Des Grieux has tried manfully but unsuccessfully to erase her from his mind. Eventually turning to the church for solace, there he has found a new vocation, and has already become a rising star. Now on the verge of the ultimate step, irrevocable vows of total commitment, he receives an unexpected visit from his father, with whom he is not on the best of terms. Few people like being kidnapped. The Count has come to plead with him to reconsider, to forego the priesthood, go back into the world, find a wholesome, *respectable* wife and start a family. When his son adamantly refuses to do anything of the kind, the Count leaves, displeased, disappointed, but not without a parting gift: a sizable fortune recently bequeathed by his late mother. Could this be a tacit admission that he has overstepped, or a bribe, or both? No matter. Irrelevant, because Des Grieux is soon to receive another visitor, a visitor even more unexpected, and once again life does an about-face.

Scene: The reception-room of the St. Sulpice seminary.

DEVOUT LADIES IN CHORUS

An inspiration! The dedication!
I've never been so stirred;
I hang on every word.
The sharp intelligence, the soaring eloquence,
The fire and fervor!
A budding Solomon, a brilliant orator,
A perfect gentleman, whose passion we adore!
A keen observer ...
A man among that chosen few,
Not only wise, but handsome, too.
Of the chosen few, and charming, too.
While he speaks, I feel an inner glow,
Overcome, captivated.
Ah! ah! And furthermore,
So great an orator we've never seen before.
In him I recall St. Peter and Paul.
I venture to say a modern Isaiah.
A genuine saint! What more can you want?
A saint here reincarnated.
What a saint! All agree, all agree with me!

He comes! Des Grieux, though wondrous wise,
Walks modestly with lowered eyes.

(As he enters, they leave with extreme deference. The Count also enters and greets his son.)

COUNT: Bravo, my son! A triumph! Your ancestors would be proud to learn that the family tree has brought forth such exalted fruit, a theologian, no less.

DES GRIEUX: Please, father, you're laughing.

COUNT: Is it true that you intend a lifetime alliance with the Lord?

DES GRIEUX: Worldly life has brought me only bitterness and disgust.

COUNT

Life indeed can be sad.
But so young, how can you be certain
Before the final curtain closes
That the world is altogether bad?



Go find a whole-some girl to marry -- no, not today, though by and by.

Son, settle down, become a father,
No better though no worse than I.
Leave these hallowed halls so confining.
Come down to earth! Duty calls:
Explore! Multiply!

To seek salvation points to folly;
Drink up before the well runs dry.
Embrace the charms of modest beauty —
No, not today, though by and by.
To lean on solace leads to sorrow;
Obey the manly call of duty:
Go find a wife and multiply!

DES GRIEUX: Nothing can dissuade me from the solemn vows I'll soon be taking.

COUNT: So that's it?

DES GRIEUX: My mind is made up.

COUNT: So be it! It seems that you will not recant, so I leave to tell stunned relatives our family has brought forth a saint! No doubt but some will say, "What gives?"

DES GRIEUX: Sir, you still make fun of me.

COUNT: (*deeply moved*) One final word: though still unknown what worldly goods you may acquire, a parish here, an abbey there -- I'm taking it upon my own to send you fuel to stoke the fire.

DES GRIEUX: Father ...

COUNT: Thirty thousand that your mother left. So now what's left to say? Goodbye, my son.

DES GRIEUX: Thank you, father.

COUNT: Goodbye ... here you will find ample time to pray. (*he leaves*)

DES GRIEUX, *alone*

Now alone ... on the verge!
Soon to embrace my destiny,
I find no other comfort
Than quiet solitude,
Fortified by my faith.
Yes, only God can bridge the rift
Between the world and me.



Fade a-way, cru-el dream! Leave, & taunt me no long-er.

After pain, after tears,
Lead me to peace at last.
Though I drank from a vial
Poisoned with blood of anger,
Memories still too sweet
Rise from a blighted past.

Fade away and taunt me no more!
Please, no more!
What does life hold in store
With its false facade of glory?
Though I try to erase
Her image from my mind,
Even the name ...
My curse, my obsession ... all for naught.

PORTER, *entering*

The service is starting.

DES GRIEUX

In a moment.
O God! In thy holy fire
Wipe out my gross desire,
And with thy piercing light, dispel
Shadows that shroud my soul
In the tortures of hell.
Fade away, cruel dream.
Leave, and taunt me no longer.
Free my haunted soul!
Go away, far away, far away ... (*exit*)

PORTER: (*returning*) So young, so sincere – or so it seems to our devout young beauties distracted from their prayers.

(Manon enters, tense and agitated)

MANON: Monsieur, I must speak with the abbe Des Grieux.

PORTER: It might be arranged ...

MANON: (*quickly handing him money*) Of course.

(taking the money, he leaves with a reverential bow.)

MANON: These silent walls ... the air so cold and biting. I pray that his heart is not yet frozen. If only he can weep with me for my foolish mistakes, instead of loathing and cursing my name. (*a chorus in Latin is heard from offstage*) They are praying ... I wish that I, too, could pray.

Pardon, O Lord,
Kind and merciful father.
Pardon a child undeserving of favor,
Yet a daughter greatly in need,
Lost in the dark, craving that mercy.

Though a lamb gone astray,
Still I dare make my plea:
Ah! Melt the heart
Of the man whom I loved and betrayed.
Pardon your child, O Lord.
Pardon your child Manon.

He is here!

DES GRIEUX, *entering*

You! No!

MANON

Yes, it is I! I, Manon ... Your Manon ...

DES GRIEUX

What are you doing here? Go away! Go away!
And leave me alone.

MANON

True, I have been faithless and cruel.
Hate me, but remember our love.
Though you look at me now in horror,
May I dare to hope, perhaps, some day? ...

DES GRIEUX

That day has passed.

MANON

**Then I was ungrateful and flighty.
Loathe me, but remember our love,
Those precious moments of love.**

DES GRIEUX

**No! On shifting sands, fabricated,
I built an unreal house of cards
And believed it would last forever.
But instead, it lasted only a day.**

MANON

**Ah, so young, so foolish,
I traded you for jewels.**

DES GRIEUX

**A dream of love fabricated
On shifting sands.
And I believed it would last forever.
But instead, it lasted only a day.
Ah! Deceitful Manon!**

MANON

In tears I now repent.

DES GRIEUX

Ah! Deceitful! Unfaithful!

MANON

Have you no drop of pity you can spare?

DES GRIEUX

**And why should you deserve it?
Go! Forever I erase you from my mind,
Erase you from my heart.**

MANON

**O pity, O pity the bird that fled
When lured by fair horizons.
Now humbly the bird returns,
Her wings battered and broken.
Will the door still be open?
In tears I plead. Forgive, or let me die.**

DES GRIEUX

No!

MANON, *in a burst of despair*
Only, only your love now will keep me alive.

DES GRIEUX

No! You have killed my love.

MANON, *with spirit*

Can your love be so dead that no cure can revive it?

Can you recall ... not long ago? ...

(with great charm and affection)

Is it not the hand warmed by your kisses?

Is it not the voice

Still as soft and sweet, tenderly caressing

As it was before?

And the sparkling eyes you have found so charming,

Sparkling all the more through a veil of tears?

Am I not myself, still your own Manon?

Can you not recall? Look once again ...

Is it not the hand warmed by your kisses?

Press it ... harder yet

Is it not the voice of your own Manon?

Can you forget?

Is it not the hand you loved to hold?

Now reminding you, I am still Manon.

DES GRIEUX

O God, do not forsake me in this hour of trial!

MANON

I love you! I love you!

DES GRIEUX

Say no more! You mustn't speak of love,

Not here, so near the altar!

(a distant bell is heard)

They summon me to pray.

MANON

No! I cannot let you go!

DES GRIEUX

I am called by the bell.

MANON

**No! I will not let you go! See –
Is it not the hand warmed by your kisses
Not so long ago?**

DES GRIEUX

Not so long ago ...

MANON

**And the sparkling eyes you have found so charming?
Am I not Manon?**

DES GRIEUX

As you were before ... Lovely as before.

MANON

**Surely you recall!
I am still myself, your adored Manon?**

DES GRIEUX

Ah! Manon! No longer can I wage battle with destiny.

MANON

At last!

DES GRIEUX

**Nevermind that I call down the wrath of God.
My life is in your heart,
My life is in your eyes.
Ah, yes! Manon, I love you! My love!**

MANON

My love!

ACT IV

From the cloistered seminary we move to the noisy crowded gambling casino in a fashionable Parisian hotel where Manon is in her rapturous element. Reunited with Des Grieux, the months that followed have been a dazzling parade of one triumph after another. On top of the world, with everything going her way, she has good reason to believe that life is a banquet given us to feast upon, while her ambivalent lover reluctantly tags along. But this giddy pace cannot go on indefinitely. The inherited fortune is rapidly dwindling, thanks largely to her own gleeful extravagance, but why worry? The solution is obvious. The gambling table awaits, and Des Grieux, if goaded

into action, is bound to win. Is it not a fact that luck invariably smiles on beginners? And so it does, beyond even Manon's wildest expectations. Unfortunately, though, he is playing against Guillot, the would-be Don Giovanni whom you may remember from Act I. Not a good sport after losing his shirt, on top of losing out in love, he is furious. More to the point, he has the power and the will to bring down destruction on them both.

Scene: the gambling casino at the Hotel Transylvania, in Paris.

DEALERS: Ladies, gentlemen, place your bets!

GAMBLER ONE: One thousand pistoles!

GAMBLER TWO: I'll take you on.

GAMBLER ONE: Double it.

GAMBLER TWO: Three aces!

GAMBLER ONE: I'm sunk.

At another table, in succession, deuce ... five ... seven ... ten ...

A VOICE: One hundred louis.

VOICE OF LESCAUT: Raise you to four hundred.

LESCAUT: Hooray! I collect!

GAMBLER: What do you mean? That money's mine!

LESCAUT: Hold on. Are you accusing me? ...

GAMBLER: See for yourself, ace and king.

LESCAUT: Let's start again.. What the hell?

Manon makes a grand entrance, followed by Des Grieux.

MANON

On top of the world, I command
As queen, also toast of the town.
Men have fainted while kissing my hand
And crumble if I merely frown.

Ladies bow when I come to call,
By night, I am belle of the ball.
Unfazed by lords and wielders of power,
Life for me is a garden of roses
All in flower.

A feast of abundance I savor
And relish each morsel of flavor.
In time the day will come when I'm to die.
When old and gray,
With laughter let me say goodbye.

SPECTATORS

Bravo, bravo, Manon!

MANON



And for making love,
Perchance sublime romance!
Before the curtain closes,
Hurry, hurry! Come take the chance!
Come join the dance!



Springtime of revelry and fun!
Chime in, and happily surrender
To life and love at twenty one.
Play on!

MEN

Chime in, and happily surrender
To life and love.
Be brave, surrender. Come on! Come on!

MANON

In vain, the broken hearted lover
Wonders where it went,
And soon, too soon to learn,
When youth is over,
Long may you be waiting
For love's return.

While playful, amorous and tender,
Young, grateful just to be alive.
Store up fond pleasures to remember
When twenty one turns forty five.

MEN

Store up the pleasures to remember.
Remember well those stored up pleasures
From long ago.

GUILLOT: Who are these newcomers who have taken center stage?

THREE LADIES

Ah, the charming Manon and her frowning escort!

DES GRIEUX

(Why am I here? When I try to say no,
Once again I meekly surrender.)

GUILLOT: (*vexed*) Des Grieux!

LESCAUT (*to Guillot*) Your smile has turned into a glare. I would guess
that someone here is grating on your nerves.

GUILLOT: You guess right.. I adored Manon. She was mine! Imagine the
grief, the outrage, when I meet face to face with my successor.

DEALERS: Everyone, back to the game!

MANON

(*noticing that Des Grieux still looks sad, she draws closer*)

Why the long, heavy face?
Am I not still your darling?

DES GRIEUX, *passionately impetuous*



Ma-non! Daugh-ter of Eve! An in-scru-ta-ble mys-ter-y,
Angel and devil, too,
Whom I love and abhor!

So enamored of gold,
Of luxury and pleasure.
Yet knowing what you are,
I love you all the more.

MANON, *seductively*

Be brave, be daring,
And my love is your reward.

DES GRIEUX

That I'm to earn? ...

MANON

Our meager fortune's running out.
Soon, my dear, nothing will be left.
But with bold courage and resolve
We'll see your fortune instantly restored.

DES GRIEUX

What are you driving at?

LESCAUT, *chiming in*

A round of cards!

A hand or two, and so *voilà!*

The fortune lost will soon be yours again.

DES GRIEUX

What! Me? So rash? Oh, no! Not I!

LESCAUT

Think of Manon. You want her to live like a pauper?

MANON

Darling, please! Show me that you love me,

Come on, come on!

You're bound to win and make us rich again.

LESCAUT

Stands to reason. Gold at hand and yours for the taking!

For luck, as we know for a fact,

Is a lady long noted for tact.

On high alert when choosing winners,

She looks after beginners.

MANON

Is it not what you want?

DES GRIEUX

It's insane, diabolic!

LESCAUT

Come on!

DES GRIEUX

I gamble, risking all ... What do I get in return?

LESCAUT

But you will win! You will be rich!

MANON

My heart and soul entire!

My life ... my lasting love ...

TRIO:

DES GRIEUX

**Manon! Manon! Daughter of Eve!
An inscrutable mystery,
Angel and devil, too,
Whom I love and abhor!**

**So enamored of gold,
Of luxury and pleasure.
Yet knowing what you are,
I love you all the more.**

**Again I yield, although I waver,
Though pride and honor are at stake,
Resolve losing out to love.**

MANON

**I'll be your faithful turtle dove,
My lasting love your just reward.
Ah, go play the winning card
And claim your reward.
I'll be yours!
For me, and for you,
The stars in our favor,
All for love!**

LESCAUT

**Ever drawn to a lover,
The stars above are in your favor.
You need but trust to find the card
And claim a rich reward.
Go on! Trust your lucky star,
Trust me! You play, you win,
No doubt, no doubt, no doubt!
All for love!**

GUILLOT, *to Des Grieux*

**A word, man to man, if you please.
May I propose a game of chance?
And we shall see if Lady Luck is still on your side.**

POUSSETTE

Bravo, Guillot! My bet will be on you.

JAVOTTE

I'm betting, too.
And my bet goes to Des Grieux.

GUILLOT, to Des Grieux

Do you accept?

DES GRIEUX, reluctantly

I accept.

GUILLOT

Let's begin.

POUSSETTE

We'll bet along with you.

JAVOTTE & ROSETTE

Along with you.

GUILLOT

One thousand crowns!

DES GRIEUX

Fine with me. One thousand crowns!

LESCAUT

(starting to sit down at another table)

One thousand crowns! Lend me a hand, you gods!

MANON

Sheer intoxication! This is living!
Now I am living!

POUS., JAV., & ROS.

This is living!

MANON

Or at least, all told, the life I want!

DEALERS, to Lescaut

But you! But you!

LESCAUT

Allow me credit as a man of honor.
My word is good as gold.

DEALERS

No deal! No deal!

LESCAUT

**Presently broke, a victim of misfortune.
Attacked! And robbed, to boot. Me! Me!**

GUILLOT, *to Des Grieux*

**Your run of luck is most amazing.
Add one thousand more.**

DES GRIEUX

Just the thing. One thousand more.

GUILLOT

Lost again!

MANON

Hooray! You have won?

DES GRIEUX

Behold!

MANON

All for us?

DES GRIEUX

All for us.

MANON

O my hero!

GUILLOT

We'll double. You agree?

DES GRIEUX

Why not?

GUILLOT

Again disaster!

MANON

I told you all along that you were bound to win.

DES GRIEUX, *in rapture*

Manon! Manon! My darling! My darling!

GUILLOT, *getting up*
This crooked game is over.

DES GRIEUX
Whenever you prefer.

GUILLOT
I cannot stand a cheater. Luck, indeed!

DES GRIEUX
How's that?

GUILLOT
Need I say, I can see
You've hidden talents up your sleeve.

DES GRIEUX
Do you imply? ...

GUILLOT
... That you're a swindler!
You slyly lead a fellow on
And then you clean him out.

DES GRIEUX
Absurd malignant slander! But I warn you ...

ENSEMBLE
Cool off! Slow down! You win or lose,
But with your fellow gamblers
You watch your p's and q's.

GUILLOT (*uneasily*)
I call on my friends to vouch for my behavior.
As for you both,
Prepare for news you may not welcome.
(he leaves in a rage)

ENSEMBLE:

TENORS
A storm! A row unprecedented! Who knows?
I now believe they both are mad? Who knows?
While standing by, just now,
I saw the game go bad.

As it occurred, I saw and heard
Aggressive gambling gone awry.
(pointing to Des Grieux)

I say that he's the man!
So catch him while you can!

SOPRANOS

A storm! A row unprecedented!
I now believe they both are mad. Who knows?
While standing by,
I saw the game go bad.
As it occurred, I saw and heard
Aggressive gambling gone awry.
(pointing to Des Grieux)
You are the man! Run while you can!

BASSES

One up, one down.
I now believe they both are mad? Who knows?
I saw the game go bad.
As it occurred, I saw and heard
Aggressive gambling gone awry.
(pointing to Des Grieux)
I say that he's the man!
So catch him while you can!

LESCAUT

Stay cool! Slow down! Start again! Play on!
(to Des Grieux) A nasty row, but that was then.
(to gamblers) Again! Play on!

DEALERS

Who is the thief? Who is the fool
That came to grief? With calm and cool,
A scandal still can be prevented.
You saw and heard, but that was then.
You gamblers, please! Play on!
Sit down! Again play on!

THREE LADIES

A common thief, a fool
That came to grief ...
Cool off, slow down, play on!
You gamblers, please! Play on!
Again sit down, play on!

MANON

My sweet! I beg you, please! Let's go at once.

DES GRIEUX

Not on your life! By leaving now
These people would believe
That I'm a cheat and old Guillot was right.
(a loud knock is heard)

GAMBLERS

My God! Who's knocking on the door?
Hurry! Hurry! Hide the cash!

MANON

(I wonder who is knocking.
I tremble, though not knowing why.)

VOICE, *from outside*: Open up in the name of the king!

LESCAUT: The police! Head for the roof! *(rapid exit)*

(Guillot enters with police, quietly followed by the Count)

GUILLOT: There is the thief ... and there his accomplice.

MANON, *under her breath, to Guillot*: Detestable!

GUILLOT: A thousand apologies, Mademoiselle ... You play a clever game,
but I'll not be duped, and I'll have revenge. *(to Des Grieux)* And you had best look
around for consolation elsewhere.

DES GRIEUX

I'll do my best! For a start, I'll begin
By tossing you out the window.

GUILLOT, *scornfully*

Me out the window!

THE COUNT

who has entered quietly

And I ... you'd toss me out as well?

DES GRIEUX

My father! Showing up ... here!

MANON

Your father!

COUNT

Here I am, to snatch my son from the gutter,

For every day the rumors fly, fraught with shame.
The tide of scandal is rising high
To sweep us all away – me as well.

ENSEMBLE:

MANON

Torn apart, I have lost him forever;
My own folly has brought him to ruin.
Cold and hard, total strangers will haul us away
To face a future bathed in tears.

DES GRIEUX

(to Count) I implore you to pause, mull it over;
Must we travel the road to ruin?
Do you want total strangers to haul us away
To face a future bathed in tears?

COUNT

Here to snatch my own son from the gutter,
Though it may seem to you cold and cruel,
Instead of pardon, no!
I want to save you from a future bathed in tears.

GUILLOT

Now is deceit repaid.
My revenge is implacable and prompt.
No! Expect no pardon.
Only a future bathed in tears.

OTHERS

Yield to cries of despair.
To youth and beauty
Pardon! Do not consign her
To a future bathed in tears.

COUNT

Seize them both!
(quietly to Des Grieux)
Fear not, I'll see that you get out.

DES GRIEUX

But Manon?

GUILLOT

The trollop will be held

Among the other whores and hookers.

DES GRIEUX

Stay away! To my death I'll defend her!

MANON, *fainting*

Ah! I will die of shame. Have mercy! All is lost!

DES GRIEUX

Torn apart, separated forever! All is lost!

GUILLOT

Jail for both!

OTHERS

All is lost!

ACT V

We are on the long, well trod, infamous road from Paris to Le Havre, the seaport town from which the boat will soon depart for distant shores bearing Manon, now fallen from dizzying heights to the lowest depths of degradation, a convicted thief and prostitute. Throughout the brief so-called trial easily manipulated by her powerful and vindictive accuser, the verdict was never in doubt. Crushed and humiliated, left without a shred of dignity, the person we are soon to see is a far cry from the Manon we knew before, loved, adored, or envied by all that she encountered. A criminal, at the mercy of powers beyond her control, knowing full well that she has brought about her own undoing, the ordeal has been excruciating, possibly lethal. Thrown into a dank, sunless prison cell, crammed in among the foul and filthy, devoured by shame and revulsion, sick, worn out, wasted away, the spark is nearly extinct.

Yet her suffering has also brought a measure of humility, wisdom, and a sincere appreciation of the love and loyalty that she once traded for jewels. Bear in mind, she is not yet twenty. Des Grieux, faithful and forgiving as ever, is determined to rescue her and start a new life. There is still hope -- or is it delusion?

On the road to Le Havre, where Manon is to be deported.

DES GRIEUX

**Manon! Dearest Manon!
Bound and tethered in chains
Among the foul and filthy,
Headed for deportation,
The boat sailing tomorrow,
While I watch in despair.
No! (*seeing Lescaut*) He's here!**

**(*approaching him*) The gunmen you have hired,
On alert, standing by,
Well-informed when and where,
Equipped and fully armed --
They will take her by force.
Manon will then be free. (*hearing no reply*)
So? Is it not the plan, and did you not agree?
So why do you stay silent?**

LESCAUT

Because ... what can I say?

DES GRIEUX, *anxiously*

Go on ...

LESCAUT

**It seems now all is lost.
As soon as the guns came out
My contemptible crew took their money and fled.**

DES GRIEUX

**You lie! You lie!
I trust a loving God to heed our sorrow.
Any minute she'll be released.
I shall hold my beloved safe in my arms again.**

LESCAUT

Time to do more than dream.

DES GRIEUX

Like what? ...

LESCAUT

**These guards! They're only human,
And serve the king, who tends to economize;
So for want of decent pay.**

They're not entirely averse to bribery and barter.

DES GRIEUX

Here's hoping!

GUARDS, *entering*

Cavalier, let's go! With a sky so blue
Whar is wrong with you?.
Too slow! Too slow! What's the story?

On a prancing bay
We can ride all day
In a blaze of glory!

GUARD: After slogging along all day. I need a drink.

SERGEANT: What a comedown! Where's the glory in hauling around a sickly bunch of convicted whores headed for deportation?

GUARD: Crowds line up in the street to mock us. Us!

SERGEANT: You just got to ignore it ... part of the job. What do our captive beauties have to say about it?

GUARD: Nothing much. Not a very lively lot. One of them looks really sick. She won't last long.

SERGEANT: Which one are you talking about?

GUARD: The young, pretty one who hides her face and never stops crying.

SERGEANT: Ah, Manon!

DES GRIEUX: O God!

LES CAUT: Hush! Let me handle this. *(to sergeant)* Hey, soldier!

SERGEANT: *(with some hauteur)* You're speaking to a sergeant.

LES CAUT: Better yet, a friend. *(quietly to D.G.)* Got some money? *(to sergeant)* You strike me as an obliging fellow. How about doing me a favor?

SERGEANT: What sort of favor?

LES CAUT: Nothing important ... just an hour or so alone with that unfortunate young lady you were talking about.

SERGEANT: Why her?

LES CAUT: A near and dear cousin.

SERGEANT: Impossible! Strictly forbidden.

LES CAUT: What a shame ... *(giving him some money)*

SERGEANT: Well, sir ...

LES CAUT: Come on, take it.

SERGEANT: I don't usually ...

LES CAUT: But I insist!

SERGEANT: Have it your way. You win. I look tough, but I'm really a softie. Be sure and bring her back before dark. We'll be at the tavern half a mile down the road. *(to guards)* Unchain Manon!

LES CAUT: Many thanks, pal, and *bon voyage!*

SERGEANT: Now look here, I hope you're not planning to repay my kind service by making off with her.

LESCAUT: Word of honor. Isn't that good enough?

SERGEANT: Of course! But just in case, one of my men will be keeping a sharp lookout.

LESCAUT: Much obliged, and again *bon voyage!*

SERGEANT: *(to guards)* Forward march!

DES GRIEUX: Dear God, thank you, thank you!

GUARDS, as they depart
With a clear, blue sky ... We are riding high ...
In a blaze of glory!

DES GRIEUX: Manon! I'll see her again!

LESCAUT: Very soon, let's hope. And you can take her away.

DES GRIEUX: But the soldier on guard?

LESCAUT: Simple, leave it to me. *(patting his purse)* I was smart enough not to give it all away.

Manon enters, walking painfully, supported by a soldier who hands her over to Des Grieux and Lescaut, who discreetly takes the soldier aside to carry out his bargaining.

MANON with a cry of joy
Ah! You have come!

DES GRIEUX
O Manon! Manon! Manon! Manon! You're crying.

MANON
Yes, with shame for myself
And with sorrow for you.

DES GRIEUX
My dearest, lift your head high
And dream of the future,
Happy days yet to come.

MANON
Why delude me with hope?

DES GRIEUX
No! That far distant land
Where you were headed for
You need no longer fear.

We'll escape, you and I,
Find a home in the country
And safely out of reach.
Manon, what do you say?

MANON

That I love you forever.
Until now unaware of your generous heart,
Undeserving though I am,
My darling, forgive the wrongs I have done,
Bringing nothing but pain. (*Des Grieux starts to interrupt her*)
No, no! Not yet! By nature, capricious and flighty,
Although I was in love, madly in love,
Where was I when needed? ...

DES GRIEUX

Why dwell on flaws and frailties?

MANON

I still cannot imagine how
I could bear hurting you, of all people.
Yet though truly in love,
I betrayed you by leaving.

DES GRIEUX

Say no more!

MANON

Now I cringe when recalling
The sweet, tender moments we shared
And the joy that I squandered.
Too late, how gladly I would pay with my own blood
For the grief-stricken tears that I alone have cost you.
Yet still I pray ... beg ... you to forgive.

DES GRIEUX

What have I to forgive
When you offer your heart,
Making it one with mine?

MANON

Ah! Now restored by a fire from heaven,
I again want to live
To see those happy days return!
Ah! Restored by a fire from heaven
And the power of love,

Those happy days return,
Those joyful days!

DES GRIEUX

O Manon! Mine forevermore!
Sanctified by the fire and the power of love,
Those happy days return.
Your pardon comes straight from heaven. I love you!

MANON

So now I'm free to die.

DES GRIEUX

To die? No! Live no longer in fear.
Arm in arm, we will stroll
In green and fragrant meadows
Where flowers bloom again.

MANON

There ... where I can again be near you.

... Ah, to relive the past ... the inn where we met ... the borrowed carriage
...the wild ride to Paris ... the letter to your father ... our pretty little table
... the black robe you wore at St. Sulpice ... So much more to remember ...

DES GRIEUX

Life unfolding anew.
But the time is ripe. Now we can escape!

MANON

Escape! No! Too weak, too exhausted ...
I can feel ... cold and heavy ...
The stern hand of death coming closer,
And a long-lasting sleep.
I am gasping ...nearly fainting ...

DES GRIEUX

You will revive! Only the day is dying.
See the first star now sparkling.

MANON

Ah! Diamonds in the night! (*with a sad smile*)
You see, I am dazzled still by jewels.

DES GRIEUX

No time to lose! Manon ...

MANON

**I love you ...and with a kiss
I say goodbye forever.**

DES GRIEUX

**No! You will soon recover.
Try to remember ... the days back when ...
Have I not the same shoulder you would lean on?**

MANON

I only want to sleep ...

DES GRIEUX

Is it not the same hand you can depend on?

MANON

My darling, hold me close ...

DES GRIEUX

Is it not my voice pleading in despair?

MANON

Forget your spoiled child ...

DES GRIEUX

The enchanting child I adore so!

MANON

Haunted by remorse ...

DES GRIEUX

Long ago forgiven.

MANON

**Cringing, I recall
The pain I put you through for love.**

DES GRIEUX

All forgotten now.

BOTH

It is still the same hand that I [you] remember,

