

THE CAT TRANSFORMED INTO A WOMAN

(La Chatte Metamorphosee en Femme)

Cast of Characters

Marianne	The elderly housekeeper
Guido	A poor young man, once rich
Dig-Dig	A learned man from India
Minette	A quite remarkable cat

Scene: Guido's room in a small French town. In the background, an alcove with windows, containing a bed that is concealed by curtains. At the left, a table, a bird cage hanging from the wall above it. Doors right and left.

MARIANNE:

(seated at the table, crocheting, a white cat asleep in her lap)

Our master not back yet! Since daybreak he's been scouting all over town, and I daresay with nothing to show for it. Poor boy! The handsomest young man in town, *I* think – so sweet, so likable! And so popular – as long as he had money! Well, his dear friends disappeared soon enough. Of all those that used to come and eat him out of house and home, the only one left is poor Minette here, asleep on my lap, and I don't see how we can keep her much longer. The mayor's cook as already offered me three crowns, but I said "Not on your life!" Three crowns! Why, the fur alone is worth that! Not to mention her personality. However, I see that I shall have to accept after all, for her own sake. Here we can't even afford to feed her. But don't you worry, Minette! You'll not suffer. I'm the one! For what else do we old housekeepers have in the world to call our own?

(She places Minette on the bed and closes the curtains so that the cat is concealed from view.)



Love is the law of wom-an's na-ture; cer-tain-ly I have no quar-rel with that.

**But in the end, after trial and error,
Wise is the woman who chooses a cat.**

**Oh, but the cat is a clever deceiver,
Ungrateful, hard-hearted and cold.
All the more reason we ladies adore them –
They remind us of lovers of old.**

**Women are weak, poor slaves of passion,
Ever too willing and prone to yield.
Slyly men win us with vows of devotion,
Only to leave after ploughing the field.**

**Likewise the cat is a slippery creature
That steals away time and again.
All the more reason we ladies adore them –
They remind us of lovers, back when.**

GUIDO: (*from outside*) Marianne! Marianne!

MARIANNE: Ah, *mon dieu*! He's back! Mustn't say a word about selling Minette. He would starve first.

GUIDO: (*from outside*) Marianne!

MARIANNE: (*runs to open*) Coming! Coming!

GUIDO: Finally! I thought that you were going to leave me at the gate, like the rest of them.

MARIANNE: I was afraid of waking up Minette.

GUIDO: Poor little thing! So she's asleep? I wish I could do the same – sleep forever. No need to eat then. One way to economize. But mainly because it would give me the greatest possible pleasure . . .

MARIANNE: And what would that pleasure be?

GUIDO: The pleasure of never again looking at another human being!

MARIANNE: Oh, dear! So you weren't able to get anything out of your father's debtors?

GUIDO: That sums it up precisely. Oh, you should have seen their long, sad faces! Though, to be sure, one of them didn't recognize me! Another has had a run of bad luck. And how quickly they all disappeared! Impossible for me to follow. Ever since they have fallen on such hard times, my debtors have all bought carriages. And I'm on foot!

MARIANNE: Now, why don't you break down and write your uncle? He has lots of money, and you used to see so much of him when he lived here in town. And his daughter almost your own age . . .

GUIDO: (*excitedly*) My uncle! Marianne, I forbid you to say his name again in my presence! Anyway, there would be no point in my writing to him because he wouldn't answer. Primarily because he's dead . . .

MARIANNE: But what about his steward?

GUIDO: That prankster! Who used to have so many a laugh at my expense!

MARIANNE: Then at least your young cousin. So many years since you've seen her. They say she has become very pretty – lively, but a good girl at heart. I am sure she would want to make up for the wrongs her father did you. And I wouldn't be surprised if she had other motives as well. She has often tried to see you, but you have always refused.

GUIDO: And I shall continue to refuse.

MARIANNE: But why?

GUIDO: For two reasons. The first I have already told you, because I don't want to see anybody again ever. And the second . . .

MARIANNE: The second?

GUIDO: That is my secret.

MARIANNE: Secrets from *me*?

GUIDO: Very well, then. My second and strongest reason is that I am already in love.

MARIANNE: With a young lady?

GUIDO: (*hesitantly*) No.

MARIANNE: With a widow?

GUIDO: No.

MARIANNE: Mon Dieu! Not a married woman!

GUIDO: No . . . but that's as far as I'm going! You shall never find out the rest. Neither you nor anyone else.

MARIANNE: Good heavens! Not . . .

GUIDO: I refuse to say another word. You wouldn't understand. Which makes two of us.

MARIANNE: Ah, mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Such a nice young man, gone completely berserk!

GUIDO: (*coldly*) Leave me alone. I want to brood. (*he sits down*)

MARIANNE: Go ahead, eat your heart out.

GUIDO: Apropos, have you anything for lunch?

MARIANNE: Absolutely nothing.

GUIDO: In that case we can divide it. For myself I don't mind. I have my philosophy to nourish me. (*with feeling*) But Minette! What does she have?

MARIANNE: True, sir. (*aside*) This can't go on. I must accept the cook's offer and sell our beloved cat. (*exit*)

GUIDO: Alone at last! Thank God! Now I can speak out. I can unburden. I'll confess my great secret! (*advances to the front of the stage as if to speak, then stops*) No, I won't either. No one must ever find out. Too absurd, too outlandish, too insane! There she lies – so charming and pretty! Her sweet little head resting on her sweet little paw. Minette! . . . No answer. (*with alarm*) She's not dead! Oh, no, no! Minette! . . . ah, that's just her way. But someone's coming. (*hastily closing the curtains*) Good Lord, what if I were seen in this compromising position?

DIG-DIG: (*in Hindu costume, opening the door and bowing in Oriental fashion*) Are you not young Guido that I have the honor to address?

GUIDO: I am he. My name is certainly Guido.

DIG-DIG: (*aside*) He looks as naïve as ever. A pushover!

GUIDO: One generally doesn't go opening the doors of total strangers.

DIG-DIG: (*with voice of honey*) Nothing easier to correct. I'll introduce myself. Oh, my friend! You will not regret my visit. As you can tell from my costume, I am not European; I am Indian. Your father had business dealings in the far East.

GUIDO: (*aside*) Aha! More unpaid bills! (*aloud*) Sir, you're wasting your time trying to get money out of me!

DIG-DIG: (*taking out a purse*) On the contrary! I'm trying to get money to you. A large debt owed to your late father.

**Delight to all from west to east,
It separates the man from beast.**

**Ting, ting, ting, ting!
Here's the stuff that princes covet,
Both doctors and lawyers
All passionately love it.
As for me I only knock it
When it's in another's pocket.**

**Hear! Hear! Hear!
Ting, ting, ting, ting, ting!
Music sweet to those
Wide awake and on their toes.**

**Ting, ting, ting!
A simple song of cheer
For the jaded ear.**

(finally giving him the purse) There you are!

GUIDO: But this is manna from heaven! I'll put it here in this box. Finding a place for it was never the problem. So you are from India? And how did you land in this part of the world?

DIG-DIG: My son, man is a natural traveler. I was born in the Kingdom of Kashmir, brought up in the temple of Candaha, a pupil and disciple of the great guru of Kashmir.

GUIDO: *(in awe)* A pupil of the great guru! You've actually seen the guru?

DIG-DIG: I was his constant companion. But the urge to travel was in my blood. I came to France, then Paris . . . and there I would have starved had I not remembered some of the skills acquired in my native country. And going under the name of Dig-Dig, Indian juggler – because I am told that in the West anyone can be successful if he knows how to juggle – I have finally come to this small town to settle down. I manage with a few private pupils – occult science, clairvoyance, intermediate and advanced magic, et cetera. But this is merely to keep body and soul together while I pursue my favorite study, the great works on Brahma and the transmigration of souls.

GUIDO: The transmigration of souls!

DIG-DIG: One of the tenets of our creed. You are acquainted, no doubt, with the concept of metempsychosis: when this earthly existence comes to an end, when

we step out of the exterior shell, we become – according to our good deeds or our bad deeds – lions, goats, cockroaches, what have you. An admirable scheme of things, and a truth tacitly acknowledged in many a popular expression: “A dirty rat! A busy beaver! So sweet and such a deer!” I can speak candidly to you, of course, because I can tell that an intelligent man like yourself would grasp the profundity of the concept right away.

GUIDO: Well, I have heard . . .

DIG-DIG: Indeed, if you do not believe in metempsychosis I would attribute this to a poor memory. I myself recall with perfect clarity my giraffe days – towering days that I look back upon with a touch of nostalgia. Towering and lording it over the jungle, so to speak.

GUIDO: You were a giraffe?

DIG-DIG: For twenty years, in Egypt. Later, I became a camel – a step I would never advise.

GUIDO: A beast of burden . . .

DIG-DIG: Endlessly combating the desert sands. To this day, I never venture outside without sunglasses and a flask of water. As for you, at a glance I can recognize an ex-sheep.

GUIDO: (*coldly*) Possibly.

DIG-DIG: A sheep of exceptional poise and sophistication.

GUIDO: Now that you mention it, I have always been especially fond of cold mutton, perhaps a touch of egotism. And it seems that I am still highly susceptible to being fleeced. Good Lord! I have a question. My very life depends on the answer!

DIG-DIG: Ask it, my boy.

GUIDO: Well, I happen to have a very charming cat, a magnificent Angora.

DIG-DIG: We are well acquainted.

GUIDO: (*with a touch of jealousy*) How so? Well acquainted?

DIG-DIG: I have often admired her when Marianne, your old housekeeper, carried her in her arms. I have had a number of conversations with this good woman, and as a result, I know more about you than you realize.

GUIDO: What do you know about Minette?

DIG-DIG: I knew the moment I saw her – from the intelligence that lights up her eyes, from the grace that animates her movement – this animal form harbors the soul of an enchanting young lady.

GUIDO: (*transported*) Good heavens! Now it all becomes clear! I loved her instinctively! My dear Indian! I must have known about metempsychosis all along. This young girl – so pretty, so vivacious – I love her already! I adore her!

DIG-DIG: There is no other explanation.

GUIDO: If there were only some means, some secret way – with all your knowledge, O learned Indian! . . .

DIG-DIG: (*mysteriously*) Hush! This I speak of most hesitantly. But one does not remain close to the great guru for ten years without picking up a thing or two. I have here, in fact, his personal talisman – a gift, of course -- whose special power is exactly that: the transmigration of souls!

GUIDO: Uncanny!

DIG-DIG: One merely has to rub it, while pronouncing four times the name of Brahma.

GUIDO: Ah, my friend! My dear friend! Let me borrow it, and everything I have is yours, my blood, my life . . . (*taking the talisman*)

DIG-DIG: Beware, beware! You may not know what you are asking for, young man. And by nightfall you will perhaps regret the awesome step that you undertake so eagerly. Think it over. Don't be rash.

Be warned! Take care, do not proceed!
Delay this transcendental drama
Till you hear what I shall read
From the sacred Book of Brahma,
Words of wisdom, words of weight:
Verse eleven, chapter eight:

**“Tamper not with hidden forces;
Leave things the way they are.”**

(*speaking*) Leave nature alone, I beg you. (*he salutes gravely and leaves*)

GUIDO: (*alone*)

**“Leave things the way they are . . .”
I go one better!**

I put them back the way they were!
(with the talisman, taking a step toward the bed)
O Minette! My dear Minette!
My dream come true! So long I've prayed!
(stopping, disturbed)
And yet I feel a cold, clammy sweat . . .
Can it be that I'm afraid?
(reviving)
No, no, no, no!

O God of all creation,
Grant now this transformation.
From thy abode above
Change the one I love.
Brahma! Brahma! Brahma!

(He rubs the talisman and the bed curtains suddenly part over a roll of drums. Minette, a young lady dressed in white, lies on the bed sleeping. Guido is deeply stirred.)

A girl! A miracle!

(Minette awakens, looks around in astonishment and leaves the bed. Guido dares not approach her.)

GUIDO:
Transformed by miraculous powers!
O feline, forever adieu!

MINETTE: *(taking a few timid steps)*
Till now I have walked on all fours;
Today I am standing on two.

GUIDO:
But how to break the ice?

MINETTE: *(inspecting her arms)*
Ye gad! Where is my fur?
Well, well . . . not bad!

GUIDO:
Pst! Minette!

MINETTE: *(turning)*
Who calls me? My dear master Guido!

GUIDO: *(enchanted)*
My name she remembers from cathood.

(Minette extends a hand)

Rapture complete! Can this be real?

MINETTE:

Ah, moment so sweet!
A thousand emotions I feel. *(touching her head)*
Up here, and here . . . no, here. *(indicating her heart)*
Have I become humane?
Oh, a state of mind so strange!
Could ever man explain
This abrupt, miraculous change?
Oh, do not lie, Guido . . . Say, who am I?

GUIDO:

On all the earth
The most beautiful thing!
You are a blossoming rose,
A clear, luminous pearl.
Lovely Venus at birth,
A breath of spring,
Well, in short . . . well, in short . . . a girl.

MINETTE:

Am I truly a girl? Happy day!

GUIDO:

Oh, my soul you so inspire,
We'll live in joy and bliss,
Ever together, like this,
And I your slave.
Just name your heart's desire.
Oh, name the thing you first would have.
Lovely Mademoiselle! . . .

MINETTE: *(eagerly)*

A looking glass!

GUIDO:

A looking glass?

MINETTE:

A looking glass!

GUIDO:

A looking glass? She is a woman.
This proves it all too well.

MINETTE:
I cannot wait!

GUIDO:
Soon you shall see.
(to himself) This I must hide and turn the key.
(puts the talisman into the box and goes to get a small hand-mirror)

MINETTE:
Run, run!

GUIDO:
Like a brook.

MINETTE:
Hurry back.

GUIDO: *(returning)*
Take a look.

EACH IN TURN:
Ah! Ah! Ah!

MINETTE:
Oh, sheer delight!

GUIDO:
Oh, sheer delight!

MINETTE:
A joy to see!

GUIDO:
Too good, but true.

MINETTE:
Could I be right?

GUIDO:
A lovely sight.

MINETTE:
Can this be me?

GUIDO:
Oh, none but you.

MINETTE:
So fair the face,
So bright the eye!
My charm and grace
I can't deny.

GUIDO:
So fair the face,
So bright the eye!
Your charm and grace
Electrify.

MINETTE:
I feel undressed
Without my fur,
But so impressed
I want to purr.

GUIDO:
You look your best
Without the fur,
But I request
You not to purr.

MINETTE:
The silken hair . . .

GUIDO:
The silken hair . . .

MINETTE:
The face so fair.
I clearly see
It must be me.

GUIDO:
You see it's true;
It must be you.

BOTH: *(with adjusted pronouns)*
My (your) face, my form, I've never known.
The eyes so warm are new to me today,
And yet they are my very own;
I recognize them right away.
Never known till today,

**And yet they are my very own;
I recognize them right away.**

GUIDO:

**Ladies, I'd find you even dearer
Could you survive without a mirror.
But where's the town or country lass
That can forego the looking glass?**

MINETTE: *(playing with the mirror)*

**This new toy I simply can't resist!
And to think of all I've missed.**

GUIDO: *(taking back the mirror)*

**That's enough of foolish vanity.
My dear . . . my dear . . . do look at me!**

MINETTE: *(following the mirror with her eyes)*

You?

GUIDO:

Me!

MINETTE:

Yes? No!

GUIDO: *(tenderly)*

Do look at me . . .

MINETTE:

(taking the mirror back and looking at herself again)

No! Ah! Oh, sheer delight!

GUIDO:

Oh, sheer delight!

MINETTE:

A joy to see!

GUIDO:

Too good, but true.

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You not to purr.

MINETTE:
The silken hair . . .

GUIDO:
The silken hair . . .

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I clearly see
It must be me.

GUIDO:
You see it's true;
It must be you.

BOTH: *(with adjusted pronouns)*

**My (your) face, my form, I've never known.
The eyes so warm are new to me today,
And yet they are my very own;
I recognize them right away.
Never known till today,
And yet they are my very own;
I recognize them right away.**

GUIDO:

**Ladies, I'd find you even dearer
Could you survive without a mirror.
But where's the town or country lass
That can forego the looking glass?**

MINETTE: I am pretty, aren't I?

GUIDO: *(crossing his arms)* Lovely!

MINETTE: That's what I thought, but one can't always trust first impressions. Is it true that whiskers are out of fashion? I believe that my own were much admired.

GUIDO: You are sheer perfection, just as you are. I could not have done better.

MINETTE: *(putting the mirror on the table)* So it's you that I owe it to! But while you were at it, couldn't you have made me just a wee bit taller?

GUIDO: Well! That's ambition for you! (Half an hour ago she was no taller than this!)

MINETTE: About this much! *(going up on tiptoe)* Like so. Oh, please! It shouldn't take more than a minute!

GUIDO: I refuse to change a thing! There are some works that should not be retouched.

MINETTE: Ah, well. You are not as obliging as I thought.

GUIDO: And you – you are being very hard to please.

MINETTE: *(extending her hand, smiling)* Yes, pardon me. I was a beast.

GUIDO: Besides, what's the complaint? Haven't I simply restored you to the shape you had before?

MINETTE: Not at all. This is my first time as a girl – my debut, as it were.

GUIDO: Really?

MINETTE: Yes, indeed. I've been a number of other things, but never a girl. And yourself? What about you?

GUIDO: I have always been just what I am – a perfectly respectable young man.

MINETTE: My memory is a little hazy, but it begins to come back. Ah, yes! I started out as a naïve little flower – a marigold!

GUIDO: Ha, a marigold! How sweet! How delightful!

MINETTE: Not very. Always exposed to the sun. Murder on the complexion. In those days, needless to say, I was embarrassingly green. Nonetheless, I gathered my courage, and one day I cried to Brahma to help me out – though between you and me, I was shaking in my roots!

Brahma! Brahma! Brahma!



Change me, I cried, o sa-cred power! Though but a sim-ple coun-try flower,

**Life in the sun I find too hot,
Stuck in a stupid flower pot.**

**Heavenly Brahma, O kindly God,
Pray, would you think me very odd
Were I to say I much preferred
The glorious freedom of a bird?**

**Then thunder rolled . . .
A total dark!
And lo! Behold!
I sprouted wings, a meadow lark.**

**At first I can't deny
I found it fun to fly,
Though there must be better ways
Of getting high.**

**But to chirp and to pipe –
Well, I'm just not the type.
Too soon, need I say,
I grew bored and blasé.**

So I swallowed my pride;
Again I cried:

Spare me, O god, let's come to terms.
I draw the line at eating worms.
Change me is what I'm driving at.
O dear Brahma!

The god replied,
We'll see to that.
No sooner said,
I was a cat.

I had my special dish –
A pampered pet
More cute'n kittenish
You never met.
Each day fresh cream and fish,
And yet . . . and yet . . .

Far too steep was the price,
For I'm terrified of mice,
And a girl has more to do
Than cuddle up and mew.

Though blushing red,
Again I said, I said:
Brahma! Brahma! Brahma! Brahma! Ah!

Hear me again, O god, for I'm
Begging for a favor one more time.
Change me, Brahma! O sweet Brahma!
For I have made another gross *faux pas*.
Give me, I pray, just one more whirl,
O dear Brahma!

Presto! *Voila!* I'm now a girl.
A girl am I and glad to be.
At last I've found the perfect spot for me!

Presto! *Voila!* I'm now a girl.
At last, a girl, ah!
I've found the perfect spot for me!

GUIDO: Someone's coming. No doubt, Marianne. Good Lord! She mustn't guess your prior status.

MINETTE: I won't say a word. I'll just sit here quietly and freshen up a bit. *(she starts licking her forearm)*

GUIDO: No, not that! Hush! She's here!

MARIANNE: *(enters, carrying a basket. Aside)* Well, the bargain's made. Sold for three crowns. But how shall I ever bring myself to tell poor . . . *(aloud)* What's this? A young lady! *(at Marianne's entrance, Minette steps behind Guido and tries to conceal herself)*

GUIDO: My dear Marianne! A surprise! Meet the . . . the daughter of an old friend of my father's, just arrived . . . from England!

MARIANNE: *(while placing her basket on the table and surveying the new arrival)* From England?

GUIDO: That's right, daughter of a friend. She has no place to stay, so I offered . . . I said she could stay here. With us.

MARIANNE: With us? My word! This younger generation!

MINETTE: *(aside)* She has brought lunch. Cream! For me! *(she passes her tongue over her lips)*

MARIANNE: What is the meaning of this, Guido? You who have sworn off women!

GUIDO: Ah, but she is unlike all other women, another species altogether. So sweet, so innocent . . .

MARIANNE: *(with skepticism)* And she comes from England? *(starts to lay things on the table)* I see how things stand, sir. I gather that my services are no longer necessary. The master requires a younger housekeeper.

GUIDO: You have no reason to fear. *(to Minette)* Isn't that true, my darling?

MARIANNE: Your darling! Aha! Things become clearer. And is this by any chance the grand passion you were speaking of this morning?

GUIDO: Why, yes! This is she! *(aside)* She little knows how well she guessed. *(aloud)* Yes, this is indeed the charming young lady whose elegance, refinement and distinguished manners . . . Hey, what's she doing there? *(Minette has crept onto the table where she is putting her fingers in the cream, then licking them)*

MINETTE: This cream is divine!

MARIANNE: Just look at her! Sir!

GUIDO: Minette, come down from there!

MARIANNE: No doubt these British ways!

GUIDO: Yes, yes . . . native customs. But what a lavish lunch, Marianne! How did you ever pay for it?

MARIANNE: (*annoyed and defiant*) How did I do it? Well, I had no choice . . . I sold your cat for three crowns.

GUIDO: Without a word to me about it?

MARIANNE: Well, yes. (*looking at Minette*) Anyway, I see that you now have other things on your mind. I sold her to the mayor's wife – a most refined lady who adores cats.

MINETTE: (*aside*) Sold me! That's a novelty!

MARIANNE: To amuse her son – a very promising young lad of eighteen.

MINETTE: (*aside*) And to a young man, no less.

GUIDO: (*angrily*) The nerve! (*calming down*) Well, very good. Since the mayor's son has bought her, let him come and get her. (*aside*) If he can find her!

MARIANNE: (*to herself*) And I thought this would break his heart. The brute!

GUIDO: (*to Minette*) Come, my dear, sit down and have some lunch. (*He beckons her to sit beside him and tries to show her table manners, which Minette tries awkwardly and unsuccessfully to imitate*)

MINETTE & GUIDO:
O sweet repast! O charming meal!
Together here to harmonize:
To find at last the love I feel
Reflected clear within your eyes.

MARIANNE:
Poor little cat! A hard ordeal!
His pet I had to sacrifice.
Poor little cat! A hard ordeal!
Yet not a tear does he reveal,
No tear within his eyes.

MINETTE:
(still sampling the cream)
So good! So good!

MARIANNE:
Her manners leave much to be desired.

GUIDO: *(demonstrating)*
No, no, Minette . . . just copy me.

MINETTE: *(trying to imitate)*
Of course . . . like so.

MARIANNE:
Upon my word! These British ways must be the latest.

GUIDO:
(I'm on the spot.)

MINETTE:
(making a face at Marianne)
The silly prude!

GUIDO:
**The British have but little aptitude
For handling fork and spoon.
Give her time. She will learn.
Meals are incomplete without a tune.
(to Minette) How about a polonaise?**

MARIANNE:
Surely you must know a few.

MINETTE:
No!

GUIDO:
Something bright and British?

MARIANNE:
Scotch or Irish might do.

MINETTE:
**Not a note! None at all!
Not a one! Yet I recall
One song, aha!**

From the land of India.

MARIANNE:
(Indecent, I'm sure . . .)

MINETTE:
Now I recall . . .

GUIDO: (*eagerly*)
Sing us your long . . . let's hear.

MINETTE:
Sweet and gentle . . . help me along.
Share my oriental song.



With-in an an-cient East pa- go- da sang a maid- en slim & fair;
Warm and sultry were her eyes,
Jet black her soft and silken hair,

And her song a tender cry:
O dearest heart! O love, reply.
When the night darkens the plain,
Come to my song, answer again.
Miaou! Miaou!
The time is ripe, the moment now.

MARIANNE:
Miaou! Miaou! So the word is Hindu now!

GUIDO:
Miaou! Miaou! The word is lovely music now.

MINETTE:
Alas, too clearly all forgotten
Are the vows to me you swore,
And the voice of my desire
No longer stirs you as before.

Has another won your heart?
I wish you well, though far apart,
But should love bring sorrow and pain,
I'd pity you then and cry again:
Miaou! Miaou! The time is ripe, the moment now.

MARIANNE:
So the word is Hindu now!

GUIDO:
Miaou! Miaou! The word is lovely music now.

(Marianne, much astonished, has been looking all around to locate the source of the cat sounds. Guido makes desperate signs to Minette, then turns to smile at Marianne, hoping to distract her.)

Oh, she sings like a warbling bird!
Pure and sweet,
Like a thrush or a meadow lark.

MARIANNE:
Or a cat . . . in heat.

GUIDO:
(sees Minette on the table, lapping up the milk from her plate)
Lord, not that! Ooh, la, la!

MARIANNE: *(also observing)*
From bad to worse!

GUIDO: *(sadly)*
(So out of place! So indiscreet!)

MARIANNE:
What next?

MINETTE:
Ever, ever scolding!

MARIANNE:
Manners so revolting!

GUIDO:
Battle scene unfolding!

ALL:
This comes to more
Than I bargained for –
Far more, I'm sure,
Than I can endure.

MARIANNE:
I would like to strike her,
Not a minx but a tiger, a tiger . . .

MINETTE:
I can barely stand her,
What a goose for a gander,
A goose for a gander . . .

GUIDO:
Drat it, oh the cat'll
Be a bear in battle,
In battle, in battle . . .

ALL:
I can take no more;
You can find to door.
If you want to go
I shall not say no.

MARIANNE: (*with anger and irony*)
(looking around) Yes, I can tell when I'm not wanted. I'll go!
But where is poor Minette?

MINETTE: (*absent mindedly*)
Over here.

MARIANNE:
Huh?

GUIDO:
Hush!

MARIANNE:
You said?

GUIDO:
I said she can't be far away.

MARIANNE:
But where? The place I've ransacked.
(She picks up her work basket containing threads, ribbons, samples, etc.)

GUIDO:
Go find her. You'll prove a witch in fact.

(A ball of wool has fallen from the basket, which Minette chases after and plays with in catlike fashion.)

MARIANNE:

(running to the rescue) **Young girl! Young girl! Out of my basket!**

MINETTE: *(angrily)*

Let me play.

GUIDO:

Do behave!

MINETTE:

She won't allow me any fun at all.

MARIANNE:

(frantically collecting her materials)

My ribbons! My samples! And my yarn!

(Minette approaches the bird cage and shakes the cage, which falls to the floor.)

MINETTE:

A little bird! Oh, these I love!

MARIANNE:

(running to the rescue)

Oh, saints preserve us! My turtle dove!

GUIDO:

(Another brawl.)

MINETTE: *(stamping her foot)*

She won't allow me any fun at all.

MARIANNE: *(threatening)*

I'd like to scratch.

MINETTE:

You've met your match.

GUIDO:

Ladies, please! You're driving me mad!

MARIANNE:

Your face I'll scratch . . .

MINETTE:
You've met your match . . .

GUIDO:
You drive me mad.

MARIANNE:
A pox on you!

MINETTE:
You'll get your due.

GUIDO:
Worse than a zoo.

MARIANNE:
I would like to strike her,
Not a minx but a tiger, a tiger . . .

MINETTE:
I can barely stand her,
What a goose for a gander,
A goose for a gander . . .

GUIDO:
Drat it, oh the cat'll
Be a bear in battle,
In battle, in battle . . .

ALL:
I can take no more;
You can find to door.
If you want to go
I shall not say no.

MARIANNE:
A pox on you!

MINETTE:
You'll get your due.

GUIDO:
Worse than a zoo.

(At the end of the trio, Marianne leaves in a huff, going into her room, right.)

GUIDO: (Well! A fine beginning!)

MINETTE: (*triumphant*) She's left! So much the better. We can have some peace for a change. But . . .you're not angry with me?

GUIDO: Now why did you go and do that?

MINETTE: Well, I find her quite impossible to live with. (*caressingly*) Darling, I am sure you wouldn't refuse the very first favor I ask of you. (*taking his hand and stroking it*) Dear Guido, get rid of her.

GUIDO: Get rid of her! That dear, kind Marianne who raised you as a kitten?

MINETTE: Yes, but things have changed. It's not that I don't still love her – but at a distance. (*she passes her hand over her ear several times*)

GUIDO: Aha! I see that we are in for stormy weather! (*severely*) Minette, you are being rather thoughtless.

MINETTE: (*stroking him*) My sweet, my darling!

GUIDO: (*a bit stiffly*) You put me in a very difficult position.

MINETTE: You refuse me? Then I refuse to love you!
(*giving him a quick scratch*)

GUIDO: That's going too far! (*aside*) Her nails used to be so tiny.

MINETTE: Leave me alone. Don't speak to me anymore. It's obvious that you understand nothing at all of my feelings – so tender, so loving!

GUIDO: Tender! Loving!

MINETTE: How can you possibly doubt it? Oh, dear! How awful! When I think of the shameless advances I used to make! The hours on your lap, in your arms – indeed, I blush! Of course, it was instinct, and I don't suppose I should be blamed for it. But this instinct seems to have undergone a metamorphosis like the rest of me. I believe it has turned into love.

GUIDO: (*aside*) Would it were true! (*continuing coldly*) Minette, I would like to think you sincere. I *must* think you sincere. But you have to understand that I could allow my cat a number of freedoms that would be highly improper for a wife. And if – despite your lovely face and figure – you continue to indulge the tastes and inclinations of your previous state . . . for example . . .

MINETTE: (*suddenly sobbing*) You're not happy! You're ashamed of me . . . Well, I promise to control myself and these instincts that you find so objectionable.

GUIDO: And in return, I promise to love you with all my heart. My only wish will be your wish.

MINETTE: (*perking up her ears*) Hush!

GUIDO: Huh?

MINETTE: Don't you hear a rustle?

GUIDO: What of it? Just imagine the joy of being with each other for a whole lifetime!

MINETTE: (*listening*) It is one!

GUIDO: (*continuing in his own world*) And to share our love, our thoughts, our feelings—

MINETTE: (*creeping forward quietly*) Quiet! Quiet!

GUIDO: What are you doing?

MINETTE: Of course it's one. Don't you hear it?

GUIDO: (*loudly*) What *is* all this?

MINETTE: (*creeping cautiously, then suddenly leaping*) You frightened it! It got away! How disappointing!

GUIDO: (Good God! A pretty scene, I must say.) Minette! Come here!

MINETTE: (*sulking*) I won't.

GUIDO: (*incredulously*) You won't? Yesterday, Minette, you were so docile, so obedient, so submissive . . .

MINETTE: Yes, but today I am a woman.

GUIDO: All the more reason for you to change your habits. As a woman, one does not spring after . . . well, it's simply not done. Unless you improve your manners, my dear, how can I introduce you socially? It would be catastrophic – if you'll pardon the expression. When I go out, I shall have to leave you here by yourself.

MINETTE: Ha! Imprisonment as well! It seems that in becoming a woman I have lost in the process. I was better off before. I was free, I was my own mistress, I could come and go as I pleased, without begging permission, and that habit I see no reason to change. I shall defend my rights, and for a starter, I intend to go out this very minute.

GUIDO: And I say no!

MINETTE:
I'm going out!

GUIDO:
No, no, no, no!
You're staying here.

MINETTE:
No, no, no, no!

GUIDO:
You're not to go.

MINETTE:
I've got to go.

BOTH:
No, no, no, no!

GUIDO:
I'll show that I'm the master.
I'll lock the door.

MINETTE:
Good! The window's even faster.
I am off to explore.

(She leaps to the window. Terrified, Guido tries to follow.)

GUIDO:
Oh, God! Oh, God! Are you out of your mind?

MINETTE:
I shall leap, for I feel so inclined.

MINETTE:
I'm going out!

GUIDO:
No, no, no, no! You're staying here.

MINETTE:
No, no, no, no!

GUIDO: (*pleading*)
Oh, do come back!

MINETTE:
No, no, no, no!

GUIDO:
I'm in despair.

MINETTE:
No, no, no, no! Ah! I adore night air!
Miaou! Miaou!

GUIDO:
Again that strange miaou!

MINETTE:
If you dare to follow
From the roof I'll raise a row.

GUIDO:
Come here, Minette! Dear Minette!

MINETTE:
Miaou!

GUIDO:
Minette! Minette!

MINETTE:
Miaou!

GUIDO:
You little feline! 'tis your nature
To go prowling alone at night.
No more of this, for I insist
You settle down and see the light.

MINETTE: (*disappearing*)
**Miaou! Miaou! The time is ripe, the moment
now . . .**

GUIDO:
**Not so sweet the song by now . . .
Minette! Minette!**

MINETTE: (*from outside*)
Miaou! Miaou!

GUIDO: There she goes! Across the terrace and over the railing. After her! (*rapid exit*)

MINETTE: (*at the same instant, showing her face through the back window, then coming into the theater*) Yes, chase after me! Across the roof! No harm in that, as I'm sure you will not get very far. Oh, no! My enemy, the old housekeeper!

MARIANNE: (*from right*) The master isn't here?

MINETTE: (*glancing toward the roof*) He has gone out for a bit of air.

MARIANNE: Too bad. I came to settle my account with him. One of us has to go – either you or me.

MINETTE: (*coldly*) Very well, if that's how you see it. But I have already quite decided to stay.

MARIANNE: I never! . . .

MINETTE: And you're staying too, granny. I've given my consent.

MARIANNE: (*putting down her basket*) Granny! Granny! The impudence! I am gathering my things, and then I shall not stay one second longer in this house. And I leave with no regrets, because at last I've found my poor Minette, and I'm taking her with me.

MINETTE: (*anxiously*) You have found her?

MARIANNE: Yes, miss. In the cupboard, of all places, and the door locked. Somebody deliberately shut her up inside there!

MINETTE: Where is she now?

MARIANNE: (*with heavy meaning*) In a safe place . . .

MINETTE: Now listen here: that cat must *not* be seen, I insist!

MARIANNE: You insist! Well, thank God she has one person to protect her.

MINETTE: Now, please! Do as I say. Trust me. I know what I'm doing.
(*whispers in her ear*)

MARIANNE: (*astounded*) No! You! Believe me, miss, I had no idea . . .

MINETTE: (*on the lookout for Guido*) Mum's the word! (*quietly*) Yes, clearly something had to be done. Solitude, bitterness, disillusion – all of these have made our poor Guido a little bit crazy, with nothing but his cat for consolation. We have to shake him out of it. And it won't take long! Not if you'll back me up.

MARIANNE: Give the command. What do you want me to do?

MINETTE: First, hold on to Minette. If he sees her, all is lost.

MARIANNE: I'll take her out of the house.

MINETTE: Not now. We've no time. I hear Guido coming back.

MARIANNE: I'll hide her. Later on I'll remove her without his noticing a thing. Ah, miss! (*Leaves right at the same time that Guido enters left. Minette hides behind one of the curtains.*)

GUIDO: (*thinking himself alone*) Vanished! These rooftops! I tried to follow and nearly broke my neck. Oh, poor Minette! Where could she be now?

MINETTE: (*coming forth sweetly and putting her head on Guido's arm*) Here I am, Guido.

GUIDO: Ha! A fine way to behave! Back so soon?

MINETTE: I've come back to say goodbye, my dear, before leaving for good.

GUIDO: Leaving for good?

MINETTE: It's for your own sake. I would only make you unhappy. Our personalities are so different.

GUIDO: Well, no doubt it will take some adjusting . . . but these things take time.

MINETTE: Never! I can't change who I really am. Bear in mind that I was a cat, I'm now a woman. Put the two together and you have a dangerous combination. Besides, now that I have a new master . . .

GUIDO: How's that? A new master?

MINETTE: Don't you remember? The mayor's son, the young man that Marianne sold me to for three crowns. I've told him everything.

GUIDO: Now why did you do a foolish thing like that?

MINETTE: And he's willing to have me the way I am.

GUIDO: Fine thing! But I'll fight it out in court. And I'll win, too. After all, it was a cat that he paid for, not a woman. The deal is off!

MINETTE: *(smiling)* He didn't seem to be displeased at the change. Shall I ask him?

GUIDO: This is too much! You little monster! Ha! Your species is no better than ours.

MINETTE: *(joyfully)* Then you don't want me anymore? Thank God!

GUIDO: On the contrary! That's why I'd like to wring your neck! When I see how beautiful you are, I forget everything else. It's obvious that barring a miracle, I shall be miserable for life. But so will you! And you are not going off with anyone else. You are staying right here, like it or not! Marianne! Marianne!

(Marianne appears, carrying a box)

MARIANNE: What's the matter? What is it?

GUIDO: *(holding Minette by the hand)* Close that window! And when I give an order, I mean for you to hurry.

MARIANNE: *(placing her box on the table)* Well, well! Don't get upset. I'll close it.

MINETTE: And I forbid you to move! *(Marianne stops dead in her tracks)*

GUIDO:

**Good God! Taken root on the spot!
Marianne, speak out! What's wrong?**

MINETTE:

(reaching out her hand toward her)

**Not on your life! Say not a word! Answer not!
Till tomorrow you'll hold your tongue.**

(Marianne opens her mouth in an obvious attempt to speak, but no sound comes out.)

GUIDO:

**Transformed into a mute!
She tries but cannot speak.
Oh, what a change, absolutely unique!**

**This can't go on. I see too well
My home's become a living hell.**

(Dig-Dig enters and after exchanging signs with Minette resumes his gravity when Guido sees him.)

GUIDO: *(to Dig-Dig)*

**O wise Hindu! I'm through with the occult!
Come in, and look at the result! *(indicating Minette)*
I now know better.
I'll be your debtor
If you'll go get her
And take her away.**

MINETTE:

(extending her hand toward Dig-Dig)

**By Brahma I command you to stir not a jot,
But to stand there like a totem pole
Till I relinquish my control.**

GUIDO: *(baffled)*

Stock still! Like a man of stone.

MINETTE *(threatening Guido)*

**And you! You too shall not escape!
Another word and you'll be turned
Into my own cast off shape.**

GUIDO: *(beside himself)*

**I, a cat? I? To hiss and purr? *(sudden inspiration)*
My talisman! I'll tend to her!
(He runs to the box on the table)
Brahma! This is no joke!
Transform her back into a cat
By the magic power I invoke.**

(He opens the box and a white cat jumps to the floor and disappears through the window)

OTHERS:

The cat! The cat Minette!

GUIDO: *(thoroughly confused)*

But Madame! A contradiction! *(indicating the box)*
Here you were seen . . . Yet still I see you there.
What the hell does this mean?

MINETTE: *(laughing)*

Try and guess . . . try and guess . . .

GUIDO:

But this is far more strange than fiction.

MARIANNE:

(indicating Minette)

Come and kiss your cousin.

GUIDO:

My cousin! So she is the cat I conjured!

DIG-DIG:

**And I your father's trusty steward;
Into my snare you have been lured.**
(Guido lifts a threatening hand, but laughs)

MINETTE: *(tenderly)*

**God be thanked! For I've fulfilled
My father's last wish on earth.
My little hoax has given birth
To a devotion for life.
Dear Guido, let me be your wife.
For alarm you have no cause,
For I am still your pet,
But minus a few of her more pointed flaws.**
(She raises her hands as if to scratch)
Such as . . .

GUIDO: *(happily)*

Such as . . .

MINETTE: *(smiling)*

**I'll trim my claws.
And yours for life I shall remain,**

And promise not to change again.
(She gives him her hand, which he kisses, enraptured.)

**Though a cat no more, no matter;
There's a moral I can draw:
When you fondle me and flatter,
I'll extend a velvet paw.
But my feline grace and charm
Turn bristly if you seek to harm.
Yet the cure is swift and sure:
At the full moon come to my tune.
Miaou! Miaou!
Unto my tender call reply,
And be not harsh, nor cold, nor shy.**

**OTHERS:
Unto her tender call reply,
Miaou! Miaou!
And be not harsh, nor cold, nor shy.**

The End