

# PUCCINI

## MANON LESCAUT

English Version by Donald Pippin

### CAST OF CHARACTERS:

**Manon Lescaut, a beautiful, pleasure loving girl, bound much against her will for a convent.**

**Lescaut, her somewhat unsavory brother.**

**Chevalier des Grieux, a young seminarian of whom great things are expected.**

**Geronte, Treasurer-General, elderly, and of course rich and powerful.**

**Edmondo, a lively fellow seminarian.**

**Innkeeper, dancing master, lamplighter, captain, sergeant, etc.**

### ACT ONE

The scene is a town square in front of an old fashioned inn, located in Amiens, a provincial town on the road to Paris. It's the place where students like to hang out, drink beer, play cards, and make fun of love, while talking about nothing else. Two among them stand out, opposite types: high spirited, Mercutio-like Edmondo, for whom life is mainly for laughter, and high minded Des Grieux, a gifted student in the nearby seminary, expected to go far in his austere vocation.

In this quiet town best known for its Gothic cathedral, the general level of excitement, or lack thereof, can be gauged by the eagerness with which everyone perks up to watch the arrival of the evening coach from Arras. Three passengers step out -- an older man of obvious importance. In fact, no less than the keeper of the keys of the king's treasury. Clearly, someone worth knowing. Also a younger man who -- is it just our imagination? -- seems to give off unsavory vibrations. Are we unfair in suspecting him to be something of a ne'er do well, a rascal, a conniver, perhaps even a scoundrel? He is traveling with his younger sister, a strikingly pretty girl named Manon, bound, at her father's insistence and much against her own wishes, to a convent. Her brother's assignment is to see that she gets there.

"Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?" says Shakespeare. One look at Manon, and Des Grieux's life is transformed forever. Horrified by her intention, however reluctant, to bury her youth and beauty in a convent, he urges her to disobey her father's orders and find her own life -- with him.

Unfortunately, Des Grieux is not the only one to have been struck by Manon's beauty. Geronte, the elderly royal treasurer, has also caught the fire.

Well-accustomed to taking what he wants, and having already determined to have Manon for himself, he does not shilly-shally. With the cooperation of Lescaut, Manon's brother, who sees his own fortunes rapidly rising by this providential stroke of luck, and with the help of the innkeeper, no less susceptible to the glitter of gold, he arranges to kidnap the unsuspecting girl that very evening and whisk her off to Paris -- a plot overheard by Edmondo, our light-hearted jester.

For Des Grieux, totally entranced, totally enthralled by Manon, ready to cast aside his own promising future and plunge into an unknown abyss, the call is clear: beat him to the punch.

*A public square in Amiens, a provincial town not far from Paris, with sidewalk tables and chairs in front of an inn. A popular rendezvous, much frequented by young students.*

**EDMONDO:** *(partly serious, partly tongue in cheek)*

Let us welcome the evening as it hovers,  
Laden with stars, and cooled by playful breezes,  
Ever friendly to poets and to lovers . . .

**STUDENTS:** Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!  
To predators and robbers!  
So much for your juvenile romantic mush.

**EDMONDO:** So you want action!  
Pronto, from around the corner  
Comes new attraction,  
Fair ladies not so jaded,  
More inclined to be persuaded.

**STUDENTS:** Just what we had in mind!

**EDMONDO:** A serenade I'll offer  
Suggesting they look us over --  
Though not the Latin Quarter,  
A batch of beauties made to order.

**STUDENTS:** Each mouth begins to water . . .

*The ladies enter and gradually get drawn into the action.*

**EDMONDO:** I have in hand a serenade  
To youth and beauty.  
O muse, be now inspired!  
Rise to the call of duty!

You are fair, ah! But we are fervent,  
Each to Venus a loyal servant.  
Ever tender toward your gender,  
Our reward is your surrender --  
Battle worn, we persevere.

LADIES: *(joining in)* We are fair, ah! But you are fervent,  
Each to Venus a loyal servant.  
Ever tender toward our gender,  
True to form, you persevere.

STUDENTS: Share the laughter, sigh with rapture!  
Beauties rare and ripe for capture,  
Hear, oh hear!

LADIES: Oh, for laughter, sighs of rapture!  
Beauties clearly ripe for capture,  
Yes, we hear!

LADIES: *(approaching)* Air sweetly scented  
Plays lightly among the shadows.  
Circling swallows return  
As the sun goes down.

STUDENTS: Bathed in moonlight soon to follow,  
You lovers, gather round.

LADIES: Magical hour  
Made for youthful folly --  
Hour blending hope and yearning,  
Merriment and melancholy.

*Des Grieux enters, salutes his friends, but does not join them.*

STUDENTS: Good old Des Grieux!

EDMONDO: Friend, come and join us. Why so distant?  
Beauty calls us to go exploring  
For romantic adventure.  
I hear no answer. Why not?  
Has the sharp tooth of thwarted passion  
Made you gun shy and resistant?

DES GRIEUX: L'amour! L'amour!  
Call it a game, tragedy or farce;  
I want nothing of it.

**STUDENTS:** Liar! There's a mystery lady  
You have captured and conquered.

**DES GRIEUX:** I fear you do me too much honor

**STUDENTS:** The truth perhaps was not so thrilling;  
The lady was unwilling!

**DES GRIEUX:** To kill that rumor,  
All you busybodies I'd better humor.  
Attention! . . . .

*(approaching each of the girls in turn in a similar vein of tongue in cheek  
sentimentality)*

Love, be mine, for time is wasting!  
Even now we could be tasting  
Wine of sweet rapture,  
Like children, playful,  
Night and day full  
Of the zest of April.  
Why delay?

Can you turn and run for cover,  
Spurn a dedicated lover  
Hereafter fated  
To long forever  
And die devoted?

**STUDENTS:** Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

**DES GRIEUX:** Love, be mine, for time is wasting!  
Even now we could be tasting  
Wine of sweet rapture,  
Like children, playful,  
Night and day full  
Of the zest of April. Why delay?

**EDMONDO:** I knew it!

**OTHERS:** We knew it!

**EDMONDO:** Our friend has the makings  
Of an accomplished Casanova.

**OTHERS:** So bravo! But the night's barely started;  
Long may its revels continue.  
On the top of the menu,  
A cheer for wine and song.  
You drinkers, come along!

Celebrate with lifted glasses!  
Sing a lover's serenade.  
Hail the moment as it passes,  
Mirth and madness on parade.

Ever brighter, ever stronger,  
Hear the sound that fills the night:  
Youthful vigor, bound to conquer  
Mixing madness and delight,  
Merry madness and delight.  
*A postilion's horn is heard from without.*

See the coach from Arras!  
The travelers alight.  
They appear of importance. So elegant!

*Lescaut, Geronte and Manon enter. Lescaut comes first; Geronte assists Manon. Edmondo and the students are quick to notice Manon.*

**STUDENTS:** A question of form!  
Indeed no less than manly duty  
To render a warm  
Salute to fragile beauty.

**LESCAUT:** *(shouting)* Hey, waiter!  
*(quietly to Geronte)* Pardon, sir. Unless you can holler  
They don't come running. Hey, waiter!

**INNKEEPER:** *(rushing in)* Coming right away!

**DES GRIEUX:** *(gazing at Manon)* What a stunning beauty!

**GERONTE:** At your inn,  
I plan to stay for the night.  
*(to Lescaut)* Excuse me . . .  
*(to innkeeper)* And you'll kindly begin  
Lugging in my luggage.

**INNKEEPER:** Just as you say.  
I beg you, if you'll follow this way . . .

*Lescaut and Geronte follow the innkeeper into the inn, after Lescaut has motioned for his sister to be seated and to wait for his return. Des Grieux, who has not taken his eyes off her, now approaches her.*

**DES GRIEUX:** O gracious lady, Dare I ask a special favor?  
Tell me your name  
And I shall be forever grateful.

**MANON:** Manon Lescaut they call me.

**DES GRIEUX:** I'm not always so forward,  
But some powerful magic  
Has me under a spell.  
As though we'd met before, perhaps in a dream --  
I feel I know you already.  
Do forgive me if I've spoken too freely.  
When will you be leaving?

**MANON:** I leave at dawn tomorrow,  
Consigned to a convent.

**DES GRIEUX:** A budding flower  
Deprived of air and water!  
Left to wither away, starved for the open!  
A fate no less than tragic.

**MANON:** Call it fate, call it rather  
The iron will of my father.

*Edmondo quietly and gleefully calls the attention of the students on the sidelines to the conversation in progress between Des Grieux and Manon.*

**DES GRIEUX:** I call it persecution!  
Ah, no! Within a convent,  
Should beauty slowly perish?  
Never, never!  
For you, a brighter star is rising.

**MANON:** *(sadly)* I fear my star is waning.

**DES GRIEUX:** We must discuss it further.  
But there's only one answer:  
You must escape!  
Together, we can make it happen.

MANON: You are so kind,  
You inspire me and fill me with courage.  
I shall remember.  
What is your name, sir?

DES GRIEUX: Renato Des Grieux.

LESCAUT: (*calling from outside*) Manon!

MANON: I must be leaving.  
(*calling back*) Coming!  
(*to Des Grieux*) Sorry, my brother now is calling.

DES GRIEUX: Will I see you?

MANON: No! Impossible! Father's orders!

DES GRIEUX: If I plead, if I implore you? . . .

MANON: (*much moved*) I surrender!  
After dark I'll sneak away and come to you.  
*Seeing Lescaut, she hurriedly joins him and they leave together.*

DES GRIEUX: No girl I've seen before comes close in beauty.  
To whisper, "I love you"  
I'd scale the mountain top and slay the dragon.  
*"Manon Lescaut they call me . . ."*

Even these simple words stir my spirit  
Like balmy summer breezes  
That touch the tender leaves with sly caresses  
And a soft melting sigh.

Long may their melody continue  
Pouring balm on my soul!  
Long may that fountain flow on and on!  
*"Manon Lescaut they call me . . ."*  
O fountain of love, flow on and on!

STUDENTS: (*clustering around Des Grieux*)  
To him it's happened as we were hoping.  
Now throbbing, probing,  
What is he to do?  
Our friend is given a gift from heaven,  
An angel fallen out of the blue.

**EDMONDO:** And so it's happened as we were hoping --  
Would it were me, friend, instead of you.  
An angel fallen out of the blue . . .

*Des Grieux runs off in a huff.*

**STUDENTS:** Touchy! Touchy! Ha, ha!  
The proof that he's a lover!

**SOPRANOS:** We ladies are needed,

**MEN:** You ladies are needed

**SOPRANOS:** Politely entreated . . .

**MEN:** To brighten the table.

**LADIES:** A strapping Brunnhilde,  
A pale little Eva,  
What goddess or diva  
Will govern the gamblers at play?

**GERONTE:** *(in conversation with Lescaut, quietly observed by Edmondo)*  
So your sister is taking the veil  
And leaves at dawn?

**LESCAUT:** Forced by a stern and overbearing father.

**GERONTE:** Regarding her future, you've other ideas?

**LESCAUT:** Don't I! Don't I!  
I'm not quite the fool that some people imagine.  
Through no fault of mine  
I've a poor reputation.  
I know lots about living,  
Maybe too much.  
On streets of Paris I got my schooling.  
Escorting my sister, I do as I am told.  
Despite some reservations,  
We good soldiers take orders.  
Though a burdensome cross to bear,  
A temporary loss  
Is not without compensations.  
Sir, kindly tell me your name.

**GERONTE:** Geronte from Ravoir.

*In the background, the students prepare for their game of cards.*

**LADIES:** To players in peril  
When markets turn bearish,  
We offer a kiss with a sigh.  
The prize that we cherish  
Is won by and by on the sly.

**STUDENTS:** When losing, when winning,  
We need your caresses . . .

**EDMONDO:** Farewell, my darling, my flower of spring.  
Daughter of Venus, of love I sing.  
I pine, I sigh, but what can I say?  
Swear to be true at least for a day.

**STUDENTS:** Some weeping, others laughing --  
To fate a mere rumble  
Where both take a tumble.  
But love is a giant,  
Insane but defiant,  
And merrily singing  
It goes on its way.  
(And merrily goes on its way.)

**LADIES:** Crown the victor with laurels,  
Then seek out the fallen  
Lamenting their losses.  
Apply the gentle pressure  
Of soothing caresses  
To atone for the torment  
Of losing at play. Ha, ha, ha!

**LESCAUT:** You travel, I assume, for pleasure?

**GERONTE:** No, my duty. An errand for the king,  
Whose trust has made me  
All that I am today -- the Royal Bursar!

**LESCAUT:** (Do I see gold!)

**GERONTE:** Your charming little sister  
Appears not very happy.

**LESCAUT:** Imagine! Prime of youth!  
No more hoping and dreaming . . .

**GERONTE:** I fear not . . . the poor darling . . .

No shoulder there to lean on.  
You must both tonight join me for supper.

LESCAUT: But of course! What an honor!  
Meanwhile, have one on me, sir.

GERONTE: Your pardon . . . I must ask you to wait a moment.  
I have urgent instructions to give to our host.

*The card game is in full swing.*

STUDENTS: A ten spot! A two spot! A four!  
The cards have double-crossed me!

*Drawn by their voices, Lescaut comes over and looks on, with keen interest.*

LESCAUT: Lucky day! Yes, with my talent for slight of hand  
I could turn a quick profit.

PLAYERS: You lead . . . I follow . . . Ace if you've got it! So take it!

LESCAUT: No, no! Save the ace for later.  
Finesse it! Finesse it!

PLAYERS: Of course, he's right. Finesse it!  
*(with compliments to Lescaut)* Bow to the master!

LESCAUT: *(with becoming modesty)* You flatter! But I am learning . . .

*After carefully observing Lescaut who has joined the game, Geronte draws the Innkeeper aside. Edmondo, ever the eavesdropper, continues to show marked interest.*

GERONTE: My friend, I pay up front, and you will stay mum.  
Here in one hour, have carriage with horses  
That run like the devil. One hour!

INNKEEPER: As you say, sir.

GERONTE: Carriage with horses . . .  
One hour! Remember?  
A man with his pretty sister will be waiting.  
And whip in hand, we'll gallop.  
Off! Onward to Paris!  
Silence is golden, as the wise would say.

INNKEEPER: *(roguishly)* Gold is my passion.

**GERONTE:** *(giving him a purse)* Good! Take it!  
You're a man of understanding.  
**A precaution:** is there maybe more than one door  
Leading outward?

**INNKEEPER:** There's another.

**GERONTE:** This other door you'd better show me.  
*They leave together.*

**LADIES:** *(from within)* Plead for a kiss and a sigh . . .

**PLAYERS:** You win! Amazing! Play on!

**LESCAUT:** *(with cool nonchalance)* Gladly.

*The game becomes increasingly animated. Edmondo runs to the back, the better to keep a sharp eye on Geronte, and then steps forward.*

**EDMONDO:** Randy old goat, broken down Don Giovanni,  
I'm on to you! Lecher, take warning!  
Yes, I may spring a surprise long overdue.

*Des Grieux enters, absorbed in thought. Edmondo taps him on the shoulder.*

**EDMONDO:** Sorry, pal, but you've been foiled.

**DES GRIEUX:** Meaning what?

**EDMONDO:** *(with irony)* A thief is snatching your heavenly flower  
From the vine --  
So forlorn, your blossom torn away  
To wither and decline.  
Your dove, plucked out of the nest,  
Flies westward and leaves you pining.  
All efforts failing, I suggest  
There's a silver lining:  
Her abductor's old, and ailing!

**DES GRIEUX:** Abducted?

**EDMONDO:** You seem in shock. Dear God, a case of crisis!

**DES GRIEUX:** She is due here any minute.

**EDMONDO:** Excellent timing!

**DES GRIEUX:** Help a friend!

**EDMONDO:** Me help you? By cutting off their escape?

I'll try. Maybe . . . we will be lucky.  
Her brother, prone to gamble, is safely in tow.

**DES GRIEUX:** And the old man?  
**EDMONDO:** The old man . . . Wait!  
I have an ace up the sleeve!

*The card game has broken up, though Lescaut remains seated at the table in something of an alcoholic stupor. Manon enters, looks around anxiously, then sees Des Grieux.*

**MANON:** To please you, I gave a promise,  
And I am here to keep it.  
You seemed so earnest.  
In fact, you begged and pleaded:  
Come back again, I have to see you!  
I said I would, although I wonder . . .  
If a polite but emphatic "No"  
Perhaps would have been wiser.

**DES GRIEUX:** Must life be always so colored by caution?  
Youth is no time for fretting!  
A time for gaiety and for courage,  
When the spirit awakens,  
When the fire inside lights the heavens!  
You were not meant  
For the walls of a nunnery.

**MANON:** *(slowly)* I was happy . . .  
Happy, once upon a time.  
The home of my childhood  
Rang out daily with my light-headed laughter.  
Life was a revel, a festival,  
One party, then another . . .  
*(sadly)* My fair weather season came soon to an end.

**DES GRIEUX:** *(enraptured)* Gazing into your eyes, so deep, so tender  
I see a spark of longing and desire,  
The smoldering of love, ah!  
Let us ride on the waves of passion  
That sweep us toward new shores.  
I love you, I love you!  
Say yes, and in that moment  
We enter realms of bliss eternal.

**MANON:** Born plain and simple,

I'm not what you imagine;  
No hidden sparks, but only what you see,  
Soon drawn into a land of living death.

**DES GRIEUX:** Love will illuminate your night of despair!  
And your beauty will sparkle,  
Spreading joy and delight.  
My delectable darling!  
Ah! More than a dream,  
My supreme inspiration!

**MANON:** Too unreal! Too romantic!  
Ah! Though but a dream,  
A supreme revelation!

**LESCAUT:** (*rising from the table half-tipsy*) Where is the waiter?  
No wine? Roll out the barrel!

**DES GRIEUX:** (*most earnestly, to Manon*) Now listen closely . . .  
As we speak, a crime is plotted,  
A plan to seize you  
By a lewd though aged scoundrel.  
The old man, your fellow traveler,  
Is prepared to carry out the assault.

**MANON:** (*horrified*) Abduction?

**DES GRIEUX:** This evening!

**EDMONDO:** (*rushing in*) The iron is hot, the carriage at your service.  
So beat him to the punch. Hurry! Get going!

**MANON:** (*surprised*) Leave? With you?

**DES GRIEUX:** My darling! My darling!  
Abducted, yes indeed --by me, and none other!

**MANON:** Ah, no! Ah, no! You, my abductor?

**DES GRIEUX:** No, no! Say instead, your lover.

**MANON:** Ah, no!

**DES GRIEUX:** I implore you!

**EDMONDO:** Hurry! Quarrel later.

**DES GRIEUX:** Come, the carriage is waiting.

**MANON:** I can't! I can't! No, no! No, no!

**DES GRIEUX:** Manon, I implore you! . . . Come on!

**MANON:** Let's go!

**EDMONDO:** Both of them crazy!

*The three of them run off. Geronte enters, much pleased with himself. Lescaut is still preoccupied at the card table.*

**GERONTE:** All is ready for the moment of my triumph! . . .  
The carriage waiting,  
And the brother's found diversion . . .  
All the better!

*The Innkeeper approaches, bowing and scraping.*

**GERONTE:** What is it? Supper is ready?

**INNKEEPER:** As you ordered.

**GERONTE:** Go inform the charming little lady.

*Edmondo also approaches, bowing to Geronte.*

**GERONTE:** *(somewhat impatient)* What?

**EDMONDO:** Do not bother to look for her. They are off!  
She's with a student, bound for Paris.

*Geronte, flabbergasted, dashes over to Lescaut and pulls him from the table.*

**GERONTE:** She's been abducted!

**LESCAUT:** *(as he continues playing)* Who?

**GERONTE:** *(exasperated)* Only your sister!

*Lescaut, astonished, throws down his hand of cards and leaps up from the table. The Innkeeper, also alarmed, rushes back into the inn. The students gather around Edmondo, eager to hear more.*

**LESCAUT:** Curses, curses, curses!

**GERONTE:** Head them off! Some fellow's got her!  
Head them off, head them off, head them off!

**LESCAUT:** *(calm again)* Why bother?  
What's the use? She is gone.  
I suppose you have some horses?

*Geronte shakes his head in despair.*

**LESCAUT:** What's done is done.  
Let us not get excited. Patience!  
I see that Manon, so sweet and charming,  
Has stirred in you protective concerns of a father.  
**GERONTE:** That's it exactly!

**LESCAUT:** For that I admire you.  
Speaking frankly, like a loyal son,  
I have sound advice to offer.  
In Paris you'll find Manon,  
In love, but not to worry.  
No money in the coffer,  
No wine but only water.  
Manon, though now ecstatic,  
Will realize that hunger is no fun,  
That a palace offers more than an attic.  
You'll find her by then  
A more than grateful daughter.  
I will make a third --  
Together, one happy family!

*(spoken) For God's sake, calm down, be philosophical!*  
Sir, the hat that you dropped . . .  
We hit the road tomorrow, so mustn't worry.  
To supper! It's not too late.  
There are times when you only have to wait.  
*(spoken) Your arm . . .*

*Meanwhile, Edmondo and the students are quietly laughing in the background.*

Zephyrs wreathing, softly breathing  
On the flowers, willy nilly,  
Iris and lily,  
Tell your story shorn of glory  
Of the predatory panther on the prowl.

Tell about the girl and geezer:  
Giving up on hopes to please her,  
With a scowl about to seize her . . . .  
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Zephyrs wreathing, softly breathing  
On the flowers, willy nilly,  
Iris and lily,  
Tell your story shorn of glory  
Of the predatory panther out to score.

His heart all atwitter,  
This old guy, though not a quitter,  
Yet is bitter,  
Hanging, hanging out to dry . . . .  
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

*When Lescaut threatens them, the students run off laughing.*

## ACT TWO

As the lights go up on the next scene, well might you wonder if we had made an inexplicable blunder. After all, Manon was last seen romantically galloping off to Paris with Des Grieux to escape the clutches of an aged predator, and presumably headed for a life of poverty and privation, an unheated attic, a table laden at best with a loaf of bread. Yet now we see her seated at an elegant dressing table, in a spacious boudoir, surrounded by every conceivable luxury. What happened?

Alas, when he advised old Geronte to be patient, assuring him that a taste of poverty would soon bring Manon to her senses, Lescaut's assessment of his sister's character has proved only too accurate. With a bit of brotherly prodding, she has left Des Grieux in the lurch without so much as a parting kiss, willingly trading their tiny hovel for a palatial villa. Yet barely a month later she has found to her increasing dissatisfaction that cold luxury is a poor substitute for the heat of passion and the warmth of congeniality. And despite the sudden and shameless way she abandoned him, Des Grieux has become day by day more desperate, more willing to stoop to any level of degradation to win her back. If gold is what it takes, so be it. Under Lescaut's expert tutelage, the former prize seminarian of whom so much was expected has become a professional gambler. A needless sidestep, for when he shows up unannounced and unexpected in her boudoir, Manon is more than eager to return to his passionate embraces.

But she is soon to discover that Geronte, not so easily abandoned, has the power to strike back. In partaking of his bounty, she has been riding on the back of a tiger -- an experience that can be exhilarating until time to dismount.

*In Paris, a sumptuous salon in Geronte's house. Mirror in hand, Manon is seated at her dressing table, nervously attended by her hairdresser who runs around busily.*

MANON: This pesky curl is so unruly.  
Bring me the tongs, and hurry, hurry!  
Now powder sparingly.  
Now underline the eyelids. . . Now mascara.

I want my eyes to sparkle like jewels.  
Close to perfection!

LESCAUT: *(entering)* Good morning, little sister.

MANON: *(still preoccupied)* Another touch of powder . . .

LESCAUT: Beautiful morning! But you seem out of sorts.

MANON: Rather busy . . . That's all.

LESCAUT: Oh? So I notice. Geronte gone?

*(with a sly laugh)* I presume booted out of the boudoir?

MANON: My beauty patches.

*The hairdresser complies. Lescaut helps Manon out of her indecision.*

LESCAUT: Naughty, naughty . . . one that says Danger?

No? Or Come Hither?

MANON: Can't decide. I'll wear them both!

The eyes will say I warn you . . .

The lips will say I desire you!

*The hairdresser leaves, while Lescaut gazes admiringly, at both her and her elegant surroundings.*

LESCAUT: Here is what I call living!

Your beauty's found a setting.

I gloat, and you know why:

Admit I've served you well.

I saved you from the embraces of a pauper.

And even on the night you fled from the inn,

I never gave up. I knew that time would tell.

Yes, like a dazzling vision,

I saw the marble stairs,

The gilded halls where now you dwell.

Finally I found you, living on bread and water,

Stuck in a grimy hovel,

Rich enough in kisses, but poor in money.

No doubt a fine young fellow, this Des Grieux,

He's not the royal robber of the treasury.

So it was right and proper

For you to leave the pauper,

Trading the grimy hovel

For life on a higher level.

**MANON:** (*interrupting*) You mention . . .

**LESCAUT:** Someone special?

**MANON:** No one.

**LESCAUT:** No one? Of course!

**MANON:** I merely wondered if . . .

**LESCAUT:** You wondered if? . . .

**MANON:** You'll tell me if? . .

**LESCAUT:** (*teasingly*) You sly one!  
In your eyes I detect a certain glimmer.  
Let us hope that Geronte is blind!

**MANON:** (*gaily*) How well you know me!

**LESCAUT:** So you want news of *him*?

**MANON:** I do! I do! (*now sad*) Left in the lurch,  
With nothing to ease the anguish . . .

Here, soft and silken tapestries,  
Gilded chairs, Persian carpets . . .  
Yet a silence like the chill of death,  
And the stillness of a frozen winter.

Not long ago I melted in his caresses  
And tasted rapture, his lips so tender,  
His heart and soul a burst of fire!  
But now -- Poor old Geronte!

Even the lowly hovel  
I now remember fondly --  
Joyful, secluded, safe and sound,  
Where like innocent children  
We played with life and love.

**LESCAUT:** Well, if you want to know . . .  
Des Grieux (like old Geronte)  
I count among my friends.  
But he's forever asking:  
Where is Manon? Where did she go?  
Who with? For what? And why?  
Of course, I pretend not to know.  
But change is in the offing . . .

**MANON:** You mean he's forgetting?

**LESCAUT:** No, no! I've taken charge!  
He's learned to gamble,  
Hoping to pave the rocky road to you.  
So, with the skills I've taught he plays for gold.  
Money in the pocket, he'll be yours!

**MANON:** (To win me you risk all --  
Me, so unworthy, who left you grieving.  
How many tears I have cost you!  
Beloved! Give me back what I tossed away:  
Hours too fleeting,  
The thousand caresses. those rapturous kisses,  
Abandon boiling over.  
Days we quarreled like children at play!  
Though false, am I not fair yet?  
Hurry! Hurry! Ah!  
Return to me and I'll be yours!)

**LESCAUT:** That table where we play,  
Though worn and wobbly,  
Is nonetheless a coffer that never stops giving.  
My protege and pupil,  
He's become a professional!

Onward with steady eye upon the target,  
He forges day and night,  
A pawn in the grip of his romantic folly.  
A roll of sevens brings him close to his beloved.  
A hand of aces -- momentum gathers.  
Fear not, my dear.  
With gold in hand, he will be yours!

**MANON:** (*back to the looking glass*) I want your frank opinion --  
Do you like my new gown?

**LESCAUT:** Ah, sheer perfection!

**MANON:** My coiffure?

**LESCAUT:** Most becoming.

**MANON:** My bodice?

**LESCAUT:** Charming!

*Five ladies enter, carrying scores.*

**LESCAUT:** (*sotto voce, to Manon*) They come with score in hand.  
Do we need entertainers?

**MANON:** (*looking bored*) Some choral group.  
Poor Geronte pretends to be a composer.

*The choral group performs:*

### MADRIGAL

**SOLO:** Tending sheep upon the meadow,  
Chloe greets the morn.  
To her amorous swain  
She's a rose without a thorn.

**CHORUS:** Chloe! Chloe! Poor Phaon sighs in vain.

**SOLO:** Pain and torture to behold  
Her hair of dazzling gold!  
Beneath the delicate bodice,  
A Grecian goddess!

**CHORUS:** The tender tale lives on (and on)  
Enacted by Geronte and Manon.

**SOLO & CHORUS:** His plea can still be heard  
By those who feel or care:  
"I shall die of despair!"  
And echo answers word for word.

Lovers still cry for a nod or a sigh,  
Some short but sweet reply.  
Ah! Chloe, overhearing this outpouring of woe,  
Would never say no!  
Would never say no!

*Manon, looking utterly bored, hands a purse to Lescaut.*

**MANON:** Pay them to go!

**LESCAUT:** (*pocketing the purse*) Not I! Insult them with money?  
(*pompously dismissing the singers*)  
True art aspires not to riches, but to glory!

*The singers leave, while various friends of Geronte start to enter. Manon points them out to Lescaut.*

**MANON:** My dancing master . . . more music . . . on top of madrigals!  
All right for those that like it. But so boring!

*After a yawn of resignation, she goes to the back to greet the new arrivals.*

**LESCAUT:** *(aside)* Watch out when ladies yawn --  
A warning sign of approaching danger! . . .  
*(with sudden resolution)* I'm off to Des Grieux!  
The coming crisis calls for drastic action!

*He leaves; the friends come forward, clustering around Manon with much bowing and scraping. They offer flowers, presents, various tributes, as Geronte looks on with pride and pleasure. The dancing master offers his hand to Manon.*

**DANCING MASTER:** Allow me, charming lady . . .  
The bosom slightly lifted . . . lovely!  
Brava, you're improving nicely.  
As for the arms, the head and shoulder --  
In alignment, like so.  
Must I remind you? In tempo!

**GERONTE:** *(unable to restrain his enthusiasm)*  
She's born to be a dancer!

**MANON:** Though still a novice.

**DANCING MASTER:** *(impatiently)* I beg you!  
Pay no attention to doting admiration,  
For perspiration makes the artist!

**GUESTS:** *(reproving Geronte)* Control yourself, be quiet!  
Surely a small request,  
For approval is best expressed  
By not interrupting.  
May art continue!

**DANCING MASTER:** *(directing Manon)* Now forward . . . brava!  
And sideways . . . Make a curtsey . . .  
The lorgnette . . . as I showed you.

**GERONTE:** The perfect pupil . . . a darling!

**GENTLEMEN:** Oh, so regal! Like a queen, a ballerina,

Both in manner and demeanor!  
Altogether captivating,  
Tantalizing, fascinating.  
She's both erotic and hypnotic.

MANON: *(who has stopped dancing, allowing the men to cluster around her)*  
Praises much exaggerated!  
Undeserved, but not unpleasing.  
Save the chorus of adulation  
For my betters.  
Gentlemen, of course you're teasing.  
Undeserved but not unpleasing.  
Save the acclaim and adulation  
For my betters.

GERONTE: Such expression!  
Words fail to do her justice.  
And I've got her in my possession!  
Captivated, I'm enchanted;  
She's a jewel to be flaunted,  
All that I have ever wanted.

GENTLEMEN: *(with a touch of malice)*  
Here she rules her territory  
But at night she's in her glory!

MANON: My dancing master pooh-poohs  
Such adulation.  
So overrated,  
I'll never become the prima ballerina  
You've already created  
In your imagination,  
Your all too indulgent imagination.

DANCING MASTER: *(to one of the gentlemen)* Who'll partner her?

GERONTE: *(stepping forward)* Who else?

*Manon and Geronte dance together.*

GENTLEMEN: Bravi! What a couple!  
Odd, yes! But be it noted, so devoted.  
See! Old Vulcan and Venus!  
Age and youth are united,  
Money and beauty.  
Would-be lovers now slighted,

Yes, even we are delighted.

**MANON:** *(the ultimate coquette)*  
Though her eyes are warm and tender,  
Though her form is lithe and slender,  
Still the dancer hears no answer,  
Waiting, waiting for her lover's call.

Lo, he appears! She sighs no longer,  
Cooing instead like the turtle dove.  
Ah, silently they then surrender  
To the miracle of love!  
To the magic spell of love!

Like the turtle dove, billing and cooing.  
Yes, you alone,  
You yourself are the miracle of love!  
You are the miracle of love.

**GERONTE:** Though flattery is pleasing,  
Let me gently remind you . . .  
A merry crowd outside  
Has begun parading.

**GENTLEMEN:** And *Tempus fugit!*

**GERONTE:** *(with a significant glance at Manon)*  
Time flies, not only in Latin.  
You, my darling and my treasure,  
Promise that later on you will join us.  
Come as soon as you're at leisure.

**MANON:** Go on your way and I shall follow.  
Your time will not be unpleasant  
Mid the glitter of Paris.

**GERONTE:** *(with gallantry)* Without you there's no glitter.

**GENTLEMEN:** Neither glamor nor glitter.

**GERONTE:** Each minute is an hour  
To a lover kept waiting.  
*(as he and the other gentlemen leave)*  
Order your pet conveyance.  
Goodbye, my love, till later.

*When they are gone, Manon rushes back to her small mirror, into which she gazes with great delight.*

**MANON:** Ah, tonight I shall glitter!

*(She hears someone approaching, and assumes it to be a servant.)*

What about my sedan chair?

*To her great surprise, it is Des Grieux. Greatly moved, she runs to greet him.*

**MANON:** You . . . you . . . You've come at last?

Ah, my own beloved! Hold me!

**DES GRIEUX:** *(reproachfully)* False Manon!

**MANON:** *(with passion)* Where's the love you felt before?

Are fire and passion so soon forgotten?

The way you kissed me!

The way you held me!

Your former darling deserves to suffer - -

So much I've hurt you!

Ah, turn your eyes away!

I cannot endure

The hatred aimed so directly.

**DES GRIEUX:** Once I was blinded; I now know better.

**MANON:** Yes, I am guilty. So guilty!

**DES GRIEUX:** And I was wounded, but now recovered.

**MANON:** Ah, you mean it, your love is dead.

I have killed it!

Is nothing left at all? Will nothing save it?

*(weeping)* I've lost your love! I've lost your love!

**DES GRIEUX:** *(bitterly)* Now you say so!

My heart you've broken.

My life you've shattered.

Never mind those days

I could barely go on living - -

Days I wanted to die.

**MANON:** I only want your pardon.

Look at what I now can give you!

**DES GRIEUX:** Stop it!

**MANON:** Is it not a lifelong dream come true,  
Beyond our wildest wishes? And all, all for you!

**DES GRIEUX:** Who needs it?

**MANON:** I need to share it!  
Here is our golden future,  
And love led you to find me.  
True, I lied to you.  
*(kneeling)* Now I kneel to you . . .  
I betrayed you!  
False and undeserving . . . Yet I beg of you!  
Ah! Love me again and forgive me.  
Ah, that's all I want!  
Perhaps Manon whom you once adored  
No longer seems so lovely ? . . .

**DES GRIEUX:** You tempting vampire! Weave your enchantment!  
Refasten the chains I've tried to break.  
Claim your captive!

**MANON:** It's love that holds you captive,  
Not I! Give in, surrender . . .

**DES GRIEUX:** I can struggle no longer . . . no longer . . .

**MANON:** Let me be yours!  
Love me again! In your embraces  
Draw your Manon ever closer.  
Tenderly say that you forgive her,  
Manon, determined now to be stronger.  
Love me as before!  
Return! Return!  
Manon, though all too human,  
Has learned her lesson.

**DES GRIEUX:** In vain I have fought a losing battle!  
Once again I succumb.  
Now more than ever, I'm yours, love, all yours!  
I've tried to slay the demon,  
But love has conquered.

**MANON:** Closely in renewed embraces,  
Love, put your arms around me.

**DES GRIEUX:** Your eyes so alluringly tender

Need only gaze into mine;  
Sanity I surrender  
To a power divine.

**MANON:** Ah! Starvation without your kisses!  
Bored, lonely, here you've found me,  
Eagerly waiting  
With ever growing desire.  
Kindle again the fire  
And the fever of love!  
Give me again the abandon I crave.

**DES GRIEUX:** Kindled again, the fire and the fever of love!  
Give me again the abandon I crave.

**MANON:** Return, return!  
Ah, come, rediscover that first awakening of love.  
Hear from my lips a promise:  
I'll be yours till I die.

**DES GRIEUX :** Again the fires burn!  
I feel again that first awakening of love.  
Hear from my lips a promise:  
I'll be yours till I die.  
I lose myself in rapture . . .  
For love I breathe a sigh.

**MANON:** Here in your arms is heaven . . .  
Reconciled and forgiven . . .  
For love I breathe a sigh.

*Geronte suddenly appears at the door, and stops, thunder-struck. Manon gives a startled cry. Geronte quickly regains his composure.*

**GERONTE:** *(dripping irony)* Well, well! My clever lady!  
Rather obvious why you chose to wait. So!  
Am I intruding?  
They say to err is human . . . It can happen to all.  
Even you, frankly, would appear to forget  
You're under my own rooftop.

**DES GRIEUX:** Not funny!

**MANON:** Careful . . .

**GERONTE:** Gratitude is outdated,  
Judging by your behavior.

Destitute, I found you.  
I gave not only shelter,  
But living proof of true love and devotion.

MANON: (*barely able to refrain from laughing*) Of love? Devotion?  
I beg to differ.  
(*holding the mirror to his face*) Here, sir . . . Look long and hard,  
Behold yourself, and draw your own conclusions.  
And then take a look at true love.

GERONTE: (*hurt and angry*) Darling, already I've drawn my conclusion,  
And know what must be done.  
First, I shall say goodbye - - Oh, I need no assistance.  
Adieu, but not forever.  
We shall meet later - - I promise!

*With this threat he leaves. Manon is laughing.*

MANON: Ha, ha! Finally, finally free as air!  
Oh, what relief! A liberation!  
Ha, ha! Enjoy it,  
Oh, my brave, strong and handsome lover!

DES GRIEUX: (*very serious*) Listen . . . We cannot linger.  
He sends a warning sign of danger.  
We have to get away.  
We've no time to lose.

MANON: A shame, though, giving up all my jewels - -  
The entire collection!  
I tear myself away . . .

DES GRIEUX: (*with intense passion*) Ah, Manon!  
It's the same song and dance as before.  
Still just as flighty! Still just as foolish!  
You are like two different people,  
The one sincere and loving,  
Kind, sweet and gentle,  
Blessed with all of the graces,  
Warm, generous and charming,  
Tender as your caresses.

Then, the other - - blindly infatuated  
With luxury, with dazzle and glitter.  
Me, no better - -  
Your adoring slave and victim,

**Plunging downward into chaos,  
Dung swirling in a sewer.  
See the squalid hero of the gaming table,  
Daily trading honor for money,  
Desperate for you!**

*(from the depths)* **The future looks even darker . . .  
Can I sink lower than this?**

**MANON: *(utterly contrite)* I'm truly sorry.  
So much I've made you suffer!  
But I'll be better. Those foolish days are over.  
I swear it . . . I swear it . . .**

*Lescaut enters, breathlessly puffing and panting.*

**DES GRIEUX: Lescaut?**

**MANON: You're back?**

**EACH IN TURN: What's happened? Say!**

**BOTH: What storm has gathered? I tremble to hear!**

**LESCAUT: Wait, wait . . . still winded.**

**MANON & DES GRIEUX: I shake with fear!**

**LESCAUT: Running too hard . . .**

**MANON & DES GRIEUX: Are we in trouble? Say!**

**LESCAUT: He has brought charges.**

**MANON: Who?**

**DES GRIEUX: Geronte?**

**LESCAUT: Right.**

**MANON: Oh, no!**

**LESCAUT: The state police are on the way.**

**MANON: Oh, no!**

**DES GRIEUX: Oh, Lord!**

**LESCAUT: So toward the back and down the stairs --  
Come on, start running!  
Down at the barracks I overheard:  
He'll have Manon arrested.  
Run, don't walk! The time is late.**

**The state police are storming the gate,  
Soon closing in. Flee while you can!**

**DES GRIEUX: Curses, curses on the slimy, creepy serpent!  
Oh, the slimy serpent!**

**LESCAUT: Off and away!**

**MANON: Oh, what to do? We have to run!**

**DES GRIEUX: The fight is on.**

**LESCAUT: If you are caught, prepare for the worst:  
Complete loss and total ruin,  
A future barren and bleak -- Deportation!**

**MANON: Oh, no! I'd rather they kill me!**

**LESCAUT: Hurry, be off! Now why do you dither?  
If you delay, you risk losing all.  
Already police are on the way.  
Hurry up! The state police are on the way.**

**MANON: Mercy! Give me a moment . . . just a moment . . .**

**DES GRIEUX: He's got us both on the run.  
Come on! Come on!**

**MANON: How could I bear to leave this necklace?**

**LESCAUT: That man is after you,  
A snake with deadly venom.**

**DES GRIEUX: Hurry up! Come on!**

**MANON: Of course! Good heavens, I'm rushing!  
But you can help me . . .**

**DES GRIEUX: For what?**

**LESCAUT: When he discovers the cage is empty,  
The chase will speedily follow.**

**MANON: (*to Des Grieux*) Lend me a hand . . .**

**LESCAUT: Manon! You putter while police are on the way!**

**DES GRIEUX: Let's go!**

**MANON: Of course! But help me, darling.**

**DES GRIEUX:** What else?

**MANON:** A host of items I'd forgotten.  
Run to the dresser! Empty the drawers!

**DES GRIEUX:** Are you insane? Hurry, Manon!  
Come on! Hurry up!

**LESCAUT:** (*with irony*) Plenty of time! Yes, take your time!  
(*now serious*) Head for the opening past the garden;  
Reaching the road, we'll gather our bearings  
Safe in the shadows under the trees.  
Let them come chasing!

**MANON:** This dazzling jewel that gave such pleasure!  
Cruel to leave all of my treasures!

**DES GRIEUX:** (*fondly*) Leave it, my darling.  
There will be others.  
Really we must  
Head for the door.  
Must I plead, must I implore?

**MANON:** Imprudent, leaving a hoard of gold.  
We later will need it, out in the cold.

**DES GRIEUX:** Your heart alone is all I crave;  
Your love is all I've come to save.

**LESCAUT:** Damn it to hell! Here they are, down below,  
Forming a circle.

**DES GRIEUX:** Manon!

**MANON:** (*terrified*) My love!

**DES GRIEUX:** This way! This way! No, no! Not there!  
Hurry! Hurry!

**MANON:** Which way to go? To run, but where?  
Oh, where? Oh, where?

**LESCAUT:** (*from the window*) The old man's giving the orders,  
And troopers surround the house.  
Police are closing in,  
Entering, climbing up, closing in!

**DES GRIEUX:** Is there no other exit?

**MANON:** There, behind the alcove.

**LESCAUT:** Closer and closer,  
Now climbing up, here they are!

*He pushes Manon and Des Grieux into the alcove, where the exit is evidently blocked. Manon comes rushing out in a frantic attempt to escape. Des Grieux tries to follow, but is restrained by Lescaut. The door bursts opens, and Geronte enters, followed by police.*

**SERGEANT:** No one is leaving!

*Manon in her terror lets the cloak slip. Her jewels scatter onto the floor. Geronte laughs bitterly, sarcastically . . . Des Grieux, sword in hand, is about to charge at him, but again is restrained by Lescaut.*

**LESCAUT:** If they arrest you now, my friend,  
Who'll be there to save Manon?

*At a signal from Geronte, Manon is seized and dragged off. Des Grieux can only look on and cry out in despair.*

**DES GRIEUX:** Oh, Manon! My dear Manon!

### ACT THREE

From the pinnacle of luxury and splendor, Manon has plummeted to the lowest depths of squalor and degradation. The scene is a French seaport town where she is being held behind bars awaiting deportation, along with a dozen other unfortunate ladies, as a thief and a prostitute, following what could mockingly be called a trial, overseen by her accuser. A man with Geronte's wealth and influence need not be overly concerned with the uncertainties of the law. The verdict of guilty was never in doubt.

It must be admitted that up till this point neither of our ill-fated lovers could be characterized as wholly admirable. But it would seem that misfortune has washed away enough of their surface blemishes to reveal a core of solid metal. Des Grieux, unswerving in his fidelity, has stood by Manon throughout her humiliating ordeal. Again he is risking everything in a dangerous attempt to rescue her from the bleak punishment that seems inevitable. Manon, stripped of vanity, totally at the mercy of powers beyond her control, knowing full well that she has brought about her own undoing, has found a measure of wisdom and maturity. Necessity has taught her the value of love and loyalty.

Facing permanent separation, Des Grieux makes a final desperate plea to the captain of the ship that is bearing her away -- a plea that brings the scene to a surprisingly positive, indeed triumphant, conclusion, as they sail off together to the new world.

*A square in the port town of Le Havre. The boat scheduled to embark soon, bearing deportees to the God forsaken shores of America, is partly visible. Also a barracks, with a ground floor window with iron bars. On a corner of the narrow street an oil lamp gives forth a dim light. It is shortly before dawn. The sky gradually gets lighter.*

**DES GRIEUX:** All is lost if we fail . . .

**LESCAUT:** It won't be long.  
I've paid off the sentry  
Who will soon take his post.  
All will be well.

**DES GRIEUX:** This waiting is torture,  
My very heart and soul  
Locked in there with her.

**LESCAUT:** By now informed,  
Manon will hear the signal for escape.  
For backup I rely  
On the help of trusty friends.  
Manon by dawn will be as free as air.

*Covering his face with his cloak, he cautiously approaches the barred window.  
Des Grieux is in the utmost agony.*

**DES GRIEUX:** Corrupted judges, her trial a mockery  
Overseen by her own accuser!  
I implored, I protested;  
I pounded on every door,  
And none of them would open.  
The road from there, heavy of heart, I have followed.  
The road ahead I dare not imagine.

**LESCAUT:** *(seeing the new sentry take up his post)*  
There's our man!

**DES GRIEUX:** At last!

**LESCAUT:** His cooperation we count on.  
The town still soundly sleeping . . .

Now or never!

*Lescaut approaches the barracks and after a hasty sign to the sentinel gives the window a light tap. The window opens, Manon appears, and Des Grieux rushes over to her.*

**DES GRIEUX:** Manon!

**MANON:** Des Grieux!

**LESCAUT:** *(to himself)* The devil take America! Manon stays over here!

**MANON:** You? . . . My dearest! My darling!  
Through shame and grief you still stand by me.

**DES GRIEUX:** Be it hell or heaven,  
I'll not forsake my darling.

**MANON:** A love so true and constant!

**DES GRIEUX:** Upon a long and lonely road I've traveled  
Guided by love, a steady light that never wavered.  
And now so near the goal!

**MANON:** You love me! You love me!  
Soon . . . together . . . forever . . . yours!

*A lamplighter enters humming a tune.*

**DES GRIEUX:** *(to Manon)* Quiet! Quiet!

**LAMPLIGHTER:** *Said Kathleen to the king: "You are old  
And overbold, sir! Your jewels leave me cold.  
I want a husband -- one to have and to hold."  
And the king, merry soul, gave her gold --  
A husband, too, so I've been told!*

**DES GRIEUX:** Be ready. You'll hear a shot.  
Run like the devil to the courtyard gate.  
You'll find Lescaut with men that can be trusted.  
They'll lead you to safety and freedom.

**LAMPLIGHTER:** *(within)* Said Kathleen to the king: "You are old"  
*And the king, merry soul, gave her gold . . .*

**MANON:** Dearest, I tremble for you.  
No matter whether I live or die,

Failure I fear as never before,  
For you could be punished as well as I.

**DES GRIEUX:** *(with passionate fervor)* Manon, you are all that I live for.  
My fear of losing you petrifies me.  
I want you for myself,  
And I want nothing more.  
Your freedom is mine as well.  
So close, but up to you.  
Have courage, and save us both!

**MANON:** So be it! Ask, I shall do it,  
Trusting my love to lead me.

*Manon kisses her hand to Des Grieux and withdraws. A shot is heard.*

**CROWD:** *(within)* A jailbreak! A capture! *(Lescaut rushes in.)*

**LESCAUT:** Manon has been recaptured!  
All is lost, so run for cover!

**DES GRIEUX:** What happened?

**LESCAUT:** You hear the pandemonium. Total fiasco!

**DES GRIEUX:** Then let them kill me.  
Run away? Not likely! *(drawing out a sword)*

**LESCAUT:** Stop! You're insane!

*Manon appears at the window, greatly distressed.*

**MANON:** For God's sake, flee if you love me!  
With tears I implore you. *(She again withdraws.)*

**DES GRIEUX:** Ah, Manon!

**LESCAUT:** *(dragging Des Grieux away)* From bad to worse!

*A crowd, attracted by the confusion and excitement, is buzzing with rumor.*

**CROWD:** *(variously)* You saw it? You heard it?  
It happened, but what? How?  
A riot? Rebellion?  
A woman escaping . . . Desperadoes!  
A riot? Rebellion? A plot?  
The trouble began with a shot.  
The work of a gang, like as not.

And what a scuffle, a struggle before she was caught . . .  
Was somebody shot?  
Door unguarded, lock untested . . .  
Ended soon as it got started . . .  
Run down and rearrested.

*A sergeant and the ship's captain appear. The sergeant orders the crowd to stand back for the roll call.*

**SERGEANT:** Make way! Get a move on!

**CAPTAIN:** The ship, sir, is ready.  
Proceed with the roll call.

**CROWD:** Exciting! Exciting! The roll call about to begin.

*The roll call proceeds. The convicted women cross one at a time as the sergeant calls their names and the Captain marks them down in a book.*

**SERGEANT:** *Rosetta!*

**CROWD:** Ha! The hussy! But a honey.

**SERGEANT:** *Madelon!*

**CROWD:** Ah! She had it coming.  
Not the time for laughter.

**SERGEANT:** *Manon!*

**CROWD:** Who's that? A fallen angel.  
So gentle, so lovely.

*Manon crosses slowly, her eyes fixed on the ground. Lescaut addresses a small group of men, all of them gazing with fascination on Manon.*

**LESCAUT:** A sad, sorry story.

**MEN:** Seduction? Betrayal?

**OTHERS:** A sister, a daughter.

**LESCAUT:** Abducted and torn from the arms  
Of the sterling young man she adored.

**MEN:** I never! My word! Torn from her lover?

**LESCAUT:** Her wedding prevented

By a wealthy but loathsome old lecher.

**MEN:** The things people do! It's happened before.

**LESCAUT:** He seizes the bride. His lust satisfied,  
She's quickly discarded.  
Ruined, for one day of pleasure.

**MEN:** Makes you wonder.  
Oh, this world! Oh, this world!  
So wicked you want to die.

*During these exchanges Des Grieux has cautiously approached Manon who addresses him passionately after a cry of joy.*

**MANON:** My love! Our time has nearly run out.  
The happy days are over,  
And they will never, never return.  
A final message, my darling:  
Swallow your pride;  
Go home to your grieving father.  
Farewell, my love, farewell!  
Try to forget Manon.

**DES GRIEUX:** Ah, helpless and wretched,  
I watch while you suffer,  
With only tears to offer.  
Ah! Ah! No balm to lessen  
The pain of parting.

**MANON:** Granted, my love was less than perfect --  
My flaws have cost you dearly,  
But out of love you forgave.  
O love rediscovered! Farewell forever.

*Throughout, the roll call has continued.*

**SERGEANT:** *Ninetta!*

**CROWD:** The diva!

**SERGEANT:** *Caton!*

**CROWD:** Look at her!

**SERGEANT:** *Regina!*

**CROWD:** The strutting peacock! The way I like 'em!  
Now not so lofty,  
She'll not long be laughing.

**SERGEANT:** *Claretta!*

**CROWD:** Ha, ha! The goddess!

**LESCAUT:** (*pointing out Des Grieux*)  
You see that young man so pale and sad  
Standing near her?  
They'll never get married now.  
She leaves in despair, deported!

**MEN:** It moves one to tears. My, my!

**CROWD:** A fun-loving party!

**SERGEANT:** *Violetta!*

**CROWD:** The siren!

**MANON:** Home with your father,  
You will some day love again.  
Life will go on, life will go on!  
You must forget Manon.  
Goodbye, my love.

**DES GRIEUX:** That love I used to feel for all humanity --  
Forever gone, forever turned to hate and anger.

**LESCAUT:** Determined to save her, his efforts are thwarted;  
She stands here convicted, disgraced, now deported.

**SERGEANT:** *Nerina!*

**CROWD:** Make way for the Duchess! A royal reception!  
A fun-loving party.

**SERGEANT:** *Elisa! Ninon! Giorgetta!*

**CROWD:** Ill-fated! Poor man! Appalling! My, my! (*general laughter*)  
You just want to cry,  
To throw up your hands, break down and cry.  
Tomorrow, more yet . . .

**SERGEANT:** (*marshalling the women*) Line up! Step forward. Now march!

*Seeing Manon with Des Grieux, he seizes her roughly and pushes her after the others. (to Des Grieux) You still are here? Away with you!*

*Des Grieux, unable to control himself, grabs Manon from the sergeant's hands.*

**DES GRIEUX:** I've got her!

**SERGEANT:** Off!

**CROWD:** (*egged on by Lescaut*) Nice going!

**DES GRIEUX:** I'll kill you if you touch her!  
Manon, hold on to me.

**CROWD:** Good work! Bravo!

**CAPTAIN:** (*returning*) What's this?

**DES GRIEUX:** (*in desperation*) One step and I will kill you!  
While I still live,  
She'll not be torn away from me. No, no!  
So I'm mad!

You take on board my soul, my center,  
Leaving a cold, empty desert  
Endlessly stretching before me.  
How could I not go mad?

But hear me!  
Hire me out as a menial,  
Lowest among the lowly,  
And I'll be overjoyed.  
Let me serve you.  
Out of desperate need I implore you!  
Every breath in my body I offer unstinting,  
But take me along.  
I beg you, allow me to sail  
And I shall serve you well.

*Touched by this passionate plea, the Captain has a bluff but kind reply.*

**CAPTAIN:** To populate America  
Fellow wants to be deported . . .  
I'd say . . . I'd say . . . What the hell?  
Come, matey, time we started!

*Des Grieux gives a cry of joy. Manon turns, grasps the situation, and radiant also with joy, stretches out her arms to him. He rushes to embrace her. Lescaut watches from a distance, shakes his head with skepticism, and goes off.*

## ACT FOUR

Any sense of triumph has quickly evaporated. The scene is a desolate wasteland in America, not yet the United States, far from any sign of civilization, and utterly bereft of the basic means of survival. Though called Louisiana, at this point in history that could mean almost any place in the vast unexplored territory west of the Appalachians. The deported lovers have again been forced to flee, this time from the penal colony to which they had been consigned, where Manon was again at the mercy of lustful predators, a lamb surrounded by wolves. Forced to flee, but where to go? After trudging aimlessly for who knows how long through barren wilderness that provides not even a drop of water, Manon is feverish and near collapse. Valiantly urging her to struggle onward, Des Grieux tells her that the seemingly endless dusty path they have followed must lead somewhere, but he is hiding the truth. There is no somewhere -- only the heat of the sun, the chill of night, and an endless blank horizon.

While Des Grieux goes searching for food and water and as the light wanes, Manon, alone and helpless in the desert, mortally ill yet terrified of death, haunted by her own past misdeeds and betrayals, gives in to total despair. Des Grieux returns in time to take her in his arms, where she dies, finally at peace and strangely happy.

*A desolate Louisiana landscape that stretches far. The sky is overcast; night is approaching. In tattered clothing, Des Grieux and Manon enter, pale and exhausted, Manon leaning heavily on Des Grieux.*

**DES GRIEUX:** Hold on to me, my darling.  
You are sick and exhausted.  
The path so dry and dusty,  
So desolate and dreary,  
Is bound to take us somewhere . . .

**MANON:** Press onward . . . We must go on.  
Dark will delay our flight to freedom.

**DES GRIEUX:** Lean on my shoulder.

**MANON:** Over the barren waste the breezes wander,  
The day slowly fading . . .  
So onward! . . . Press onward . . . No!

*She falls. Des Grieux cries out in alarm.*

**DES GRIEUX: Manon!**

**MANON: Forgive me. Go on without me . . .**  
**You are strong; you will manage.**  
*(spoken)* **Go on . . . I cannot . . . follow.**

**DES GRIEUX: You're in pain?**

**MANON: Excruciating. No, how childish!**  
**Self-indulgent, I spoke without thinking.**  
**You must not worry.**  
**If I rest for a moment, a moment only . . .**  
**Draw close, my darling - -**  
**One moment is all I need . . .** *(She faints.)*

**DES GRIEUX: Manon, tell me you hear.**  
**Reply, if only a whisper.**  
**Open, open those eyes so tender.**  
**Your lover calls you!**  
**Let my caresses revive you,**  
**My kiss again console you.**  
**Ah, Manon! For me, give one little sign.**  
**Silent . . . My God, my God!**  
*(he touches her forehead.)*  
**A malevolent fever . . .**  
**If I only could halt**  
**The shadows drawing closer!**  
**A desolate forewarning of total darkness . . .**  
**I feel no stir of life . . .**  
**Silent! Manon, have you no answer?**

*(Manon revives slowly as Des Grieux lifts her from the ground.)*

**MANON: I heard you weeping, I heard you calling.**  
**I felt your tears upon me**  
**That told me you were there,**  
**Yes, there when you most were needed.**  
**Ah! Your tears**  
**That let me know you still were there.**

**DES GRIEUX: For always, my Manon!**

**MANON: Now more than ever, my love,**

**I need your courage.**

**DES GRIEUX: Ah, Manon! Now as always. My dear Manon!**

**MANON: My throat is parched for water . . .  
So dry, so thirsty . . . some water!**

**DES GRIEUX: If only blood, my own blood, could save you!**

*(He looks around in dismay, then runs to the back to peer into the distant horizon. He returns despondently.)*

**DES GRIEUX: There's nothing, nothing! . . .  
Dry as a desert, not a trace of water,  
A blank horizon.  
O God to whom I've prayed  
Since the start of time remembered,  
Hear me now, O father, help us!**

**MANON: Yes . . . He will guide us!  
You must go searching.  
Better I stay behind.  
You alone will explore for food and shelter;  
Search out, search out this unforgiving land.  
Go with good cheer, and within a few hours,  
You will restore me with news of success.**

*Des Grieux finds a resting place for Manon, and remains for a while undecided. Slowly walking away, he turns once more to gaze upon her in despair. With sudden resolve, he then rushes off. The sky darkens. Manon, alone, is distraught with terror, fever and fatigue.*

**MANON: Worn out . . . alone, and left in torment . . .  
Around me, desolation . . .  
I fear the setting sun,  
The coming darkness, the encroaching shadows . . .  
I die alone in this wasteland of desert . . .**

**Cruel but just, ah!  
I, too vain, too flighty,  
Now terrified of shadows . . .  
Ah, but I don't want to die!  
I'm not ready yet to die!  
Slowly the curtain closes . . .**

**Here I arrived, believing I had found a haven,**

A place of welcome  
Where the door stood open.  
Instead, my accursed beauty  
Stirred up the storms of passion  
From which again I'm forced to flee.

My shameful past of lies and deceit  
Is reawakened,  
And like a vengeful ghost  
Returns to accuse me.  
Ah! The vultures circle round me!

Now all is over . . .  
I shall find peace  
Only in the sleep of death.  
No! Don't let me die!  
I don't want to die!  
I am not ready yet to die!  
My love, where are you?

*Des Grieux rushes in. Manon falls into his arms.*

Held in your arms one last time,  
I can go bravely . . .  
*(forcing a hopeful smile)* What news, what message of hope  
Do you bring me?

**DES GRIEUX:** I have found nothing --  
Not a sign of shelter, no sign of life.  
Instead, a merciless, bleak horizon.

**MANON:** Deadly shadows hang over me . . .  
The night is slowly falling . . .

**DES GRIEUX:** Burning up with a fever,  
Even you become morbid.  
Lay your head on my shoulder here;  
You'll be yourself again.

**MANON:** Near death, how much I love you!  
Now as my breath grows fainter  
My words are few.  
I've only enough left to say I love you --  
A love that is forever,  
A love born out of despair,  
Ripened by suffering,

Now joyful, profound and eternal.  
Love eternal! Love eternal!

*She starts to fall as Des Grieux tries to hold her up. He touches her cheek and cries out in alarm.*

DES GRIEUX: The cold chill of death!  
No tiniest hope to cling to.

MANON: You waste our time in weeping!  
We have so little left . . .  
Please, no tears, but kisses,  
Before the tiny spark vanishes.

DES GRIEUX: *(with utmost fervor)* You showed me the road to rapture,  
The fire of love eternal!

MANON: Now gasping for fuel,  
Dwindling, it flickers and dies.

DES GRIEUX: Manon!

MANON: *(growing steadily weaker)* I hear you somewhere . . . But where?  
Come close, come closer yet . . . the way I like it . . .  
Oh, yes! Oh, yes! And kiss me!  
Close to your heart  
I am so happy . . . Oh, no! *(a sudden spasm of pain)*

DES GRIEUX: *(in despair)* Why, why go on?  
My darling, I'll die with you.

MANON: *(with a supreme effort)* You must not!  
Goodbye now . . . Suddenly colder . . . I shiver . . .

*(with ineffable tenderness)* So much in love, we had so much fun.  
Remember? Way back . . .  
You said my cheeks were so round and rosy . . .  
And now the light goes out . . .

DES GRIEUX: My God!

MANON: *(her voice nearly gone)* My transgressions  
In time will be forgotten,  
But my love forever . . . will live . . . *(She dies.)*

*(Des Grieux, frantic with grief, bursts into tears and falls senseless on Manon's lifeless body.)*

**The End**