

Manon Lescaut

by Giacomo Puccini

Cast

MANON LESCAUT (soprano)
LESCAUT, her brother, Sergeant of the Royal Guards (baritone)
IL CAVALIERE DES GRIEUX, a student (tenor)
GERONTE DI RAVOIR, Treasurer-General (bass)
EDMONDO, a student (tenor)
INNKEEPER (bass)
SINGER (mezzo-soprano)
DANCING-MASTER (tenor)
LAMPLIGHTER (tenor)
SERGEANT OF THE ROYAL ARCHERS (bass)
NAVAL CAPTAIN (bass)
HAIRDRESSER (silent)
Singers, old beaux and abbés, girls, townfolk, students, courtesans, archers, sailors

ACT ONE

AT AMIENS

A large square near the Paris Gate.

(On the right, an avenue. On the left, an inn with a portico under which tables are laid out. A small outside staircase leads to the first floor of the inn. Students, townspeople and soldiers stroll about the square or stand talking in groups. Others sit at the tables drinking or playing cards.)

EDMONDO

(in a knot of fellow students)
Hail, gentle evening descending
with your train of zephyrs and stars;
hail, so dear to poets and lovers —

STUDENTS

Ha ha ha!
And to thieves and drunks!
We have cut short your madrigal!

EDMONDO

And I thank you.
Here gaily flocking up the avenue
come our fresh, laughing and pretty
working-girls.

STUDENTS

Now the avenue is brightening up.

EDMONDO

I'll devise a madrigal,
artful, bold and merry.
They come flocking,
our young working girls —

STUDENTS

Fresh, laughing and pretty.

EDMONDO

I'll devise a madrigal, artful and merry,
and may my Muse excel in gallantry!
(to some of the girls)
Youth is our name,
Hope is our goddess;
indomitable courage
drags us by the hair.

STUDENTS

Youth is our name!
Hope is our goddess;
indomitable courage
drags us by the hair.
Divine ecstasy!
Now, you laughing girls
made for love, surrender your hearts.

GIRLS

A wave of perfume drifts through the air,
the swallows fly away
and the sunlight dies.

STUDENTS, then TOWNSPEOPLE

Give your lips, give your hearts
to valiant youth.

GIRLS

This is the hour of day-dreams
when hope struggles with sadness.
(Des Grieux enters, dressed as a student.)

STUDENTS

Here is Des Grieux!

EDMONDO *(to Des Grieux)*

Come and join us, friend, and laugh
and yield to the urge of strange adventure.
What? No reply? Why?
Perhaps for some unattainable lady
a sharp pang of love pierces you?

DES GRIEUX

Love? Love?
Of that tragedy, or rather farce,
I know nothing!
*(Edmondo and some of the students talk to Des
Grieux. Others court the girls at the entrance to
the avenue.)*

STUDENTS

Rubbish! Cautiously, blithely, you are
concealing
mysterious conquests.

DES GRIEUX

Friends, you do me too much honor.

EDMONDO and STUDENTS

By jove, we've guessed it, friend.
You're worried over a snub.

DES GRIEUX

No, not yet,
but if it pleases you I'll humor you —
and at once!
(He approaches a group of girls.)
Among you, dark and fair beauties,

is there hiding a pretty, charming girl
with rosy lips who waits for me?
Is it you, fair star? Tell me!
Show me my destiny
and the divine, ardent face
which shall capture my love,
which I shall gaze upon and adore eternally!
(Edmondo and the other students laugh.)
Among you, dark and fair beauties, etc.
Is it you, slender brunette? Tell me!

EDMONDO and STUDENTS

Bravo! Bravo!

EDMONDO

Take note, companions,
let no-one complain about him anymore!

STUDENTS, GIRLS, TOWNSPEOPLE

Bravo!

Let's celebrate the evening
as is our custom.

Let the glasses ring
with merry music in the toasts
and let the ardent enchantment
of pleasure sweep us away!
Ah! Let's celebrate!
Dances, toasts, mad caprices,
the procession of pleasure
now advances along the streets,
and night will reign;
shining and impetuous,
it is a poem of splendor:
let its light and passion
conquer all.

Shining and impetuous, etc.
(A postillions horn is heard.)

Here comes the coach from Arras!
*(The coach stops outside the inn and the crowd
watches the passengers alight. First Lescaut,
then Geronte who helps Manon to the ground.)*
Let's see them getting out!
Elegant travelers — dandies!

STUDENTS *(admiring Manon)*

Who wouldn't give that lovely girl
a tender salute of welcome?

LESCAUT

Ho there! Innkeeper!

(to Geronte)

Sir, you are a model of courtesy.
Ho, there! Innkeeper!

INNKEEPER

(rushing up, followed by servants)
Here I am!

DES GRIEUX

(gazing at Manon)
Heavens, how beautiful she is!

GERONTE

(to the landlord)
Tonight, friend, I shall stay here.
(to Lescaut)
Your pardon!
(to the innkeeper)
Landlord, see to my luggage.

INNKEEPER

Very well, sir.
(He instructs the servants to unload the baggage, then turns to Geronte and Lescaut.)
Pray follow me.
(He goes up the steps followed by Geronte and Lescaut, who motions to Manon to wait for him.)

DES GRIEUX

(to Manon)
Gentle lady accept my plea:
let those sweet lips tell me your name.

MANON

My name is Manon Lescaut.

DES GRIEUX

Pardon my words,
but I am drawn to you
by some mysterious fascination.
I even seem to have seen you before,
and my heart throbs with strange emotions.
Pardon my words!
When do you leave?

MANON

I leave at dawn tomorrow.
A convent awaits me.

DES GRIEUX

And in your face
the springtime blooms forth!
O fair one, what harsh fate dogs you?

MANON

My fate is this:
my father's firm wish.

DES GRIEUX

Oh, how lovely you are!
Ah, no! It is not a sterile
convent that shall covet you! No!
On your destiny another star is shining.

MANON

My star is sinking!

DES GRIEUX

We cannot talk now.
Come back soon,
and conspiring against fate
we shall triumph.

MANON

So much pity lies in your words!
I want to remember you!
What is your name?

DES GRIEUX

I am René des Grieux.

LESCAUT

(from the inn)
Manon!

MANON

I must leave you.
(turning towards the inn)
I'm coming!
(to Des Grieux)
My brother is calling me.

DES GRIEUX

You'll return?

MANON

No, I cannot! Leave me, please!

DES GRIEUX

O sweet one, I beg.

MANON

You have won me over.

When darkness falls!

(She stops speaking as she sees Lescaut on the balcony of the inn and hurries to join him.)

DES GRIEUX

Never have I seen such a woman!

To tell her: I love you,

awakens my heart to new life.

“My name is Manon Lescaut.”

How those fragrant words

linger in my spirit

and caress hidden chords.

O gentle murmur, pray never cease! *etc.*

“My name is Manon Lescaut.”

O gentle murmur, pray never cease!

(Edmondo and the students who have been watching Des Grieux crowd around him.)

EDMONDO and STUDENTS

Your luck reassures us.

O worthy devotee of Cupid,

the fair and divine angel

has come from heaven for your delight, *etc.*

(Des Grieux leaves in a huff.)

He’s off. Then he must be in love!

(Edmondo and the students cross to the inn and join a group of girls.)

STUDENTS

Come, sweet maids!

Bring us good fortune.

GIRLS

Is she fair or is she dark,

the goddess who guides your game?

GERONTE

So your sister is taking the veil?

LESCAUT

On the bad advice of my family.

GERONTE

I take it that you have different ideas?

LESCAUT

Exactly, exactly.

I have more sense than might appear, though an unsavory reputation surrounds my exploits.

But I know life, maybe too well.

Paris is a very great school.

Complainingly, I perform my duty

as my sister’s mentor,

like a true soldier.

GIRLS

Your friends faithful for the moment,

do you want a kiss, a sigh, from us?

Ah, we’ll crown the victor —

just ask for a kiss, a sigh!

STUDENTS

Whoever loses, whoever wins,

we all long for you, sweet maids.

LESCAUT

I simply say that in this world

no misfortune befalls us

without some compensation.

And what may your name be, sir?

GERONTE

Geronte di Ravoir.

STUDENTS

Both he who weeps and he who laughs,

mischance casts us down and mocks us;

but the mad eternal song

of love joyfully bursts forth, *etc.*

GIRLS

We’ll crown the victor,

and the heart of the vanquished

shrouded in gloom

shall rest in the warm aura of soft caresses,

forgetting shame and pain. *etc.*

EDMONDO *(to one of the girls)*

Farewell, my star, farewell, my blossom, pretty sister of the god of love.

My sighs enfold you

and for a day do not deceive me.

(The girl leaves him. Seeing Geronte and Lescaut talking, he decides to eavesdrop.)

LESCAUT

Are you travelling for pleasure?

GERONTE

No, duty:

the collection of taxes for my
purse, by the King's grace.

LESCAU

(to himself)

What a crock of gold!

GERONTE

Your sister does not seem happy either.

LESCAUT

Imagine! Eighteen years old!
So many dreams and hopes!

GERONTE

I understand. Poor child!

We must console her.

Will you join me tonight for supper?

LESCAUT

Honored! Honored!

(He points to the inn, offering a drink.)

Meanwhile, allow me —

GERONTE

Excuse me, wait for a moment

I must give some instructions to the landlord.

*(Lescaut bows and Geronte goes off. It begins to
get dark. Servants bring lamps and candles from
the inn for the gamblers' tables.)*

TOWNSPEOPLE

An ace — a jack.

STUDENTS

A three!

ALL

What a cursed game!

LESCAUT *(watching the players)*

They're gambling! Oh, if only I too
could be lucky enough to win!

ALL

Stakes! Cards! An ace!

LESCAUT

*(standing behind one of the players and
studying his hand)*

An ace? My good sir, a jack!

You're wrong, you're wrong!

ALL

That's right! A jack! You're a master!

LESCAUT

You're joking! An amateur.

(He sits down and takes a hand of cards.

*Geronte reappears and seeing Lescaut
engrossed in the game calls the innkeeper.)*

GERONTE

Friend, I pay in advance and dispense
with the talk!

A coach and horses to drive
like the wind — in an hour!

INNKEEPER

Yes, sir!

GERONTE

Behind the inn, in an hour — understand?

A man and a young girl will be there —
and away like the wind, away to Paris.

And remember that silence is golden.

INNKEEPER

I worship gold.

GERONTE

Good, good. Worship it and obey.

(giving him a purse)

Now tell me:

is this the only way out of the inn?

GERONTE

There *is* another.

GERONTE

Show me where it is.

(They leave.)

GIRLS *(from the inn)*

Ask for a kiss, a sigh!

CARD-PLAYERS

(to Lescaut)

We invite you to hold the bank!

LESCAUT

Cards!

EDMONDO

(after overhearing the exchange between Geronte and the landlord)

You old lady-killer,

what a powdered Pluto you are!

But maybe your Proserpina

will have the strength to resist you?

(Des Grieux enters.)

(To Des Grieux)

Chevalier, you are foiled!

DES GRIEUX *(in surprise)*

What do you mean?

EDMONDO

That flower which

smelt so sweetly just now,

torn from its stem, poor flower,

will shortly fade away!

Your damsel, your dove is flying.

The postilion will sound his horn.

Come take heart;

an old man is abducting her!

DES GRIEUX

Truly?

EDMONDO

You turn pale?

By God, you're serious!

DES GRIEUX

I'm waiting for her here, do you understand?

EDMONDO

We are well placed, then!

DES GRIEUX

Help me!

EDMONDO

Help you? Prevent them leaving?

Let's try! Listen. Maybe I can help you.

The soldier over there is hooked by the game.

DES GRIEUX

And the old man?

EDMONDO

The old man? Oh, he'll have to reckon with me!

(He goes over to the card-players, whispers to several of them, and then departs. The game finishes and Lescaut drinks with the students.

Manon appears at the top of the stairs, looks around, and comes down to rejoin Des Grieux.)

MANON

You see? I am true to my word.

You asked me to return so fervently that I have come.

But I think it would be better

not to see you again,

and I should have politely

refused your entreaty.

DES GRIEUX

Oh, how grave your words are!

The youth radiant in your face

does not usually reason thus;

this melancholy disdain

ill matches the smile

that shines from your eyes!

MANON

Yet happy, so happy I once was!

Our quiet little home rang

with carefree laughter

and with my merry friends

I often went dancing!

But the heyday of gaiety has fled!

DES GRIEUX

In the brilliant depths of your eyes

the desire for love sparkles —

love now speaks to you!

Ah, give your sweet lips and your heart

to the waves of a new enchantment.

I love you! I love you!

Make this moment

eternal and infinite!

MANON

I am but a poor girl,
no glow of beauty shines upon my face,
my destiny is ruled by sorrow.

DES GRIEUX

Love will conquer sorrow!
Your beauty will grant you
a prosperous future.
O sweet creature, ah, my infinite desire!

MANON

It's not true, it's not true!
Ah, tender dream, my infinite desire!

LESCAUT

(rising tipsily and banging on the table)
Is there no more wine?
What? Is the cask empty?
(The students make him sit down, and fill his glass. At the sound of Lescaut's voice Manon turns to re-enter the inn but Des Grieux restrains her.)

DES GRIEUX

I beg you, listen to me!
A vile outrage threatens you,
an abduction!
A bold rake,
the old man who arrived with you,
has laid a plot against you.

MANON

What are you saying?

DES GRIEUX

The truth!

EDMONDO

(coming up to the pair)
The deed is done, the carriage is ready.
What a colossal joke!
Quick! Off with you —

MANON

What? Elope?

DES GRIEUX

Let's elope! Let's elope!
Let your abductor be another.

MANON

Ah! No! You're taking me away?

DES GRIEUX

No, no! Love is taking you away!

MANON

Ah, no!

DES GRIEUX

I implore you!

EDMONDO

Hurry, be off, children!

DES GRIEUX

Ah, let us fly, let us fly!
Manon, I implore you — let us escape!

MANON

No! No! No! No!

EDMONDO

Hurry! Hurry!

DES GRIEUX

Ah, Manon, I implore you,
ah, let us fly, I implore you!
Ah! Let us flee!

MANON

I'll go with you!

EDMONDO

Oh, what a crazy pair!
(He give Des Grieux his cloak to cover his face, then all three run off behind the inn. Geronte enters and notices with satisfaction that Lescaut is still occupied at cards.)

GERONTE

Now's the time to seduce the sister!
Come, courage now!
The sergeant is intent on the game.
Let him stay there!
(to the innkeeper)
Hey, I say, supper is ready?

INNKEEPER

Yes, Excellency!

GERONTE

Then tell the young lady that —

EDMONDO

(to Geronte)

Excellency, look there!

She has slipped away with a student.

GERONTE

(deeply agitated, hurrying over to Lescaut)

They have kidnapped her!

LESCAUT *(still playing)*

Who?

GERONTE

Your sister!

LESCAUT

A thousand bombs!

GERONTE

Let's follow them! It's a student!

Let's go after them!

LESCAUT

That's useless. Let's ponder.

Do you have horses ready?

(Geronte shakes his head.)

The deed's done.

To despair is stupid.

I see Manon with her charming graces
has roused in you a father's affection.

GERONTE

Quite so.

LESCAUT

I know what you mean —

As a dutiful son

I'll give you some excellent advice:

Paris! Manon is there.

Manon is not really lost.

But a student's purse
will soon be empty.

Manon does not want poverty,

Manon will gratefully accept
a palace and quit her student.

You will be as a father
to a perfect daughter,

and I, sir, will complete the family.

What the deuce!

One must be calm — philosophical.

EDMONDO and STUDENTS

Fluttering breezes

breathing among scarlet flowers and lilies,

oh tell I faith of strange

and harsh adventure!

Parched lips and a full cup —

wanted to drink and greedily sucked.

LESCAUT

Here is your hat!

And tomorrow we'll be on our way!

As I was saying:

To supper — give me your arm!

We must be equal to the occasion...

because...

(They disappear into the inn.)

STUDENTS

Fluttering breezes, *etc.*

To the aged fox

the fresh and velvety grape

will always taste sour.

*(They laugh derisively and when Lescaut
returns to threaten them, they scatter, highly
amused by the situation.)*

ACT TWO

In Paris

*An elegant room in Geronte's house. At the back
two glass doors. On the right rich curtains
conceal an alcove. On the left by the window, a
luxuriously appointed dressing-table at which
Manon is sitting wrapped in a white dressing-
gown, while a hairdresser and two assistants are
busy putting the finishing touches to her coiffure.*

MANON

(looking at herself in the mirror)

This curl is rather willful!

(to the hairdresser)

The curlin-tongs, quickly.

*(The hairdresser hurries to get the iron and sets
to work on the rebellious curl.)*

Now the powder!
 Make the eyebrows a little severe!
 The ceruse!
(pleased with the effect)
 Let my eyes flash like darts!
 Bring the jonquil!

LESCAUT *(entering)*
 Good morning, little sister!

MANON *(to the hairdresser)*
 The rouge and the pomade!

LESCAUT
 This morning you seem a trifle sulky.

MANON
 Sulky? Why?

LESCAUT
 No? So much the better!
 Where's Geronte?
 Has he left your boudoir already?

MANON
(to the hairdresser)
 And now a beauty-spot!
(The hairdresser fetches the box containing the patches. Manon is undecided which to choose.)

LESCAUT
 The saucy one! The roguish one!
 No? The flirtatious one?

MANON
 I don't know.
 Oh well, two beauty-spots!
 "The Assassin" to set off the eye
 and "the Voluptuary" near the lips.
(The hairdresser carries out her orders and then removes the dressing-gown. Manon appears richly and elegantly dressed. The coiffeur bows and leaves with his assistants.)

LESCAUT
(scrutinizing Manon)
 Ah, what a delightful ensemble!
 You're gorgeous and radiant!
 I'm elated! And with good reason!
 Mine is the glory for saving

you from the love of a student.
 When you fled, there at Amiens,
 I never abandoned hope!
 There I saw your destiny!
 There the magic splendor
 of these rooms flashed in my mind.
 I have found you again!
 A mean little house
 was your dwelling;
 you had kisses and no money!
 He's a fine young man, that Des Grieux,
 but, alas, he's not a Treasurer-General
 so it was natural that you should
 abandon that humble abode for a golden palace.

MANON
 But tell me —

LESCAUT
 What do you wish to say?

MANON
 Nothing!

LESCAUT
 Nothing? Really?

MANON
 I wanted to ask —

LESCAUT
 I'll answer you!

MANON
 You'll answer?

LESCAUT
 I understand!
 In your eyes I detect a desire.
 If Geronte should suspect it!

MANON
 It's true! You've guessed it.

LESCAUT
 Do you long for news of him?

MANON
 It's true, it's true! I left him
 without a word of farewell, without a kiss!

(She looks around and her gaze falls upon the alcove.)

In those soft lace hangings,
in that gilt alcove
there is a silence, a mortal chill —
there is a silence,
a coldness that turns me to ice!
And I who was accustomed
to a voluptuous caress
of ardent lips and passionate arms
now have something quite different.
Oh, my humble dwelling,
you again appear before me —
cheerful, secluded, white-walled,
like a sweet dream of peace and love!

LESCAUT

Since you wish to know,
Des Grieux, (as Geronte once was),
is a great friend of mine.
He keeps on pestering me:
“Where’s Manon?
Where has she gone? With whom?
To the north? The east? The south?”
I reply: “I don’t know!”
At last I’ve convinced him!

MANON

He has forgotten me?

LESCAUT

No, no! But by winning money
he may discover the way that leads to you!
Now he is mending his fortunes!
I’ve introduced him to gambling! He’ll win!

MANON

(to herself)

(For me you are striving,
for me, the wretch who deserted you,
who cost you so much grief!
Ah, come, give me back the past,
the fleeting hours, your passionate caresses!
Ah, give me back the kisses,
your burning kisses,
that rapture which once gladdened me!
Ah, come! Am I beautiful? Come!
Ah, come, I can bear it no longer!)

LESCAUT

The old card-table, for us, is just like
a universal coffer!

Launched and trained by me,
he’ll fleece everyone to the buff!
But meanwhile in the torment of long struggles
day and night
he lives unconscious of his madness,
and at the gaming table asks where you are!
He’ll win! He’ll win!
(Manon reflects, then studies herself in the mirror.)

MANON

Really now, doesn’t this gown
suit me marvelously?

LESCAUT

Like a glove!

MANON

And my wig?

LESCAUT

Wonderful!

MANON

And my corsage?

LESCAUT

Beautiful!

(A group of singers carrying sheets of music enters. They bow to Manon and stand to one side.)

(softly, to Manon)

Who are these ugly mugs?
Quacks or apothecaries?

MANON

They’re musicians!
Geronte writes madrigals!

SINGER

On the mountain-top you roam,
O Chloris;
your lips are two blossoms,
and your eyes are a fountain.

SINGERS

Alas! Alas! Philenus expires at your feet!

SINGER

You loosen the wonder
of your hair to the wind,
and your little bare
white breast is a lily.

SINGERS

You are Chloris, Manon
and Geronte is transformed into Philenus!
Philenus is playing;
his pipes are murmuring: "Have pity!"
The echo sighs: "Have pity!"
Philenus is weeping:
"Chloris have you no heart?
See, Philenus already swoons!"
No! To that sweet, plaintive piping
Chloris has never said No!

MANON

(bored, giving Lescaut a purse)
Pay those people!

LESCAUT

(pocketing the purse)
What! And insult art?
(to the musicians)
I bid you adieu, in the name of Glory!
*(As the musicians bow and leave, in an
anteroom seen through the glass doors at the
back Geronte is receiving his guests.)*

MANON

(to Lescaut)
Madrigals! Dancing! And then music!
They are all lovely things! But I am so bored!
*(A string quartet enter, take up their position at
the rear, and begin to tune their instruments.
Manon rises and goes to meet Geronte, ushering
in his friends and the dancing master.)*

LESCAUT

(to himself)
A little lady who is bored
is a frightening thing!
I'm away to Des Grieux!
In masterly fashion I'll arrange events!

*(He leaves unobserved, as Geronte's guests pay
their respects to Manon.)*

DANCING MASTER

(advancing, and offering Manon his hand)
I beg you, mademoiselle,
hold yourself erect — so —
excellent, that's the style!
Now bring the whole body forward!
So!
I entreat you — in time!

GERONTE

Oh, charming dancer!

MANON

A little awkward.

DANCING MASTER

I beseech you, do not
heed whispered praise.
Dancing is a serious matter!

GENTLEMEN and ABBÉS

(softly, to Geronte)
Hush! Control yourself like us;
admire in silence,
in silence adore —
it's a serious matter.

DANCING MASTER

(to Manon)
To the left! To the right!
A curtsy! Careful!
The lorgnette!

GERONTE

A perfect minuet.

GENTLEMEN and ABBÉS

What languor in her glance!
What sweetness, what tenderness!
She is too lovely — like a star!
What innocence! What a treasure!
That mouth — ripe for kisses!
If she smiles she seems like a star!

GERONTE

She is too lovely!

I cannot find the words —
the words to sing her praises!

MANON

Murmured golden praises
now throb around me;
come, curb your chorus of adulation! Ah!
Murmured golden praises
now throb around me!

GERONTE

You make me lovesick!

MANON

Come, curb your chorus of adulation!

GERONTE

You make me lovesick,
you make me delirious!

GENTLEMEN and ABBÉS

You are the goddess of the day!
She is queen of the night!
*(The dancing master shows signs of
impatience.)*

MANON

The good dancing master deplores this chatter.
If you flatter me
I shall not become the divine dancer
that your optimistic fancy
imagines me already to be.

DANCING MASTER

A partner —

GERONTE

(rising hastily)
Here I am!

GENTLEMEN and ABBÉS

Excellent! What a fine couple!
Hurrah for the fortunate lovers!
Just like Mercury and Venus!
Oh, here happiness,
with love and wealth,
charmingly prospers!

MANON

The hour, O Thyrus, is attractive and lovely,

the day smiles, smiles about
your faithful little shepherdess.
She sighs for you, dies for you.
But you appear and in a trice
she becomes joyful and alive!
Ah, see the sky!
How serene it is over the miracle of love!

GENTLEMEN and ABBÉS

You are the miracle!
You are love! Ah! Love, *etc.*

GERONTE

(interrupting)
Gallantry is all very well,
but you forget that it is late.
A merry throng is surging along the esplanade.

GENTLEMEN and ABBÉS

How time flies here!

GERONTE

I know from experience.

(to Manon)

You, my shining joy,
promised to accompany us;
we will go ahead.

MANON

Only a brief moment I ask you;
waiting for me will be easy
in the gilded beau-monde.

GENTLEMEN and ABBÉS

Waiting is always tedious.

GERONTE

Do not prolong the suffering
of us poor souls in suspense.
*(Kissing Manon's hand, the guests, bowing,
retire. The dancing master and the musicians
also leave.)*
I'll order the sedan-chair.
Farewell, my fair goddess.
(He departs.)

MANON

(admiring herself in the mirror)
Oh, I shall be the most beautiful!

(She picks up her cloak. Hearing someone approaching, she expects it to be a servant.)

Is the sedan-chair here?

(Instead Des Grieux appears at the door.

Manon runs to him.)

You, you, my love! You?

Ah, my supreme love! Oh, heaven!

DES GRIEUX *(reproachfully)*

Ah, Manon!

MANON

Then you no longer love me?

You used to love me so much!

Oh, those long kisses!

Oh, the lingering enchantment!

Your erstwhile sweetheart

awaits your revenge.

Oh, don't look at me like that;

you never looked so stern before!

DES GRIEUX

Yes, wicked girl, my revenge —

MANON

Oh, it's my fault! It's true!

DES GRIEUX

Ah, wicked girl, my revenge —

MANON

Oh, it's true! You no longer love me —

Ah, it's true! So you no longer love me?

You used to love me so much —

you no longer love me!

DES GRIEUX

Be silent, you are breaking my heart!

You do not know of

the dark, desolate days that descended upon me!

MANON

I want your forgiveness.

See? I'm rich —

DES GRIEUX

Be quiet!

MANON

Doesn't this seem a feast

of gold and color?

It's all for you!

DES GRIEUX

For pity's sake, be quiet!

MANON

I imagined a radiant future;

love brings you here.

I betrayed you, that's true!

(She kneels.)

I am at your feet!

I betrayed you — call me wicked —

I kneel at your feet.

Oh, I want your forgiveness,

oh, do not deny it to me!

Am I perhaps less charming

and beautiful than Manon of other days?

DES GRIEUX

O temptress!

This is the old spell that blinds me!

MANON

It's love's magic; yield to it, I am yours!

DES GRIEUX

I can struggle no longer! I am defeated!

MANON

Surrender, I am yours!

Ah come, come!

In your arms clasp Manon who loves you...

DES GRIEUX

I cannot struggle, o temptress!

MANON

Hold me tight to your breast!

Manon longs for you alone, for you alone!

DES GRIEUX

I can no longer struggle!

MANON

Surrender, I am yours!

DES GRIEUX

I am defeated: I love you! —

MANON
Ah, come!

DES GRIEUX
— I love you!

MANON
Ah, come!
Manon longs for you alone, for you alone!

DES GRIEUX
I can no longer struggle!
I am defeated: I love you!

MANON
Come!
In your arms clasp Manon who loves you!

DES GRIEUX
In the depths of your eyes
I read my destiny;
all the treasures of the world
are in your divine lips!

MANON
Ah! Manon longs for you alone —
hold me close to your breast.
Return to my desires, I beg you,
return to the ecstasy,
to the lingering kisses of love!
Live in rapture close to my heart —
oh, come back to me! *etc.*
My mouth is an altar
where your kiss is God!

DES GRIEUX
These are your kisses!
This is your love!
Your kiss, sweet treasure, sets me afire!
In you I am drunk again with passion! *etc.*
In your dear arms
there is rapture, oblivion!

MANON
Lips adored and tender!

DES GRIEUX
Manon, you bring me nigh to death!

MANON
Lips sweet to kiss!

BOTH
Such sweet suffering!
*(Geronte suddenly appears at the door and
stands dumbfounded.)*

MANON
Oh!

GERONTE
I' faith, Mademoiselle,
now I understand why we had to wait!
I have arrived at an awkward moment.
An unintentional mistake!
Who in this world does not make mistakes?
(to Des Grioux)
Even you, I believe, for instance,
have forgotten that you are in my house —

DES GRIEUX
Sir!

MANON *(to Des Grioux)*
Be silent!

GERONTE
Gratitude — for you this is a red-letter day!
(to Manon)
This is the way you remember
whence I took you,
the proof I have given you of true love!

MANON
*(looking at Geronte capriciously, then picking
up a hand mirror from the table)*
Love? Love?
My good sir, here!
Look at yourself — look!
If I am wrong, be fair and tell me so!
And then look at us!

GERONTE
I am fair, my pretty little doxy.
I know my duty —
I must leave here!
O gallant chevalier, o charming young lady,
au revoir —

and soon!
(*He leaves.*)

MANON (*laughing*)
Free! Free as air!
What joy, chevalier, my handsome lover!

DES GRIEUX
Listen, we must leave at once.
You shall not stay a moment longer
under this cursed old man's roof!

MANON
What a pity!
All this splendor!
All these treasures!
Alas, we must go!

DES GRIEUX
Ah, Manon,
your foolish thoughts betray me;
always the same, always the same!
Trembling divinely,
in ardent abandon
sweet and tender like the
charm of your caress;
always some new ecstasy;
then, suddenly, overcome, dazzled
by the glitter of the gilded life!
I? Your slave and victim, I descend
the ladder of shame.
Slime in slime I am
and a depraved hero of the gambling den,
I have defiled myself, sold myself.
The vilest disgrace brings me nearer to you!
In the murky future, tell me,
what will you do with me?

MANON
Once again, pray forgive me!
I will be faithful and good, I swear it!
(*Lescaut enters, breathless. Des Grieux and
Manon hurry to him in surprise.*)

DES GRIEUX
Lescaut!

MANON
You here?
(*Lescaut collapses into a chair.*)

DES GRIEUX, then MANON
What's happened? Speak!
(*Lescaut indicates by his look and gestures that
something awful happened.*)

MANON and DES GRIEUX
Oh, heavens! What has happened?
You make us shudder!

LESCAUT
Let me get my breath...

MANON *and* DES GRIEUX
You make us shudder!

LESCAUT
... to speak.

MANON and DES GRIEUX
Oh, heavens. What has happened? Say!

LESCAUT
He has denounced you!

MANON
Who?

DES GRIEUX
The old man?

LESCAUT
Yes!

MANON
Alas!

LESCAUT
Guards and archers are on their way here!

MANON
Alas!

DES GRIEUX
Oh, God!

LESCAUT
Come, chevalier, be off down the stairs!

MANON
Alas!

LESCAUT

I heard what had happened
from a grenadier at the barracks.
Down the stairs, chevalier, and away!
The guards and archers are already
on their way!
Go, like the wind!

DES GRIEUX

Curse that crafty old man!

MANON

Alas! Alas!
I'm hurrying, alas!

DES GRIEUX

Yes! Watch out!

LESCAUT

Ah, you don't know you are losing her,
ah, you don't know the cruel
inhuman fate that awaits her: Exile!

MANON

Alas, death, death!

LESCAUT

Now hurry! Don't hesitate!
In a few moments you'll be lost!
The archers have already left the barracks! *etc.*
The vile old man will die of rage
if he finds the cage empty
and does not know where you've gone!

MANON

Alas; I'm hurrying!
(*to Lescaut*)
Just a moment! This sparkling emerald —
(*to Des Grieux*)
But yes! My God!
I'm hurrying! You help me!

DES GRIEUX

Yes, beware, vile old man!
(*to Manon*)
Let's go, Let's go! Hurry! Come on!
Help you do what?

LESCAUT

Manon!

MANON

To wrap up —

LESCAUT

Go quickly, they're already on their way!

DES GRIEUX

Let's go!

MANON

But yes! You help me...

DES GRIEUX

Let's go!

MANON

...to wrap up this jewelry!
Empty the drawers!
And this enchantment that I so adore,
must I leave, abandon it?

DES GRIEUX

Come, let's hurry! Let's go, Manon!
Come, let's away!
O my beloved Manon, hurry!
We must fly at once!
You are torturing me again!

LESCAUT

Oh, that fine coffer — a pity indeed!
Our route will be through the garden,
in a moment we shall be on the road
in the shadow of the tall trees.
They'll have to be clever to catch us!

MANON

(*collecting more jewels and hiding them under
her cloak*)
It would be foolish to leave these gold trinkets,
O my treasures, o my treasures!

DES GRIEUX

Just bring your heart with you.
I only want to save your love.

LESCAUT

(*from the window*)
Curses!
Here they are, surrounding the house!

DES GRIEUX
Manon!

MANON
Des Grioux
This way! Through there! Let's fly!
Well then, out that way!

DES GRIEUX
Let's fly! No, no!
That way, quickly, hurry!

LESCAUT
The old man is bawling orders,
the guards are filing in...

MANON
Alas!

DES GRIEUX
Let's run!

LESCAUT
... the archers are standing at the ready!
(Manon and Des Grioux are undecided which way to escape. Lescaut runs to the door and locks it.)
They're coming in, climbing the stairs!
Here they are!

DES GRIEUX
Tell me, is there another way out?

MANON
Yes, over there in the alcove!

LESCAUT
(hustling Manon and Des Grioux into the alcove and following them)
Here they come up the stairs!

MANON
(in the alcove)
Oh! Oh!

(She rushes out of the alcove followed by Des Grioux and Lescaut. A sergeant and two archers appear from the alcove while Geronte and a squad of soldiers enter through the door.)

SERGEANT
Nobody move!
(Geronte bursts into sarcastic laughter at Manon who, panic-stricken, drops her cloak, spilling the stolen jewels on the floor. Des Grioux draws his sword.)

LESCAUT
(disarming him)
If they arrest you, chevalier,
who can save Manon?
(At a sign from Geronte, Manon is dragged away by the soldiers.)

DES GRIEUX
(desperately trying to follow Manon, but held back by Lescaut)
Oh, Manon! Oh, my Manon!

INTERMEZZO

THE IMPRISONMENT — THE JOURNEY TO LE HAVRE

Des Grioux: "...How I love her!
My passion is so strong
that I feel I am the most unhappy creature alive.
The attempts I made in Paris
to obtain her release!
I have implored the powerful, I have knocked
and petitioned at every door!
I have even resorted to violence.
All was in vain.
Only one way remains for me — to follow her!
And I will follow her! Wherever she may
go!... Even to the ends of the earth!"
(The story of Manon Lescaut and of the Chevalier des Grioux by Abbé Prévost)

ACT THREE

Le Havre

A square near the harbor.

(The harbor is in the background. Part of the stern of a warship is visible. To the left, the corner of a barracks with a barred window on the front. The main entrance facing the square is guarded by a sentry. On the right is a house and a narrow street with an oil lamp burning

dimly at the corner. It is just before dawn. Des Grieux and Lescaut are standing opposite the barracks where Manon is imprisoned.)

DES GRIEUX
Eternal, cruel anxiety.

LESCAUT
Be patient still.
Soon the archer I have bribed
will mount guard over there.
Be patient yet.

DES GRIEUX
The waiting tortures me!
(indicating the barred window)
My life, my soul — it is all there!

LESCAUT
Manon already knows
and awaits my signal to come to us.
Meanwhile I with my friends
will try to rescue her!
At dawn I will make her free!
(He hides his face with his cloak and retires cautiously to the back to watch the prison window.)

DES GRIEUX
Ashen-pale I trudge in search of my destiny,
and walk on night and day.
And an illusion torments me, excites me!
Though it seems near, it disappears
when I grasp at it!
Paris and Le Havre — fierce sad agony!
Oh, the lingering torture of my life!

LESCAUT
(approaching Des Grieux)
They're coming!
(A picket of soldiers, led by a sergeant, marches out of the prison for the changing of the guard.)

DES GRIEUX
At last!

LESCAUT
(pointing out one of the soldiers)
There's my man — that one!
(The relieved picket enters the barracks.)

Le Havre is asleep!
The hour has come!
(Lescaut signals to the sentry, who moves away. He then goes to the barred window and taps cautiously on the bars. Des Grieux watches, motionless. The window opens and Manon appears and Des Grieux speeds toward her.)

DES GRIEUX
Manon!

MANON
Des Grieux!
(She stretches out of her hands and Des Grieux kisses them feverishly.)

LESCAUT
(to himself)
To the devil with America!
Manon shall not go!

MANON
You, my love?
In my shame you have not deserted me?

DES GRIEUX
Desert you? Never!

MANON
My beloved!

DES GRIEUX
If I have followed you this long way...

MANON
Love!

DES GRIEUX
...it was because in my heart I remained ever faithful.

MANON
Beloved!

DES GRIEUX
Soon you will be mine!

MANON
Yours soon! Soon, yours!

DES GRIEUX

(interrupting her as a lamplighter enters the square)

Hush! Hush!

LAMPLIGHTER

(taking down the lamp)

And Kate replied to the King:

“Why tempt a poor maid’s heart?

The Lord made me beautiful for husband!”

(extinguishing the light)

The King laughed,

then gave her jewels and gold

and a husband who won her heart.

(The lamplighter goes on his way. Dawn begins to break.)

DES GRIEUX

‘Tis dawn! O my Manon,

be ready at the entrance to the courtyard.

Lescaut is there with loyal men.

Go there and you will be saved!

LAMPLIGHTER

(in the distance)

And Kate replied to the King —

The King laughed, then gave her jewels and gold.

MANON

I tremble, I am afraid for you!

I tremble. I am anxious but know not why!

Oh, I feel a baleful threat!

I tremble at a peril I do not know.

DES GRIEUX

Manon, my plea is desperate!

Anguish chokes my words.

Do you want me to kill myself here?

I entreat you, Manon, ah, come!

Let us save ourselves!

(pointing to the street)

Come, I beseech you!

Ah, come! Let us fly!

MANON

So be it! I’ll do all you ask!

I’m yours, wait for me, my love!

(Des Grieux clasps Manon’s hands and, reassuring her, points again to the street.)

Manon throws him a kiss and withdraws from the window. Suddenly a shot is heard; Des Grieux, startled, runs towards the street.)

VOICES *(in the distance)*

To arms! To arms!

LESCAUT

(running in from the street, sword drawn)

The game’s up!

Chevalier, Let’s run for our lives!

DES GRIEUX

What happened?

VOICES *(as before)*

To arms!

LESCAUT

Hear how they’re shouting!

Our plan has failed!

WOMEN’S VOICES

(as before)

Ah!

DES GRIEUX

(drawing his sword)

Let death come!

Ah, fly? Never!

LESCAUT *(restraining him)*

Ah, you must be mad!

MANON

(reappearing at the window, distraught)

If you love me, in the name of God

escape, my love!

(She leaves the window abruptly.)

DES GRIEUX

Ah, Manon!

LESCAUT

(dragging Des Grieux away)

A bad business!

(Attracted by the shot and the alarm, townspeople rush into the square in utter confusion.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

(to each other)

Ah!

Did you hear? What's happened?

What was it? An abduction? A revolt?

A woman escaping?

Did you hear? What happened? What was it?

A woman was escaping.

The dense gloom over there

hid the kidnappers. *etc.*

More than one woman —

(A roll of drums; the barracks gate opens. A sergeant and escort come out with a dozen women in chains. Manon is among them.)

SERGEANT

(to the crowd)

Make way there!

(The commander of the warship comes ashore with a squad of marines.)

COMMANDER *(to the sergeant)*

The ship is ready.

Speed the roll-call!

TOWNSPEOPLE

Silence!

They're beginning the roll-call now!

(The sergeant calls the names from a list, the women, in turn, cross to where the marines stand while the Commander enters the names in a register)

SERGEANT

Rosetta!

(Rosetta passes defiantly)

TOWNSPEOPLE

Oh, what an air!

She's a poppet!

SERGEANT

Madelon!

(Madelon crosses, nonchalant and laughing)

TOWNSPEOPLE

Ah, you've come to a bad end! Ha, ha! —

What a saucy laugh!

SERGEANT

Manon!

(Manon walks slowly past, her eyes downcast.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

Who can she be? — A seduced girl!

She's really lovely!

LESCAUT

That one? There lies a mystery!

MEN

Seduced? Betrayed?

TOWNSPEOPLE

My lady is sad! Ha, Ha!

I' faith, what sorrow!

LESCAUT

The girl was torn

from the love of a handsome youth!

SERGEANT

Ninetta!

(Ninetta crosses the square.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

What bearing!

(Des Grieux approaches Manon and tries to get behind her.)

MANON

Des Grieux, soon I shall be far away.

MEN *(to Lescaut)*

What infamy! What horror!

SERGEANT

Caton!

(Caton stalks majestically by.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

She's a goddess!

MANON

This is my destiny.

And I shall have lost you forever!

My supreme love! Farewell!

LESCAUT

Snatched from her wedding
and cast to foul caresses!

MEN

She rouses compassion!
It's always the way!

SERGEANT

Regina!
(Regina struts coquettishly across, some laugh.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

You've come to this!
I'd like this one!
What an insolent laugh!

MANON

Return home!
Farewell! Farewell!

LESCAUT

For the pleasure of a day
of an old gentleman
who, once satisfied, turned her out!

MEN

What infamy! Horrible! Pitiful!
Ah, she rouses compassion, pity!

LESCAUT

(pointing to Des Grieux)
See that pale young man
standing near her?

SERGEANT

Claretta!
(A blond passes briskly.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

Ha, ha! What a blonde!

MANON

You must forget Manon!

DES GRIEUX

Ah, look at me and see
how I sink under this bitter anguish!
Ah, each thought dissolves in tears!

MANON

Maybe I did not love you enough;
this is my remorse!
But forgive me, my beloved,
ah, my dearest love, farewell!

LESCAUT

The bridegroom is that poor fellow
standing near her! Do you see?

MEN

Indeed, she awakens pity! The horror of it!

TOWNSPEOPLE

What a fine collection!

SERGEANT

Violetta!
(A brunette with a brazen air crosses.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

What a dark beauty!

MANON

Now you must return to your father,
you must forget Manon!

DES GRIEUX

Ah, in my soul I have only hatred
for mankind and God!

LESCAUT

Thus, he returns and sees his bride in chains,
trampled in the mire, torn from him!

MEN

What infamy! Oh, horror!
Indeed, she rouses pity!
Infamy and horror!
She awakens compassion, pity!

SERGEANT

Nerina!...
Elisa!
(They cross the square.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

What splendid beauty-spots!
Not a beauty among them!
What a fine collection!

SERGEANT

Ninon!

(She hides her face in her hands as she passes.)

MANON

My love, farewell!

SERGEANT

Giorgetta!

(Giorgetta crosses.)

TOWNSPEOPLE

(severally)

Shame! Horror! ha, ha, ha!

SERGEANT

(to the women prisoners)

Quickly! In line! March!

(seeing Manon motionless near Des Grieux)

You still here?

We'll put an end to that!

(He grasps Manon roughly by the arm and pushes her into line.)

DES GRIEUX

(wrenching Manon free)

Stand back!

SERGEANT

(to Des Grieux)

Be off with you!

MEN

(egged on by Lescaut)

Courage!

DES GRIEUX

Ah, woe to anyone who touches her!

Manon, hold tight to me!

MEN

That's the way! Bravo!

COMMANDER

What's going on?

DES GRIEUX

Ah, don't come any nearer!

For, while I live,
no one shall snatch her away from me!

(Seeing the captain, he is overcome with emotion and relaxes his grip on Manon.)

No! I am crazy! Look at Me!

(to the captain)

How I weep and implore you,

how I weep, look at me,

how I plead for pity!

Hear me! Take me on as a cabin boy

or in some even meaner duty

and I shall come gladly!

Please take me!

Ah, see how I weep and implore you!

Take my blood — my life!

I implore you, I beg for compassion!

I shall not be ungrateful!

(He falls to his knees.)

COMMANDER

(smiling kindly at Des Grieux kneeling before him)

Ah! So you want to populate America

do you, young man?

Well then — so be it!

Come on, cabin boy, look lively!

(Des Grieux cries out with joy and kisses the Commander's hand. Manon turns, sees and understands. She stretches out her arms to Des Grieux who runs to her. Lescaut, watching, shakes his head and walks away.)

ACT FOUR

In America

A desert plain on the borders of New Orleans

(The ground is bare and undulating, the horizon boundless, the sky cloudy, It is early evening. Manon and Des Grieux come into sight. They are ragged and destitute. Manon, pale and exhausted, leans on Des Grieux, who seems scarcely able to support her.)

DES GRIEUX

Put all your weight on me,

O my weary beloved.

The dusty road, the cursed road
will soon end.

MANON

Onward, ever onward!
The air around us is getting darker.

DES GRIEUX

Lean on me!

MANON

The breeze roams over the great plain
and day is dying!
Onward, onward! No —
(*She falls.*)

DES GRIEUX

Manon!

MANON

I am finished! Forgive me!
You are strong, I envy you;
a woman, weak, I give up.

DES GRIEUX

Are you in pain?

MANON

Horribly!
(*Manon tries to reassure him.*)
No! What am I saying?
Vain, foolish words.
Oh, take comfort!
I ask but a brief rest — only a moment.
My sweet lover, come closer to me!

DES GRIEUX

Manon, listen, my love!
You don't answer, dearest?
Look, it is I who weep,
I who implore you, I who caress and kiss
your golden hair!
Oh, Manon! Manon, answer me!
Silence! Curses!
(*touching her brow; to himself*)
A cruel fever grips her.
Desperate, I am haunted
by a sense of misfortune,
a sense of darkness and fear!
(*to Manon*)
Answer me, my love!...
Still silent...Manon, won't you answer me?

MANON

(*reviving gradually as Des Grieux raises her*)
Is it you weeping?
Is it you imploring?
I hear your sobs,
and your burning tears
bathe my face.
Ah, is it you weeping and imploring?
My love, help me!

DES GRIEUX

Oh beloved! Oh, Manon!
Ah, Manon my love!

MANON

Love! Love, help me!

DES GRIEUX

Oh, my Manon!

MANON

Thirst is destroying me — darling, help me!

DES GRIEUX

All my blood I would give for your life!
(*He runs off to scan the horizon.*)
Nothing to be seen! Nothing!
Barren land, and not a trace of water —
O motionless sky!
O God, to whom as a child I also raised
my prayer, give us your help!

MANON

Yes, help! You can save me!
Listen, I will rest here!
You scan the hazy horizon
and look for hill or cabin.
Push forward and then return
with joyful words and glad tidings!
(*Des Grieux, doubtful whether to leave her,
walks slowly away, looks back once, then with
sudden decision, hurries off.*)
Alone, lost, abandoned
in this desolate land! Oh, horror!
The sky is darkening around me.
Alas, I am alone!
And in the depths of the desert I meet my end,
cruel torment, ah,
alone, forsaken, I am a deserted woman!
Oh, I do not want to die!

So all is over.
 This seemed a peaceful land to me!
 Oh, my fatal beauty
 kindles a new anger —
 they wanted to tear me from him;
 now all my horrible past rises again
 and comes to life before my eyes.
 Ah, it is stained with blood!
 Ah, all is ended!
 Now I invoke the tomb as a haven of peace.
 No, I do not want to die!
 My love, help me! No!
(Des Grieux returns.)
 In your arms, beloved, for the last time!
 Do you bring good news!

DES GRIEUX
 I found nothing,
 the horizon revealed nothing to me,
 in vain I gazed into the distance.

MANON
 I am dying: the shadows are closing in;
 night is descending upon me.

DES GRIEUX
(passionately trying to comfort her)
 A fatal delirium assails you.
 Rest here on my throbbing heart
 and regain your strength!

MANON
 I love you so much — and I am dying!
 Already I can hardly speak,
 but I can tell you about how much I love you!
 Oh, my love, heavenly delight,
 ineffable rapture!
 Oh, my supreme desire,
 I love you, love you so much!

DES GRIEUX
(touching her cheek — to himself)
 The chill of death!
 God, my last hope is shattered.

MANON
 My sweet love, you weep.
 This is the hour for kisses,
 not for tears;
 time is flying — kiss me!

DES GRIEUX
 Oh, my greatest joy,
 flame of love eternal.

MANON
 The flame is dying —
 speak, oh speak — alas!

DES GRIEUX
 Manon!

MANON
 I can no longer hear you — alas!
 I want your face here, close to me,
 so, so, kiss me —
 close to me, once more I can feel you —
 Alas!

DES GRIEUX
 Without you...I am lost —
 I will follow you.

MANON
(with a last dying effort)
 I forbid it! Farewell —
 dark is the night —
 I'm cold.
 Was your Manon loving? Do you remember?
 Tell me — the splendor of my youth?
 And I shall never see the sun again!

DES GRIEUX
 My God!

MANON
 My faults will be — forgotten,
 but my love — will never die.
*(Manon dies and Des Grieux, crazed with grief,
 falls senseless over her body.)*

Curtain