EXT. BURGUNDIAN COUNTRYSIDE - SUNRISE - 1892

The first light is breaking over the fields and hedges of this timeless rural landscape. With the clanking of bells, a herd of cows makes its way to the first milking.

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

The room is simple with a few sticks of worn wooden furniture. A young woman is asleep under the covers, with a cat curled up on the bottom of the bed. This is GABRIELLE-SIDONIE COLETTE, or as she will later be known, simply COLETTE.

A voice calls from down the corridor - her mother SIDO.

    SIDO (O.S.)
    Gabrielle!

The girl stirs but her eyes remain stubbornly closed.

    SIDO (O.S.) (CONT’D)
    Gabrielle!! Wake up.

    COLETTE
    (murmuring)
    Let me sleep!

    SIDO
    Come on, Gabrielle!!

Sido is now at the door frame. A handsome country woman, forthright and practical - nobody’s fool.

    COLETTE
    What time is it?

    SIDO
    It’s 8 o’clock. Willy is coming today.

Colette just murmurs.

    SIDO (cont’d) (CONT’D)
    Good. Then you won’t want your hair doing.

She disappears. After a moment, a head emerges from under the pillow and looks to the empty doorway. We get our first look at the milky skinned, precocious, whip-smart, Colette.

EXT. COUNTRY TRAIN STATION - DAY

A train belches steam as it slowly moves toward the station. A MAN IN A TOP HAT leans out of the window.
EXT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

Dismounting, Willy sees a waiting carriage across the platform.

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - PARLOR

Wearing her best frock, Colette carries a large TEA SERVICE down a corridor and into the main room. Willy is seated, in conversation with Sido and JULES, the patriarch, an affable old soldier, with one leg, who is smoking a pipe.

JULES
And how is Paris these days, Willy?

WILLY
It’s a hot bed! It’s “Electric!” Heaving with artists, writers, poets, all seeking to say something profound... most of them are too young or crazed but still, they do generate a certain... life force!

Colette, her hair neatly plaited, puts the cups out for everyone then takes over the teapot and pours.

JULES
We were going to see a play in Paris - weren’t we?

SIDO
La Tosca.

WILLY
I was at the opening. I wouldn’t bother, quite frankly. Sarah Bernhardt did her best, she always does, but the piece is too overwrought in a particularly feminine way... melodramatic in extremis! Tears on the stage but all dry eyes in the house.

SIDO
Maybe I’ll go and make up my own mind.

WILLY
Well, just remember... if a book bores you, you can throw it away. If a painting is garish, you close your eyes.

(MORE)
WILLY (CONT'D)
Whereas bad theatre is like dentistry; you are compelled to stay in the chair, having your skull drilled, until the entire grizzly procedure is over.

JULES
Good point, Willy. Painful business!

COLETTE
Though I imagine it must hold a secret source of enjoyment - for the dentist.

Willy raises an appreciative eyebrow and chuckles.

WILLY
Indeed... Oh - I almost forgot. A small gift.

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a small package. She unwraps it to find a SNOW GLOBE OF PARIS.

COLETTE
Thank you. I’ve read about these.

WILLY
Shake it.

She does and looks, fascinated, at the twirling flakes.

COLETTE
Look, Sido. A snow globe.

She holds it up for her mother.

EXT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE – LATE AFTERNOON

M. Willy bids good-bye to Jules, Sido and Colette, before the carriage moves off. Colette is holding her comfortable old cat which she hands off to her mother.

COLETTE
Sido, I’m going for a walk.

SIDO
Change your dress first.

COLETTE
I’ll stay on the path.

SIDO
Change it!
INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - STAIRS - MINUTES LATER

Now in a different dress, Colette starts to come down stairs. Hearing her parents talking in the kitchen, she slows up, listening carefully.

SIDO (O.S.)
There’s something about him I find suspect... something disingenuous.

JULES (O.S.)
Oh, not in my reckoning... He’s a good man. He has a reputation, yes, but there comes a time in a man’s life to settle down...and she’s the right age for it. She’ll be twenty next time around.

SIDO (O.S.)
I just worry that he won’t understand her. That girl said her first word at nine months. She was always reading, way ahead of her class, she was the lead in the school play - every year.

JULES (O.S.)
My dear, would anyone be good enough for you?

SIDO
Hmmph.

Now on the ground floor Colette waits outside the door as her parents talk. Sido moves into view by the kitchen sink.

SIDO (CONT’D)
Have you finished the letter to his father?

JULES
I keep starting but I can’t seem to finish it. A girl without a dowry, -that just doesn’t happen in their circles. They may cut him off if he marries her.

SIDO
So they call it off. The world won’t end.

As her father talks, Colette sneaks back up the last five stairs...
JULES
Sido, he clearly adores her - he’s visited four times. He’ll give her status, not to mention a tremendous cultural life - the theater, the opera. He’ll give her Paris for heaven’s sakes!

Colette comes clumping down the stairs, slightly too loudly and into the room.

COLETTE
Can I go now?

SIDO
Yes. Take this - for blackberries.
(hands her a pot)
I’m making a tart tomorrow. And don’t be late back.

COLETTE
(eye roll)
I won’t...

Sido watches her daughter, not without suspicion, as she takes off across the garden.

EXT. SAINT-SAUVEUR - COUNTRYSIDE - LATE AFTERNOON

Colette runs down a path, then backs up, picks a few prime blackberries, and continues on.

She moves through the woods, with the stealth of an animal then breaks out across a broad green meadow towards a barn.

EXT. OLD BARN - LATE AFTERNOON

She approaches the gaping black door of a dilapidated barn.

INT. OLD BARN

Entering the darkness, Colette blinks to re-adjust her eyes. A flutter of wings attracts her attention. She turns to see an ascending pigeon. Then, below, a tired old horse.

COLETTE
Where are you?

WILLY
Over here. Enjoying the simple pleasures of country life!

Behind a partition, she sees Willy, reclining on a pile of straw.
COLETTE
You look at home in the hay.

WILLY
I think I might be! And you look like
a beautiful young country girl. Right
there. With the light...What’s that?

Colette shows him, putting the bowl between them as she
nestles beside him. Her hands are blue with the juice.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Your fingers are stained.
(he takes her hand)
Mm... Maybe I could just leave
Paris behind.
(he takes a blackberry)
You could feed me berries. I’d catch
a fish with my teeth. Then come back
here to my cave. Like a bear. Bliss.

COLETTE
I’d like that.

WILLY
(he caresses her braids)
Your hair is a phenomenon.

COLETTE
In the village, they call me “the
girl with the hair.”

WILLY
I can see why. I’m sure you’re famous
here in your village.

COLETTE
A little.

She looks down.

COLETTE (cont’d) (CONT’D)
How long until your train goes?

WILLY
In about 40 minutes. But I have
to walk to the station.

COLETTE
Normally takes me about 15
minutes. Will probably take you
20.
WILLY
Yes. Right. So if my calculations are correct...

COLETTE
We have time - if we’re quick.

WILLY
Yes, we do.

He smiles, moved by her beauty, kisses her, then breaks off.

COLETTE
What?

WILLY
I just can’t say how unimaginably happy I am, Gabrielle.

COLETTE
So am I.

He holds her by her shoulders firmly.

WILLY
I adore you.

He kisses her shoulder. Feeling his beard brush against her skin, Colette smiles as they move into a passionate embrace. A nearby horse chews hay as they proceed to take their clothes off.

11A INT. COLETTE’S BEDROOM. NIGHT. 11A

Colette sprawls out on the bed, her hair in plaits. She is writing a letter in a school exercise book in pencil, resting on an encyclopaedia.

COLETTE
Dear Willy, As I walked home by the river, the light shining through the trees, my heart filled with a kind of delicious pride. After all, you know all those fine women of Paris...so I must have something.

(smiles to herself)
I want to wake up next to you. Trace your profile with my finger while you sleep. Know that the day is ours. That life is ours for the taking. We will be so entire and so happy, my love.
12 EXT. GARDEN - AFTERNOON

At the Wedding Party, Jules is making a toast Colette and Willy in front of a MIXED CROWD of WEDDING GUESTS.

JULES
It’s the proudest time in a father’s life, but also - I now find - one of the saddest. I have to hand over my beloved daughter, who has lit up our lives for so long, with her wit, her brilliance, her beauty. I will miss you, Gabrielle. Almost as much as your mother will...

A murmur of acknowledgement from the assembled. Colette smiles at her father, and catches her mother’s eye, holding back emotion.

JULES (CONT’D)
But it is no small compensation that I give her to a man of such inestimable standing. There are many celebrities in Paris but few are famous enough to be known by -- by a single name.
WILLY - Welcome to the Colette family.

Everyone cheers. Colette turns to her new husband, glowing.

SOME TIME LATER - EVENING

A COUNTRY BAND strikes up. COUPLES polka around the garden.

A COUPLE OF PEASANTS carry trays of drinks from a kitchen tent to the GUESTS. Some CHILDREN chase a chicken through the dancers.

WILLY (cont’d)
This is definitely a country wedding.

COLETTE
It’ll make a good story -- in Paris.

WILLY
You’ll be the story in Paris, Gabrielle. Just wait ‘til they get a look at you.

Willy twirls Colette round and round and round...
EXT. CITY OF PARIS - EVENING - 1893

Across the river Seine - the center of the demi-monde; the Left Bank. This is not postcard Paris - the buildings are sooty and chimneys are filling the sky with smoke. On the quay, PEOPLE go about their business as a YOUNG ATTENDANT lights the gas lamp.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - BOUDOIR - EVENING

MATILDE, the maid, is winching Colette into a very tight red froufrou dress. A knock on the door.

WILLY (O.S)
Are you ready yet?

COLETTE
No - not yet.  
(to the maid)
What do you think, Matilde?

MATILDE
It’s pretty, Madame.

Colette looks at herself critically.

INT. BEDROOM/HALLWAY

Willy returns and prepares to knock again.

WILLY (O.S)
We should try to get there before it ends.

COLETTE (O.S.)
I’m coming...

The door opens. Colette is in another dress - the one from their meeting in Saint-Sauveur. Matilde hovers nervously.

COLETTE (CONT’D)
Is the carriage waiting?

Willy looks disappointed but together they proceed through SEVERAL ROOMS to the front door. We get a feeling for Willy’s apartment - a warren of dark rooms overcrowded by boxes, papers and Wagnerian bric-a-brac. Willy, it seems, is a hoarder.

WILLY
Where’s your new dress?

COLETTE
It looks ridiculous. I couldn’t breathe in it.
WILLY
That thing cost me two hundred and
thirty-seven francs.

COLETTE
I know. We’ll get it adjusted.

WILLY
(half joking)
More money!

They exit.

16 EXT. ELEGANT PARISIAN STREET – EARLY EVENING

The carriage pulls up. Colette is fiddling with a spot of
tooth powder on her dress.

WILLY
What is it?

COLETTE
...It’s tooth paste.

WILLY
(amused)
My God! Here...

He rubs a little spit on it.

WILLY (CONT’D)
That’ll do. Let’s go in...

17 INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET’S SALON – HALLWAY

They approach the giant door.

WILLY
Ready for the lions...?

She lets out a nervous exhale. The double doors glide open.

18 INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET’S SALON – MAIN ROOM

Willy and Colette proceed into a reception room filled with
the beautiful, the sparkling, and the eccentric of Paris’
Golden Age. The mirrors have been polished; so have the
epigrams. Amidst the gas lamps, the India rubber plants,
and the zebra skin rugs, the energy is bouncing off the
walls.

Willy acknowledges hellos and nods to people along the way.
With her tight braids and country dress, Colette looks drab
in this sea of peacocks.
They arrive at a circle of conversation -- that of MME. DE CAILLAVET, the hostess, the debonair COUNT MUFFAT, and a few SALONITES and FRIENDS.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
It’s monstrous. I can’t look at it.

COUNT MUFFAT
At least it’s temporary.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
Oh here’s Willy -- Willy! Eiffel’s Tower, are you for or against?

WILLY
I’m for it, if a little jealous of this giant erection in the heart of our capital... belonging to someone else.

Laughter from the circle.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
You rogue, Willy. And you’ve brought a... an orphaned relative?

COUNT MUFFAT
A secret love child?

WILLY
(acknowledging their mockery)
Very good... May I present to you my wife, Gabrielle-Sidonie Colette.

Colette curtsies politely, her cheeks flushing.

COLETTE
Pleased to meet you.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
Delighted. Well, astonished actually. You have caught the slipperiest eel... How does one do that?

COLETTE
I’m not sure...

Colette smiles, a little nervously.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
Where are you from, you sweet thing?
COLETTE
I’m from Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye...
(no reaction)
...it’s in Burgundy.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
Hence the dress!

COUNT MUFFAT
Have you “relocated,” Willy?
This is apparently hilarious and there is laughter.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
Tst...ignore him... But how on earth did you two meet?

COLETTE
Our fathers served together in the army...

COUNT MUFFAT
(riding over her)
Willy married! The wild days are done, eh?

COLETTE
You’re quite mistaken, sir. The wild days have just begun.

Willy smiles at his new bride’s moxie. A business-like young man rushes up to Willy. This is PIERRE VEBER.

VEBER
Willy, thank God you’re back. That short story for La Forgue —

WILLY
Pierre. Let me introduce you to my wife, Gabrielle.

VEBER
What...? Very pleased to meet you.

Before she can speak, he turns to Willy with a more urgent tone.

VEBER (CONT’D)
It’s due on Tuesday and you haven’t given me the slightest clue.

WILLY
Amuse yourself for a moment, Gabrielle.
COLETTE

I will.

Willy draws Veber aside to continue the shop talk.

WILLY
It’s simple - an eight hundred word
sketch. Small coastal resort, damp
bathing-costumes. The perfect place to
rejuvenate a de-iodized constitution.
A buxom girl approaches, long legs...

Colette is left standing by herself. Nearby, a silver tray
displays a living turtle with an exquisitely jeweled shell.
She takes a lettuce leaf from a salad dish and feeds it.

COLETTE
Poor thing. You want the earth and
the grass don’t you?

Across the room she sees Willy, with Veber, lifting the glass
on a wall candle and lighting a cigar.

Feeling out of sorts, she moves through to an adjacent room
where...

19

INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET’S SALON – MUSIC ROOM

A STRING QUARTET is giving a recital to the assembled.
Across the room a group of SALONITES are clearly discussing
her. Embarrassed, Colette finds an empty seat. She looks
across the room - the salonites are still whispering.

SCHWOB
Are your ears burning?

Colette looks up and sees - Marcel SCHWOB, an intellectual
with a humane gleam in his eye. He sits next to her.

SCHWOB (CONT’D)
I’m Schwob, a friend of Willy’s.

COLETTE
Hello. I’m Gabrielle. Willy
described you to me.

SCHWOB
I hope he was kind.

COLETTE
(wryly)
Hope costs nothing.
Schwob raises an amused eyebrow, then looks out into the room where people are stealing glances at them.

SCHWOB
The modern day mob, aren’t they?
(Colette nods)
But their goddess is gossip instead of the guillotine. Are you feeling overwhelmed?

COLETTE
A little.

SCHWOB
They may look grand and intimidating. But just imagine them shitting. Each and every one of them.

Colette looks at him, incredulous.

SCHWOB (CONT’D)
Well they all do, don’t they?

Across the room, AN IMPORTANT-LOOKING GENTLEMAN, waves to Schwob.

SCHWOB (CONT’D)
(to the Gentleman)
Good evening, Sir!
(to Colette)
Try it.

AEROPLANE VERSION

SCHWOB (CONT’D)
They may look grand and intimidating. But just imagine them perched over a chamber pot. Each and every one of them.

INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET’S SALON – VARIOUS ROOMS

We follow Colette as she searches for Willy in the sea of SOCIALITES. She walks through rooms where PEOPLE are now dancing in an avant garde fashion then through a series of SMALLER COMPARTMENTS, where SERVANTS are polishing glasses and CHEFS are preparing hors d’oeuvres, past palms and oil lamps, to a distant room at the far end of the salon.

INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET’S SALON – SMOKING ROOM

From the doorway, Colette spies Willy leaning on the mantelpiece talking to a beautiful YOUNG WOMAN in a red dress. The woman leans in close to him, laughing. He whispers something and she laughs even harder.
There's a shrieking coming from the corner of the main room. Colette turns to see the crowd laughing as a BOHEMIAN pours milk into an upright piano.

INT. HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE – MOVING – NIGHT

Colette looks out the window into the night-time streets. After a moment, Willy ventures a question.

WILLY
So what did you think of the salon?

WILLY (CONT’D)
That was essentially - what you witnessed tonight - everyone who’s anyone in Paris...

COLETTE
Was it?...

WILLY
Who did you like? Who did you talk to?

COLETTE
I liked the tortoise. I think he was as bored as I was.

WILLY
I suspect you were more intimidated than bored?

COLETTE
No. I found them...shallow. Pretentious.

WILLY
Ah, you're reading them wrongly. It's not pretension so much as exaggeration. The ideal is to be authentic yet larger than life. To present a personality with a capital P. You could do it too with your country girl charm...

She turns to him.

COLETTE
(interrupting)
Did that woman have a capital P?

WILLY
Which one?
COLETTE
The one you were talking to? In the red dress. With the breasts?

WILLY
Nicole D’Allier? That was just... flirtation. It means absolutely nothing.

COLETTE
Then why do it?

WILLY
It’s what one does... to pass the time. It staves off boredom. You’re reading it all completely wrong.

Colette sighs, frustrated. Willy changes tack.

COLETTE
Maybe...

WILLY
Forget about all of them now. Any way - haven’t you heard the news? Willy is married. Happily married. And he’s going home with his bride, who he loves very much.

Colette nods, looks at him with a half-smile. He is forgiven.

EXT. PARIS STREET
The carriage rides off into the distance.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - MORNING
From directly above, we see Pierre Veber dash up the stairs.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE ROOM
Colette is seated at a desk, carefully roughing out a letter. She writes a line then crosses it out, rephrases it.

There’s a knock at the door. Veber enters in the hallway and looks through to Colette’s small room where she sits with a large pile of correspondence.

COLETTE
Hello, Veber.
VEBER
Gabrielle. It’s cold out there today.

COLETTE
I’m under house arrest so it doesn’t affect me.
(gestures to the other room)
Schwob’s already in there.

We follow Veber through the maze-like apartment to Willy’s office. He passes through the front room which is semi-dark, its furniture covered by dust sheets.

INT. WILLY’S STUDY

Willy, mid-flow, barely notices Veber enter. Schwob sits by an oil lamp, taking notes.

WILLY
So something like...”all the humor and vivacity descends into...a dreadful melodramatic swamp! Or... it released the toxins of man’s very soul, leaving the audience pale, and nauseous as though having eaten a bad oyster.”

SCHWOB
It’s a bit extreme. The ending was actually quite touching.

Willy thinks for a moment.

WILLY
Hmmph - I prefer my version.

He finally acknowledges the new arrival.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Veber!

VEBER
Willy. Schwob.

WILLY
(to Schwob)
So drop in those embellishments and file it at The Echo before six.

SCHWOB
Will do.  
(he leaves.)
WILLY
The factory’s on fire... We’re on fire...! Sit. I’ve had a remarkable idea - it could be, anyway...

VEBER
What is it?

WILLY
I’m going to launch a novel.

VEBER
What?!

WILLY
We’ve had stories by Willy, music reviews by Willy. Now Willy’s first novel. There’ll be enough literature in it to appeal to the high-brows and enough filth for the great unwashed.

VEBER
And who’s going to write it?

WILLY
...You are!

Veber shakes his head, absorbing this.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Brandy? Cigar?

27

INT. ENTRANCE ROOM

Schwob stops to chat to Colette by the desk. Matilde is stoking the fire.

SCHWOB
Are you writing for him too? He’s made you one of his ghosts already?

COLETTE
Just letters...

SCHWOB
You’re fastidious... exacting.

COLETTE
A lot of crossing out, you mean.

SCHWOB
...well, yes.
COLETTE
Willy copies them out afterwards -
so they are in his handwriting.

MATILDE
No one has handwriting like M. Willy.

INT. WILLY’S STUDY
Willy is completely absorbed in his pitch, sweat beading from his forehead as he paces.

WILLY
He first sees her, Monna, held aloft on the shoulders of her admirers.. She’s eighteen, beautiful, wild and she’s from the streets, eats men up, never wears a corset. And our hero, Renaud - a writer, a genius - he’s captivated by her. She seduces him in her shabby rooms - five entire days of carnal bliss - but she has a powerful hold over him. She instinctively understands his base desires. We wonder - will Renaud escape - go back to his wholesome friends and his burgeoning career - or will he be dragged down by her toxic embrace, forgetting all about writing to live forever in a sexual quagmire..?

Willy ends with a flourish, eyes slightly damp.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT
Colette gets up from her desk, as Willy escorts Veber through the apartment.

WILLY
How long do you think it will take?

VEBER
Two or three months?

WILLY
No no...weeks, Veber! It has to be weeks! Write for four hours at a time...

VEBER
All right... I’ll come back to you if I get stuck.
WILLY
Yes...Just write it...and fast!
Let’s get some money coming in.

VEBER
Goodbye, Gabrielle.

She waves. The door closes on Veber. A piece of wallpaper
has pulled free of the wall. Willy rubs it back in place.

WILLY
Chaos. Working in these
conditions. Absolute...chaos.

Willy comes over to his wife and kisses her as they walk
back into the front room.

WILLY (CONT’D)
You’ve married a literary
entrepreneur. What a phenomenal
disaster.

COLETTE
You’ve married a country girl. Not a
penny to her name.

WILLY
We’re utterly doomed aren’t we?

They both laugh. She hands him the rough draft of the
letter. He peruses it quickly.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Perfect... but how about; “The
contract you have sent me seems
eminently fair, with only one
shortcoming - the money.” Always
pump something up before you prick
it. You get more of a “POP” that
way.

Unexpectedly, Willy farts.

COLETTE
Willy!

WILLY
Intimacy in all its savage
abandon, my love! I’ve a few
meetings today. Let’s meet at La
Mascotte at nine. No make it ten.

COLETTE
...Goodbye Willy.
Colette watches him go. MUSIC COMES UP FOR THE NEXT
SEQUENCE

CLOSE ON A PANE OF GLASS

It is greenish, uneven, and mottled. Using a tiny pair of
scissors, a hand is etching the letter “W.”

INT. LA MASCOTTE - NIGHT

Willy, Colette, Schwob, Veber and a COQUETTE, are finishing
up a meal, drinking champagne. Willy is regaling them with
an anecdote as he pays the bill with a roll of notes.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT

As Willy walks down the aisle toward his seat, he is in his
element. He nods acknowledgements and greetings to
everybody who is anybody. Colette follows a couple of steps
behind.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY

We see the etching progress - W I L. The creator is none
other than Colette, alone, absorbed in this labor of love.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Colette starts pulling sheets off old furniture in the
living room and opening up the blinds.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

In bed together, Willy is reading the evening paper as Colette
nuzzles into his chest. He indicates a cartoon drawing - of
himself with his trademark top hat - that Colette finds
amusing.

INT. ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY

Colette completes the etching of W I L L Y on the kitchen
window, taking a moment to admire her handiwork. MUSIC
ENDS.

EXT. RUE JACOB - AFTERNOON

Colette walks towards home, turns into the courtyard and
collects the mail.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - HALLWAY/LIVING ROOM

She enters, already opening the envelope and walks through
the house perusing the letter - that is written in green
ink.
COLETTE
(murmuring)
No... you’re a liar.

Disgusted, she crumples it and throws it to the ground.

EXT. STREETS OF PARIS - AFTERNOON

We follow close on Colette as she walks determinedly. The streets seem abrasive, dirty, polluted. Several STREET WALKERS ignore her as she walks by. She checks the address on the crumpled letter, looks up at the building.

EXT. COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Colette walks across the courtyard, up the stairs, across a balcony and tries the door to a small apartment. It’s locked. Then she hears a familiar voice and moves over to look through a small window.

INT. LOTTE KINCELER’S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

WILLY (O.S.)
That’s 153 plus 278 plus 34 plus 106 for your hats... That makes it 571. For one month, Lotte...

LOTTE
Do you want me to look cheap?

Willy is with the voluptuous LOTTE KINCELER. Between them the damning evidence: an accounting ledger.

WILLY
But for that money I could be laid five times as often by a prostitute.

EXT. LOTTE’S KINCELER’S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

There’s the sound of a woman’s raucous laughter. Colette turns to see TWO SEX-WORKERS across the courtyard. As she turns back, Willy sees her at the window. Lotte instinctively grabs a pair of dressmakers scissors.

WILLY
Ah, my dear. You’ve come to fetch me.

EXT. COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Now walking back down the stairs, Colette is struggling mightily to keep her emotions in check as Willy blusters.
WILLY
She’s not a disreputable woman.
There’s even a play about her – it’s a
shit play but nevertheless... I wonder
who the hell wrote that letter?

COLETTE
I don’t care who wrote it.

WILLY
She’s no rival to you, Gabrielle.
I promise, I’ll never sleep with
her again. But - you have to
understand - this is what men do.
We are the weaker sex. We don’t
have your strength. We are simply
slaves to our urges. And here in
the city - it’s perfectly
acceptable to...

Colette flies at him with inarticulate rage.

COLETTE
I don’t accept it! You’ve been lying to
me. All this time! I wait for you all day
long! And I never ask you for anything
because you say we have no money.

WILLY
It’s true - we have no money.

COLETTE
Because you spend it all on her!

WILLY
I really don’t!

COLETTE
Then when you get into our bed...and I
touch you...and I kiss you...and you say
you’re too tired...every night...no! No!

WILLY
I’ve been inattentive. I’ll make amends.

He reaches out to her.

COLETTE
Don’t you dare touch me!

She spits out the words with such venom that they bring him
to a halt as she walks on.
WILLY
Gabrielle! I gave up my
inheritance for you! My bloody
freedom!

COLETTE
Go to hell!

She exits through the large beaten-up gateway.

44 EXT. RURAL TRAIN STATION - DAY

The train pulls into the station. A solitary figure waits on
the platform - Sido.

45 EXT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Sido and Colette are hanging out laundry. Colette seems to
be only half-listening - her mind is elsewhere.

SIDO
...the Laurent girl had her baby
last week. It was over nine
pounds, but she managed well
enough. She called her “Monique
Françoise.” The christening is
next month. Oh, and the Durands
moved away.

COLETTE
Really? Why?

SIDO
He inherited a house. In Lorraine.
I’ll miss them.

Colette manages a half smile.

SIDO (CONT’D)
I’m glad that you’re home. How
long do you think you’ll stay?

COLETTE
I don’t know, Sido.

SIDO
It must seem boring to you. Compared
to Paris.

COLETTE
No. Not at all.
INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - PARLOR - DAY

Colette is stretched out on a sofa, reading a book, absently stroking a cat in her lap. A loud clock is ticking. Sido appears at the doorway.

SIDO
You must eat something.

COLETTEThere’s a big one
Or a spider. There’s a big one
that’s dangling in my room. I’ll
catch her and put her to work out
here.

Sido turns to leave but looks back at Colette.

SIDO
Come outside. Help me with the tomatoes.

EXT. SIDO’S KITCHEN GARDEN - DAY

Colette and Sido are kneeling together in the soil. They tie some young tomato plants. An ANT crawls up one of the stems.

SIDO
Agh - ants. There must be honeydew...

COLETTEThere’s a big one
(feels the leaf)
Yes.. it’s sticky.

SIDO
The white flies have probably got to it.
They’ll have sucked all the juice.

COLETTEThere’s a big one
We need some ladybirds?

SIDO
Or a spider. There’s a big one
that’s dangling in my room. I’ll
catch her and put her to work out
here.

Colette stops, looks at Sido.
COLETTE
Did you ever feel like you were playing a part, Sido?

SIDO
In what way?

COLETTE
As a wife... or a mother... That you were just going through the motions?

Sido thinks. Inspects the other leaves.

SIDO
Sometimes as a wife... Never as a mother. Why?

Colette shakes her head, perturbed.

SIDO (CONT’D)
Is he good to you Gabri...? (Colette’s eyes tear up)
What is it, my love?

Colette finally opens up...

COLETTE
Nothing’s how I imagined it.

SIDO
Come here...

Colette falls into her mother.

SIDO (CONT’D)
My darling kitten. No one can take away what you are – no one. You’re too strong for that. Always have been. Trust no one but yourself.

COLETTE
I know.

SIDO
What’s he done to upset you?

COLETTE
Nothing... Nothing. (she pulls away)
It’s all – just – new... That’s all. I must get used to marriage.

Sido nods, looks at her daughter who looks away.
Willy and Colette walk along the dappled banks of the green slow river. She is distant. He is persistent.

WILLY
Are you happy to be here?

COLETTE
Yes. It makes the city seem even more foul...

WILLY
Well, you are a country girl...

She rolls her eyes.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Did you miss me?

COLETTE
(lies)
No, not really.

WILLY
Life has been...awful without you.
Just dead.

His tone grows more emotional. She holds firm.

WILLY (CONT’D)
I don’t feel like myself at all.
Everything seems...utterly pointless. I can’t even write anymore...
You mean more to me than all the women of Paris put together.

COLETTE
Have you sampled them all?

WILLY
Please don’t mock me.

COLETTE
You’re happy to mock everybody else...

WILLY
It’s true. It’s all horseshit... Words are deceptive little bastards...
(MORE)
WILLY (CONT'D)
but if you trace mine to their source -
to my bruised, aching heart...

COLETTE
I wouldn’t credit that as the organ
of origin.

He snorts.

WILLY
You know me too well.

COLETTE
I can read you like the top line
of an optician's chart.

WILLY
That’s wonderful. Did you make it up?
(she shakes her head exasperated)
Just...tell me what you want,
Gabrielle. And I’ll do it.

She turns faces him.

COLETTE
I know who you are, Willy... And
maybe I knew all along. But I want
you not to lie to me.

WILLY
I won’t. Never again! I promise.

COLETTE
I don’t want to be treated like a
little wife at home. I want to
know what’s going on. Whatever it
may be. I want to be... part of
things.

WILLY
You will be. You will be part of
everything.

He gives her his most sincere eyes. He puts his arms round
her and their voices get quieter as they walk further away.

WILLY (CONT’D)
...and I’ll even buy you a dog.

COLETTE
I’m being serious.
WILLY
So am I.
    (he looks around)
This river is so beautiful.

COLETTE
Yes, me and Luce used to come
swimming here after school.

WILLY
You did? She was your best friend,
wasn’t she?

COLETTE
No - but she was always with me.

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM

Willy is now in bed, Colette is undressing. They talk
quietly so as not to wake Sido.

COLETTE
Sometimes she could be sweet.. but
she could also be very annoying.

WILLY
In what way?

COLETTE
Well, she was clumsy, more than
anything. One day in winter, when
the first snows started, I made a
compact little snowball and
smuggled it into the classroom. As
Miss Terrain was writing I passed
it along to the next person..

She strips down to her underclothes, shivers slightly.

COLETTE (CONT’D)
Brrrrrr.

WILLY
Get in. I’m like a pot-bellied
stove.

Colette gets in and clings to him. Willy warms her hands.
COLETTE
It finally got to Luce.. who
“dropped” it..We both got
detention. ..she’d do anything to
be close to me.

Willy laughs.

WILLY
I bet she did.

He kisses her. They re-engage passionately and make love.

50 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR
Sido, in her nightgown, carries an oil lamp down the
corridor. From Colette’s bedroom comes the rhythmic creaking
of the bed springs that she does her best to ignore.

51 EXT. PARIS - MORNING - 1895
An aerial shot moves over the rooftops, churches, squares
and streets of Paris.

52 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT
Colette comes out of the kitchen eating a peach. A little
BULLDOG comes scampering after her. This is Toby Chien. She
hears an argument and moves stealthily through the apartment
to ascertain its source. Through the door she sees Pierre
Veber (angry) and Schwob (diplomatic) in front of Willy’s
desk.

WILLY
Get out! Both of you! This is harassment!

SCHWOB
Willy, come on. You’re not being
fair.

VEBER
This is the third time I’ve had to
come round and ask you for it!

WILLY
Then stop coming round and bloody
well asking!

VEBER
I am close to being evicted. You
owe me 400 francs. You’d get the
advance from Ollendorff you said!
WILLY
And I will - by Friday.

VEBER
You said that last week.

SCHWOB
A factory needs to pay its workers, Willy!

WILLY
Go on strike then! Get some other idiot
to hire you! Leave me alone! Both of you!
I’ll have your money by Friday.

VEBER
You’d better bloody have it!

Veber walks briskly into the living room, nods to Colette,
too angry to speak, and exits. Schwob follows, saying
goodbye.

Willy emerges, forlorn, and starts to get ready to leave.

WILLY
Damn them! They’d never get
published by themselves. I lend them
my name, my reputation... I take all
the risk. And there’s no money. We
simply need more output.

COLETTE
You could get another writer in.

WILLY
And pay them with what? We only have
about 1000 coming in this month - 300
from the Echo, 425 for the next vamp
novel and 250 from the music reviews.
But it doesn’t cover our outgoings.

COLETTE
How can we spend that much?

WILLY
The mortgage, Matilde, restaurants...

COLETTE
You always pick up the bill,
Willy, however many people join
us.

WILLY
It’s expected.
COLETTE
And the casino. And the races...

WILLY
What do you want me to do? Live like a monk? Or a peasant?

COLETTE
I’m just saying we could economize. Mademoiselle Terrain always used to say, “Look after the pennies and..”

Then lightning strikes...

WILLY
You... You!

COLETTE
What?

WILLY
You could write them up. Those stories of Saint-Sauveur you told me last year. They could be Willy’s next novel.

COLETTE
My school stories?

WILLY
Yes. There may be something there...You must start straight away, my love. Aim for four hours at a time - the wolves are at the door!

He goes back to his study. Colette’s mind is racing.

53 INT. ENTRANCE ROOM – MOMENT’S LATER 53

Sitting at a desk, exercise book open, Colette dips her fountain pen in the ink. A statuette of Willy is perched in the front of the desk, overlooking her. She writes SCHOOL NOTES BY GABRIELLE-SIDONIE COLETTE on the first page. Then...

COLETTE (V.O.)
My name is Claudine. I live in... Montigny. I was born there in...1881. I shall probably not die there.
INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S BUILDING – STAIRCASE – LATE EVENING

From directly above, we see Willy trudging upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM – LATE EVENING

Moments later, a rather tipsy Willy enters the bedroom. Colette is in bed, her eyes wide open.

WILLY
Why aren’t you sleeping?

COLETTE
I only just stopped writing.

Willy sits on the bed, belches, and takes off his boots.

WILLY
Did you manage four hours…?

COLETTE
Twice that. At least.

WILLY
Really?! You must be a natural!

COLETTE
I’ve changed a few things…for the story. But it might ruffle a few feathers back home.

WILLY
Don’t worry about the facts. You can add a character, make up an event. Adapt it to the times! All people really want is the feeling, the emotion – that great sweep of narrative.

COLETTE
So I should just write what I want?

WILLY
Yes! No one will ever dispute it – and if they do… “It is the hand that holds the pen that writes history.”

Spontaneously, Colette comes over to him, wraps her arms around him from behind and nibbles on his ear. He doesn’t respond.

COLETTE
You’re not in the mood?
WILLY
I’m tired as a bear in winter...
Save it for the book!

INT. ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY
MUSIC STARTS UP. We see Colette label a new exercise book
SCHOOL NOTES PART 3 before she starts on the fresh page.

COLETTE (V.O.)
“These are the copses, where bushes
spitefully catch your face as you pass.
Those are full of sun and strawberries
and lilies-of-the-valley and...snakes.
I’ve shuddered there with choking terror
at the sight of those dreadful, smooth,
cold bodies gliding in front of my
feet.’

She is completely absorbed.

COLETTE (V.O.)
“I feel so much alone there, my eyes
lost far away amongst the trees, in the
green, mysterious daylight that is at
once deliciously peaceful and a little
unnerving because of the loneliness and
the vague darkness.”

INT. WILLY’S STUDY - MORNING
There’s a pile of five notebooks on Willy’s desk with a
ribbon round them and a label that says “For Willy.”
Seated behind his desk, Willy unties the precious package,
picks up the first book and settles in to read it.

After a few pages he takes a cigar and lights it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT
Colette is playing with TOBY CHIEN on the floor. She gets
up and looks at the grandfather clock in the hall - 1:30.

HALF AN HOUR LATER
Willy emerges with the books. Colette is on the sofa with
the dog, a novel open in front of her. He smiles,
congratulatory but awkward.

COLETTE
What?
WILLY
Well... there we are. You did it.
I take my hat off to you.

COLETTE
And?

WILLY
It’s... beautiful. I spent the whole day in Saint-Sauveur.

COLETTE
You don’t like it?

WILLY
I do...

COLETTE
Truth?

WILLY
Yes. The nature descriptions are... charming.

COLETTE
“Charming...?”

Willy heads off to boudoir.

WILLY
Yes, perfectly charming! Sorry, I need to take a piss.

COLETTE
What else?

WILLY
Nothing - really - it’s a truly wonderful depiction.

She follows him into the bedroom. He goes into the adjoining boudoir, takes out a chamber pot and starts pissing. She flops onto the bed.

COLETTE
...And?

WILLY
We won’t be able to get it published is the shame of it...
COLETTE
What’s wrong with it?

WILLY
Honestly...?

She nods. He takes a breath.

WILLY (CONT’D)
So...I’ll treat you like any other writer I’m giving a report to, shall I?

COLETTE
Yes.

WILLY
Except I love you. I adore you. Let’s be clear about that.

COLETTE
Just tell me.

He finishes up, zips up, and comes into the bedroom.

WILLY
There’s nothing driving it. No plot. A novel by Willy... It grips you from page one. Yours has... (he gestures) ...too many adjectives. Some of the characters are interesting but overall... Well, it’s just too cloying. Too...feminine.

She says nothing, stares at the floor, anger mounting.

COLETTE
Well that was a waste of nine months.

WILLY
Not if you enjoyed it.

Not wanting to break in front of Willy, she storms off, through the apartment.

INT. WILLY’S STUDY

Colette slams the door behind her, eyes brimming with tears. She opens the notebook and looks at the first page. It says, “School Notes by Gabrielle-Sidonie Colette.” She takes a pen, crosses out her name.
And stops, leaving the single word “Colette.” She looks at it for a moment, tears in her eyes, and underlines it.

A makeshift stage, where the famous mime artist, WAGUE, performs a lip-sync sketch, accompanied by a PIANIST and a FEMALE SINGER. The audience is transfixed by his mastery of the form.

Colette and Schwob are at the edge of the crowd. Colette is dressed in black and white, her style feels modern and edgy - well ahead of the fussily-dressed socialites.

COLETTE
Wague’s mesmerizing, isn’t he?

SCHWOB
Yes - he’s the king of cantomime...

The song plays out its last few lines. Everyone bursts into applause.

SCHWOB (CONT’D)
Let’s get a drink.

MOMENTS LATER

Two champagne glasses are taken off a tray.

COLETTE
(to the servant)
Thank you, Geraud.

SCHWOB
Cheers.

They clink glasses.

SCHWOB (CONT’D)
How’s it going with your book?

COLETTE
It’s gone. I tried but it wasn’t any good.

SCHWOB
I can’t believe it.

COLETTE
Willy hated it. I don’t care. I don’t need to leave a mark on this world.
(MORE)
COLETTE (CONT'D)
Give me a flock of starlings and that will intoxicate me. Something real. Not just doing lines for the headmaster..
(takes a moment)
Did you always write, Schwob?

SCHWOB
I didn’t really have a choice. It was simply... There.

COLETTE
Does it make you happy?

SCHWOB
Oh god no! I do it to prevent me from going mad. But sometimes, occasionally, it will transport me.

This registers with Colette. Despite her bravura - she misses it. They are interrupted by a beautiful couple; GASTON and JEANNE de CAILlavet.

GASTON
Hello Schwob! Good to see you.

SCHWOB
Hello Gaston, Jeanne. Do you know Colette?

JEANNE
I think we’ve been introduced but... I don’t remember that name.

COLETTE
It’s new - in a manner of speaking.

JEANNE
Well then, I will think of this as our first meeting.

Schwob looks from one to the other, sensing a definite energy.

INT. MME. DE CAILlavET’S SALON - ENTRY ROOM

Madame de Caillavet is demonstrating the newly installed LIGHT SWITCH to WILLY, who seems distracted.

MME. DE CAILlavET
It’s so easy. On and off. No more sooty candles.
WILLY
Yes, maybe one day they will do my building.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
It’s so much safer too. Even if the light is a little... bright.

WILLY
Indeed. If you’ll excuse me.

Willy makes his exit and looks through the crowd for Colette. He rounds a corner and sees, through one room in which PEOPLE ARE DANCING, into a far room where Colette, GASTON and JEANNE DE CAILLAVET are sitting together.

62a INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET’S SALON - SMOKING ROOM

The newly introduced friends are all already quite tipsy. They are sitting in front of a MIRRORED WALL that reflects the DANCERS. Gaston is reading Colette’s palm. As Willy stares, a flicker of jealousy passes through his eyes.

GASTON
You have a long life line. Very strong head line - here. And your love line splits in three.

COLETTE
And what could that mean?

JEANNE
Who knows?

Gaston laughs, somewhat flirtatiously.

GASTON
So many intersecting lines.

COLETTE
I have the hands of a man - see.

She measures up to Gaston - hers are larger.

JEANNE
You have a touch of Hermes, Colette. There’s something androgynous about you.

GASTON
No, I know what it is. You’ve the soul of Narcissus! Filled with sensuality and bitterness.
COLETTE
My soul is filled with beans and bacon rinds. You’ll find nothing else there.

They all laugh. Willy arrives in front of them.

GASTON DE CAILLAVET
Willy, you ogre, how are you? We’ve been greatly enjoying the company of Colette – now she is no longer hiding her light under a bushel.

WILLY
Quoting the good book, Gaston? You may remember a little verse about coveting other men’s wives.

GASTON
And you may remember one about not trying to remove a speck from your brother’s eye with a log in your own.

WILLY
(amused)
Touché Gaston. Your wits are improving... somewhat. We’d better go now, darling.

INT. CARRIAGE – MOVING – NIGHT

WILLY
His first play was absolute rubbish – but his mother runs a salon, so of course it was a huge success and he was praised to the skies for his brilliant “writing” and sublime “talent.” Unctuous prick... He was after you.

COLETTE
Willy, he’s not that type. Besides they just got married.

WILLY
They’re no longer on honeymoon, my dear.

Colette looks at him, slightly amused...

COLETTE
Your jealousy is misplaced.

WILLY
Why so...?
COLETTE
It was actually his wife I found interesting.

WILLY
Jeanne?

COLETTE
Yes.

Willy considers this.

COLETTE (CONT’D)
What would you think of that?

WILLY
Well, that’s a different case.

COLETTE
It is?

WILLY
Perhaps...

Willy smiles to himself.

64
INT. STAIRCASE - DAY

From above we see two burly men ascending the staircase.

65
INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - DAY - 1898

A knock at the door. Colette answers to two rough-looking bailiffs.

BAILIFF
Good Morning, Ma’am. I need to speak to the gentleman of the house.

COLETTE
What is it?

BAILIFF
Monsieur Henri Gautier Villar - Is he in?

COLETTE
You can speak to me about whatever it is.

BAILIFF
Sorry ma’am.

Willy walks up the hallway.
WILLY
Yes. What is it?

BAILIFF
Sir, I have a repossession order for
two arm chairs, one armoire, one oak
desk.

WILLY
Do you have the court papers?

BAILIFF
Here you are. All in order.

Willy surveys them and resigned, steps to the side.

COLETTE
Willy?

WILLY
It’s only bits of wood.
(to the Bailiffs)
The chairs are in the front parlour.
Armoire’s in the bedroom.

COLETTE
With all my clothes in...

WILLY
Clear it out! I’ll see to the desk.

She storms off in exasperation. Willy goes into the office.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - OFFICE

The desk is surrounded by piles of paper and envelopes. He
-clears the papers out of the second lowest drawer and opens
the bottom drawer. Inside are a stack of school notebooks —
Colette’s novel. He picks them out of the drawer.

BAILIFF
Ready?

WILLY
Take it! Take it away!

He opens the book and flips through a few pages. Then a few
more, his curiosity aroused.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - DAY

Willy sits on a single chair in the middle of the room.
This time he’s engaged - gripped! He makes margin notes in
spidery handwriting.
WILLY
(to himself)
I am a bloody idiot.

Then, he skips back to the first page where it says “School Notes by (crossing out) Colette.” He neatly rips out the page and screws it up.

68

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT – WILLY’S STUDY – NIGHT

In a pool of gaslight, Willy and Colette are seated at the desk. Willy is going through his notes.

WILLY
...example, “it’s a lovely spring morning,” liven it up. How about:
(grand gesture)
“Perhaps it’s the season. It’s too fine – almost disgracefully fine.”

She scribbles it down.

WILLY (CONT’D)
And page 29 – that scene with Luce.

(he finds it)
I’ve added: “she brushes up against me suggestively, her blue eyes half closed and her mouth half-open.”

COLETTE
That’s quite louche.

WILLY
Louche sells, my dear. Trust me – all we need is a little more spice, a little less literature. I know what men want. And so do the publishers.

Colette ponders this for a moment – not completely satisfied.

COLETTE
And you really think they’ll take it?

WILLY
Yes! Ollendorff will go nuts for it.

COLETTE
(ironically)
As you did on first reading.
WILLY
Well never mind about that now.
We’ve got to work work work...

MUSIC COMES UP AND CONTINUES THROUGH THE FOLLOWING MONTAGE:

69 INT. PRINTERS - DAY
The presses are rolling, pumping out copies of the novel.

70 EXT. PRINTER’S COURTYARD - DAY
Crates of the book are being loaded onto a HORSE-DRAWN WAGON.

71 OMITTED

72 EXT. BOOK SHOP WINDOW
A SHOP CLERK builds the Claudine books onto a pyramid-shaped display. Behind is a sign: “CLAUDINE AT SCHOOL, BY WILLY.”

73 INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET’S SALON - DAY
Rachilde (the journalist) is reading her own review out loud to a crowd that includes Willy.

RACHILDE
"...Claudine is a young girl from a small village, yet, she is all of us. Feisty, opinionated, selfish and sensual, she astounds us with her moxie, her desires and her crimes!

The crowd let’s out an “Oooo.”

74 INT. BOOK SHOP - DAY
A Cousin Bette-type OLD MAID is in line with the book. In front of her, TWO SCHOOL GIRLS have purchased a copy.

75 EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE PARK - DAY
A YOUNG NANNY is reading the book, ignoring the CRYING BABY in the perambulator beside her.

75a EXT. CONVENT - DAY
A nun has abandoned her holy book to read Claudine.
INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jules watches, as Sido opens a package revealing the book.

JULES
Look at that!

SIDO
(critically)
Yes, look at it...

INT. SALON - DAY

Rachilde continues reading her rave review - to Willy.

RACHILDE
"It took an extraordinary man to define this modern young woman. Willy, your book will change the world."

(she raises a glass)
To Claudine!

SALON-GOERS
To Claudine!

Schwob and Colette watch from a corner.

SCHWOB
All Paris is saying your husband is a genius.

COLETTE
And what do you say?

SCHWOB
He is, if that book is anything to go by.

Colette smiles, indicates Willy with her eyes.

COLETTE
Look at him. I haven’t seen him as happy for a long time.

In the center of the room Willy is up on some FRIENDS shoulders, uncorking champagne. Colette gives Schwob a tight lipped smile. Something is rankling her but she won’t confess it - yet! MUSIC ENDS.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Willy and OLENDORFF, the publisher, are finishing up a meeting in OLENDORFF’S double high book-lined office.
OLLENDORFF
Well, we’ve never had one fly off the shelves like this before. Quite a phenomenon. Everyone’s talking about it. And you know who’s buying it? Young women!

WILLY
Really, I thought... that’s interesting.

OLLENDORFF
We’ve also been having enquiries about theatrical rights. Any thoughts?

WILLY
Of course, the theatre is the next logical step! With as large a stage as possible!

OLLENDORFF
It’s the theatre-going public which will make you rich, Willy.

WILLY
Make us all rich, my dear Ollendorff.

They laugh as they leave the room.

79
EXT. PUBLISHING HOUSE

Colette is waiting by a carriage outside. She sees Willy and Ollendorff coming down the stairs, talking business, but can’t quite make out what they are saying.

WILLY
So what size are you thinking of...?

OLLENDORFF
Perhaps - 20,000 units or 25,000 somewhere in that ballpark. I’m waiting to see what the pre-orders are like back from the sellers.

WILLY
And what kind of return would that yield?

OLLENDORFF
Well, we’re calculating about 3 francs a unit profit - so, yes - it’s a tidy sum.

The men push through the double doors and are now fully audible.
OLLENDORFF (CONT’D)
Mme. Willy, a great honor.

COLETTE
A pleasure to meet you.

WILLY
Listen! Claudine At School is heading for her third printing.

COLETTE
Excellent.

OLLENDORFF
I believe that Willy based “Claudine” in part on your school days?

COLETTE
Yes, I believe I had a little something to contribute.

Ollendorff chuckles. Willy’s smile is stretched thin.

OLLENDORFF
Well, I’m very glad your experiences have borne such wonderful fruit. Very nice to meet you, Madame.

80  EXT. PUBLISHERS - DAY  80

Willy climbs in next to Colette.

WILLY
Gare de Lyon.

COLETTE
Where’re we going?

WILLY
You’ll find out.

81  INT. CARRIAGE - MOVING - MINUTES LATER  81

Willy is uncharacteristically quiet.

COLETTE
Is something wrong?

WILLY
What do you think is wrong?

COLETTE
What..?
WILLY
Finally...finally we’ve a success. And then you imply that I’m not
the true author of it.

COLETTE
I didn’t... Most books are “based
on” something.

WILLY
Listen, we’re holding dynamite here. We have created something very
powerful. But if it goes off at the
wrong time it will blow our bloody
heads off.

COLETTE
It was only Ollendorff. He’s your
publisher, Willy.

WILLY
Schwob also said something.

COLETTE
Schwob’s part of the factory.

WILLY
People love to talk. They’ll praise
you to your face, but as soon as you
turn around...Tch! The knives are in
your back. You don’t know the
mentality here. I do.

COLETTE
I know it well enough to write a
book that’s the toast of Paris.

WILLY
Shout it to the streets then. Tell
people. Roll up for the
massacre...

Colette sighs, Willy really is quite upset. The matter
seems to cut to the core of his identity.

WILLY (CONT’D)
I’m sorry. Perhaps I
overreacted... Anyway, I’ve a
surprise for you.

COLETTE
What is it?
WILLY
Then it wouldn’t be a surprise...
We’re going to the country.

Colette smiles, puts her head on his shoulder.

COLETTE
Good. This city is driving me mad.

82 EXT. FOREST – DAY

Colette and Willy walk through trees, holding hands.

WILLY
What’s that one?

COLETTE
Lime.

WILLY
And that one?

COLETTE
Douglas Fir.

WILLY
And that one?

COLETTE
Chestnut...A weeping Chestnut.

WILLY
I don’t know why you love nature so much. Animals are vile to each other.

COLETTE
Animals are honest at least. They never lie.

WILLY
Well yes, my dear, that is because they can’t speak.

They come out of the trees into a clearing. There is a small lawn in front of a neoclassical country home.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Look at that!

COLETTE
Yes, it’s somebody’s house.
WILLY
Wonder who lives there.

COLETTE
It’s beautiful.

WILLY
I’m thirsty. Let’s see if they’ll stand us a drink.

He marches towards the house. She follows.

COLETTE
Willy, they might shoot at us!

83
EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE – DAY

Willy and Colette stand at the door. He knocks and rings a bell. He waits a moment then rings again.

COLETTE
Wait... they might be upstairs.

WILLY
Or deaf... They’ve been deafened by all the country silence.

COLETTE
Shhh... I thought I heard something.

WILLY
Give me a kiss.

Willy is on good form and charming Colette. She kisses him, aware too that the door might open.

COLETTE
Someone might come.

WILLY
Good...

He tries the door, it’s locked. Kisses her again.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Put your hand in my pocket.
There’s something there for you.

COLETTE
Willy!

He leads her hand downward. Slightly puzzled, Colette reaches into Willy’s pocket and retrieves... a key!
WILLY
Allow me.

Willy takes the key, puts it in the lock and turns it. The lock springs open.

INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

They enter the formerly-grand old house - still beautiful but dilapidated. The rooms glow luminous in the last of the sun.

WILLY
What do you think?

COLETTE
...Whose house is it?

WILLY
For you, my love, my heart. Lest Paris drive you mad.

COLETTE
What?

WILLY
It’s yours. You’re always talking about missing the countryside.

Willy kisses the key and gives it to Colette who stares at him and then again at the house.

COLETTE
Willy, I can’t believe it.

WILLY
Somewhere for you to write. And be alone.

Colette hugs him lovingly, then breaks off.

COLETTE
So...where did you get the money?

WILLY
I got an advance from Ollendorff. 25,000 Francs.

COLETTE
For what?

WILLY
For the next book. “Claudine in Paris.”
COLETTE
What?! I can’t do another Claudine.

WILLY
Just write about us! Our lives! Our friends! Change the names. Create gossip!

COLETTE
Willy...

WILLY
We’ll talk about the details later. (he looks up at the house) So...do you like it?

Colette takes in the house’s impressive dimensions.

COLETTE
It’s indescribable.

WILLY
No such word. A good writer should be able to describe anything no matter what.

85  INT. COUNTRY HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – DAY  85
Inside, WORKERS are scraping the paint off the living room floor. The room is unfurnished with peeling wallpaper.

85a INT. COUNTRY HOUSE  85a
Two workers carry in a sofa. Colette follows carrying a chair.

86  EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE – GARDEN – DAY  86
Colette digs a wild patch of garden. She is sweaty and covered in earth but hugely exhausted and content. She plants carrots, turnips and sweet pea shoots below their sticks.

In the background, we see the hoops of an OUTDOOR GYM.

88  INT. COUNTRY HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – DAY  88
Colette watches from the window as a carriage pulls into the driveway. The floors are now polished, the wallpaper redone, the place fully furnished.
INT. LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

WILLY
This is it? Your total output for all these weeks?

Willy stands, holding a few manuscript pages.

COLETTE
I had to do the house - all the repairs. The painting, the tiling...pruning the roses.

WILLY
Bugger the roses. We have a deadline.

COLETTE
It’s actually harder to write out here... Alone. And I don’t want to write another Claudine.

WILLY
Are you out of your mind? Claudine is a franchise! Do you realize how rare this moment is? When people are begging for more? Come.

He walks her through the house and up the stairs.

WILLY (CONT’D)
What would the headmaster do if Claudine had not done her homework?

COLETTE
Willy. Don’t be silly.

WILLY
(serious)
What would he do?

COLETTE
(sarcastic)
Make her do lines? Put her over his knee and tan her hide?

WILLY
Correct.

He arrives at the door of the study and stands expectantly at the door jamb as she walks past him into the study.

COLETTE
I’ll start tomorrow.
But Willy closes the door and turns the key in the lock.

COLETTE (CONT’D)

No! Willy!

WILLY

Write!

COLETTE

Willy!!

WILLY

You will do as I say! I will return in four hours and I expect to see pages.

He pockets the key and goes off.

INT. STUDY – CONTINUOUS

Frustrated, she tries the door handle. It’s locked.

COLETTE

Willy!! This isn’t funny.

She bangs on the door, anger building.

COLETTE (CONT’D)

LET ME OUT!!

(kicks the door.)

Bastard...absolute...arrogant bastard! I’ll write the bloody book! And I’ll tell them it was me! Me! Me who wrote it! Bastard! I’ll tell them! Claudine is mine!

Mine!

She stands back breathing hard. Then turns with a look of resignation to the writing desk.

MOMENTS LATER

She sits for a moment, still smarting from the exchange, dips her pen in the ink and writes “Claudine in Paris.”

EXT. BOOK SHOP WINDOW – DAY

Close on a book – CLAUDINE IN PARIS

It is revealed as part of a HUGE shop display. A LARGE SIGN announces “THE LATEST NOVEL FROM WILLY.” In front of it is a large pyramid of books. MUSIC ENDS
EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE - DAY

A beautiful day, PARISIANS are promenading and riding bicycles and velocipedes in the open air. Colette and Willy are pedaling a tandem. She’s at the front, putting in most of the leg work, he, true to form, is taking it easy at the back.

Under the trees, a cafe has been set up with delicate folding chairs and small round tables. A few dozen SOCIETY TYPES are enjoying tea and cakes.

Depositing their tandem by a tree. Colette and Willy approach. There is a feeling that all eyes are on them.

Walking through the tables they go past a beautiful red-headed heiress, named GEORGIE Raoul Duval. She is taking tea with her companion, a pretty young girl named LILY.

LILY
(whispering)  
Colette and Willy are here!

GEORGIE
So they are. Don’t stare.

Across the patio, Colette and Willy are seated by a WAITER. Georgie takes out a small card and scribbles a note.

GEORGIE (CONT’D)
Go take this to them.

MOMENTS LATER

Post-exercise the couple are eating cake.

COLETTE
Mmmm. It’s good.

WILLY
Indeed.

He looks round.

WILLY (CONT’D)
How many people here do you think are reading Claudine in Paris – right now?

COLETTE
I don’t know.
WILLY
At least three quarters, I’d say.
And those who haven’t yet will soon catch up.

He notices Lily weaving through the tables towards them.

WILLY (CONT’D)
(to himself)
What comes this way?

LILY
M. Willy, Mme. Colette, I have a note for you....from Mrs. Raoul Duval.

Clearly a little starstruck, she hands Willy the note and he surveys it.

WILLY
(remembering)
Mrs. Raoul Duval. Georgie Raoul Duval?

LILY
Yes.

WILLY
Oh... wonderful!... Please go tell your mistress we accept her invitation and look forward to her delightful company.

LILY
(thrilled)
I will!

And off she goes.

COLETTE
Who is she?

WILLY
(under his breath)
...An American - a wayward debutante from Louisiana.. she married a munitions magnate three times her age.

COLETTE
They sound a bit dull.

WILLY
He is. She is anything but. (glances at her)
We don’t have to...
COLETTE
No. Let’s go...

INT. CAFE NOIR - EVENING

In the high ceilinged cafe, we follow a WAITER who drops a bill off at a table where Georgie and Colette are in fits of hysterics - the kind of laughter sustained by the seriously drunk and flirtatious. Willy is providing the after-dinner entertainment. Lily sits by them, awed at getting to spend time with such celebrities, autograph book at the ready.

GEORGIE
(almost crying with laughter)
That’s so funny. Did he really say that?

COLETTE
Oh yes - he would. He is such a colossal snob.

WILLY
Then Mme de Caillavet happened to mention that he was only a baron and not a Marquise. “Allow me, he said “I am also Duke of Anjou, Bishop of Coutances, Prince of Joinville, of Asturias, of Orleans and the Dunes. But all that isn't of the slightest importance...
(with perfect timing)
...here.”

Everyone howls with laughter. A stray curl of her hair falls down over Georgie’s face.

COLETTE
Wait a moment.

Colette takes the lock and tries to pat it back into place. A moment of electricity passes between the two. Willy watches fascinated.

COLETTE (CONT’D)
Hold still. That’s it.

She takes her hands away. The disobedient lock immediately falls back down. The women lose it.

The waiter comes back by the table.

WILLY
(paying the bill)
Here you are.
WAITER
Thank you, Monsieur Willy.

GEORGIE
Is the evening over already? I can’t bear it...
   (turning to her assistant)
Lily, go tell the coachman to ready the carriage.

LILY
Of course...

Lily doesn’t get up though.

GEORGIE
Well?..?

LILY
I’m sorry Ma’am but...
   (thrusting an autograph book forward)
M. Willy, may I have your autograph?..?

WILLY
Of course! My pleasure. I’ll even do you a doodle. Of me.

LILY
Oh thank you!

He hands it back. Georgie looks impatient.

LILY (CONT’D)
And yours too Madame Colette.

GEORGIE
Oh come now...

COLETTE
Not at all. Spirit should always be rewarded.

She returns the book to Lily who positively vibrates with excitement.

WILLY
Good night, my dear.

LILY
Good night!

She hurries off.
GEORGIE
Well... I live at 74 Rue Goethe. If you’d like to stop by for at nightcap...

The question hangs in the air.

WILLY
Thank you so much. But I feel like I will retire this evening.

GEORGIE
Are you sure now?

COLETTE
Willy...

WILLY
We’ll play again soon, my dear.

GEORGIE
Yes...I hope so. Before my bore of a husband returns. Well adieu!

And she’s gone. Willy weighs this.

COLETTE
You don’t want to go?

WILLY
The invitation was clearly for you.

This really lands for Colette.

COLETTE
... Should I?

WILLY
Yes, of course.

COLETTE
You don’t mind?

WILLY
I’d be a hypocrite if I did, wouldn’t I?

Colette considers this.

WILLY (CONT’D)
If it’s any comfort to you, I will be at home lying in bed, thinking of the two of you in the fondest way possible.
INT. GEORGIE’S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Colette slowly ascends the dark staircase. Hiding her nervousness and her excitement. She knocks on the door. After a moment’s waiting Georgie answers.

GEORGIE
Come in.

INT. GEORGIE’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Georgie’s apartment, naturally, is very stylish.

COLETTE
What a nice place.

GEORGIE
Thank you. This is my little pied-a-tete. Frederick is not so keen on the Art Nouveau pieces. But I love nature...and women.

Colette looks at a painting of nymphs bathing.

COLETTE
I can see that.

GEORGIE
I remember in Claudine At School when the girls go swimming together at night...

COLETTE
Night is the best time to swim.

GEORGIE
When I was a girl, I was told all the lakes in Louisiana have alligators. So I never went for a midnight swim but I regret it...

Georgie looks down then raises her eyes towards Colette.

COLETTE
When you raise your eyelids, it’s as if you were taking off all my clothes.

Georgie looks down, blushing.

COLETTE (CONT’D)
Don’t look away. Look at me. Look at me looking at you.

She does. It’s electric. Colette slowly moves in and kisses her for a long hot moment.
GEORGIE
You have the most beautiful teeth.

She indicates Colette’s slightly angled front canine.

COLETTE
Like an alligator.

They smile and kiss again.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT – MORNING

Willy is perusing the morning mail. He hears the sound of Colette entering and, affecting nonchalance, carries on reading.

Colette enters, also acting cool.

WILLY
My dear...

COLETTE
Have you fed Toby Chien?

WILLY
I forgot. I thought Matilde does it.

She heads down the hallway towards the kitchen. He stops her with a question.

WILLY (CONT’D)
How was last night?

COLETTE
It was...interesting.

WILLY
What happened?

COLETTE
What do you think happened?

WILLY
Ah... well don’t tell me. I’ll wait to read about it. When Claudine develops tender feelings towards a lady friend.

Colette rolls her eyes.

COLETTE
I won’t be writing it down.

WILLY
But you must... It’s prime material!
COLETTE

No!

She heads out.

WILLY
Will you see her again?

COLETTE
(calling out)
Probably.

Willy is somewhat unsettled by his wife’s casualness and... independence.

INT. GEORGIE’S APARTMENT – DAY

As Georgie is finishing up her morning toilet, there’s the ring of a doorbell.

GEORGIE
(murmurs)
One moment, my darling.

She hastily wraps herself in a gown and makes her way through the apartment.

As she opens the door she is taken a back to see the bald pate of Monsieur Willy.

GEORGIE (CONT’D)

Oh.

WILLY
Wonderful, you’re here.. I was just passing by...

GEORGIE
Yes...

He continues to stare at her. She flushes slightly.

WILLY
Well -

GEORGIE
You’d better come in.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT – ENTRANCE ROOM – LATE AFTERNOON

Colette is working away in her small room. The front door goes and Willy comes in.
WILLY
How’s the writing going?

COLETTE
Slow...painful... How was your meeting with the bank?

WILLY
Good... yes, it was good. I won’t bore you with the details.

He heads off. She continues writing.

EXT. GEORGIE’S STREET - AFTERNOON

MUSIC COMES UP. A carriage pulls up outside the beautiful residence. Colette gets out and surveys it.

INT. GEORGIE’S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - DAY

Colette approaches the door and knocks.

COLETTE
Is she in?

LILY
Yes, please come in.

Lily leaves as Colette enters. Inside, Colette turns towards Georgie’s bedroom.

LILY (CONT’D)
She’s expecting you.

Lily gives Colette a smile and leaves discreetly.

EXT. GEORGIE’S STREET - EVENING

A carriage pulls up - but this time it’s Willy who gets out.

INT. GEORGIE’S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - EVENING

Willy approaches the door. Georgie opens it. He takes off his top hat and hands it to her as he goes in.

INT. GEORGIE’S APARTMENT - DAY

Colette and Georgie make mad passionate love.

INT GEORGIE’S APARTMENT - EVENING

Now Georgie is making love to Willy - with equal fervor.
103a INT. GEORGIE’S APARTMENT – NIGHT
Colette and Georgie’s passion continues to heat up...

103b INT. GEORGIE’S APARTMENT – AFTERNOON
Georgie and Willy come to climax.

104 EXT. GEORGIE’S STREET – AFTERNOON
Colette walks down the street looks up at the apartment. Someone who looks suspiciously like Willy is at the window.

105 INT. GEORGIE’S BUILDING – STAIRCASE – AFTERNOON
Colette marches up the stairs, rings the bell.

    COLETTE
    Georgie! I know you’re in there.

Still no answer. Colette knocks hard on the door.

    COLETTE (CONT’D)
    Georgie. Open up!

More loud knocks. Eventually Georgie answers in a nightgown.

    GEORGIE
    Colette, I was taking a nap.

Colette pushes past her.

    COLETTE
    Who’s been in here?

    GEORGIE
    No one. What are you doing?

Colette looks to the bedroom where tell-tale cigar smoke hangs in layers.

106 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE – STUDY – DAY
Colette is writing at her desk.

    COLETTE (V.O.)
    Blue cigar smoke feted the air...
    (she pauses, crosses out, then continues)
    I marched in and looked straight in the face of the Renaud. He recoiled, saying, “It was wicked of me. I’m sorry.”
Colette looks at the statue of Willy on her desk, wistfully.

COLETTE (V.O.)
Rezi was there, of course she was there - covering herself up...

INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT

Colette and Willy’s voices merge as the story transfers over.

WILLY
...I shall always remember her lily white face decomposing, as if it were dying right under my gaze.

Once again at the desk under the circle of light, Willy is reading aloud from the notebooks, giving his customary polish to the latest Claudine. Colette sits quietly by as this chapter of their own lives is read. But she has more confidence now - more poise. She is growing into herself.

He sets the book down. A moment’s thought.

WILLY (CONT’D)
It’s good.

COLETTE
I know.

WILLY
I’d suggest you change the line when Renaud says, “It was wicked of me to do it.” But I know that you won’t.

COLETTE
(piqued)
What do you think Renaud would say, in those circumstances?

WILLY
Hmmm...something like, “Why...we were waiting for you, my dear.”

COLETTE
I don’t think she would believe him.

WILLY
Of course not.

This is a sore point.
COLETTE - FINAL SHOOTING SCRIPT 66.

WILLY (CONT’D)
But don’t you think she’s being hypocritical - I mean, it’s acceptable for Claudine to sleep with Rezi but she doesn’t want Renaud to do the same?

COLETTE
Not behind her back, no. The betrayal came when Renaud lied to her. Renaud who swore he would always be honest.

WILLY
Perhaps he wanted to tell her, but he was frightened of her terrible jealousy?

COLETTE
Then he was a coward as well as a liar.

WILLY
You’re very harsh on him.

COLETTE
Who else will be? And Renaud would never be jealous? If for instance, Claudine went off with.. A young man, for a change?

WILLY
He would find that unacceptable.

COLETTE
Infidelity, for Renaud is a matter of gender.

WILLY
It is...
(clears his throat)
How long have you known...?

COLETTE
For a month or so.

Colette has won this one. Willy clears his throat.

WILLY
Well I must say, I’m impressed with the way you’ve handled yourself. The younger Claudine would have thrown a fit.
COLETTE
I’m planning on killing Renaud off
in the next one.

WILLY
No - you can’t. Please.

COLETTE
(quoting Willy)
“The hand that holds the pen writes
history.”

Willy shoots her an amused but slightly threatened look.

WILLY
Renaud’s moral shadings aside, the
writing is very good. Quite a work
of art. Those little scratches you
make on the paper -
(he indicates)
- very powerful. And it will have a
powerful effect. Everyone will immediately
know whom it’s about, there will be a huge
scandal, the books will spread like
thistledown all over France.

COLETTE
And M. Willy will have yet another
hot book on his hands.

An uneasy truce has been declared.

WILLY (cont’d)
You know what? I’m tempted to go
back and put even more Georgie into
Rezi.

COLETTE
Willy, we have to draw the line
somewhere.

WILLY
Why, my dear? Our marriage is
already public domain.

108  INT. PRINTING PRESS - DAY

MUSIC COMES UP: The pages of the new novel fly rapidly out of
the machine.

109  INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE - DAY

Ollendorff hands a brand new hardback copy of “Claudine en
Menage by Willy” to Willy who nods approvingly.
INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Georgie pours a glass of brandy for Colette. She is clearly wound up but trying to remain civilized.

GEORGIE
My husband - he’s just...pure rage. He was going to challenge Willy to a duel...

COLETTE
What?

GEORGIE
I’ve put him off. Hopefully it won’t come to that.
(she looks at Colette)
You’ve read it, yes?

COLETTE
I have.

GEORGIE
How worried should I be?

Georgie walks across to her with the drink.

COLETTE
The names have all been changed.
It’s not blatantly obvious who is who...

GEORGIE
I don’t believe you. Everyone is chattering about it - saying it will be salacious in the extreme.
(She clears her throat)
I know you have no time for me since our separation and I know I behaved badly. But I’m begging you... Ask Willy to change it - before publication?

Colette slowly shakes her head.

GEORGIE (CONT’D)
Please Colette... One woman to another? Please...

COLETTE
No, I can’t.

GEORGIE
You’d let me suffer?
COLETTE
It’s not just Willy, Georgie, it’s... the book itself...Willy thinks it’s a work of art.

Georgie downs her drink and switches gears - no more tears, a hardness comes to her eyes.

GEORGIE
You had your chance to be decent. So, it will be left to my husband to settle it. Ollendorff has agreed to a lump sum for the destruction of the entire print run.

COLETTE
What? You can’t do that.

GEORGIE
He has already accepted.

COLETTE
The sly bastard. You can’t. You just can’t.

GEORGIE
We have. And that is how it is.

Colette finally snaps.

COLETTE
You are a duplicitous bitch.

GEORGIE
I had a good teacher.

Colette leaves slamming the door. Georgie looks after her.

111 EXT. GEORGE’S APARTMENT - DAY

Colette leaves the house in a rage.

112 EXT. PRINTER’S COURTYARD - DAY

A WORKER pours petrol on a bonfire of novels then throws his cigarette butt on it to ignite the pile. It bursts into flame immediately. Charred pages rise with the heat. The worker takes another crate and dumps them on.
INT. LA MASCOTTE - EVENING

Colette and Willy are with Schwob in their favorite dining spot feasting on oysters and champagne. There is an unexpected air of celebration.

WILLY
Like a true French heroine, our daughter was burnt at the stake.

COLETTE
I said it would be a “hot book.”

WILLY
The thing is though, Ollendorff signed the deal but unfortunately failed to mention...
(drum rolls the table...)
That he didn’t own the copyright. I do.

SCHWOB
Unbelievable!

WILLY
All I had to do was trot round to another publisher and collect a second advance. The presses are hard at it as we speak.

SCHWOB
How do you two do it?

COLETTE
I think we got very lucky...

WILLY
Not at all! That American tart and her senile lackey didn’t stand a chance. We are with the times! The wind is under our wings! And I have a little plan that will make Claudine the most popular girl in France, if not the entire world.

SCHWOB
With the play?

WILLY
Not just that. We’ll have Claudine perfume, Claudine lingerie, Claudine soap.
COLETTE
She will literally be a household name.

They all laugh.

INT. THEATRE – DAY – 1903

On a blackboard, in chalk is written “CLAUDEINE AUDITIONS.”
An insipid actress is cooing her way though the dialogue.

INSIPID ACTRESS
My name is Claudine. I live in Montigny. I was born there in 1881. I shall probably not die there...

Colette and Willy are sitting in the tenth row of the theatre. In front of them are the DIRECTOR and two FINANCIERS.

Colette, now in her late twenties, seems to have grown comfortable in her skin. Willy, on the other hand, is showing the tell-tale signs of a life too-well lived.

WILLY
She’s not bad.

COLETTE
She’s terrible.

INSIPID ACTRESS
Montigny is a village, not a town: its streets, thank heaven, are not paved; the showers roll down them in little torrents that dry up in a couple hours; it is a village, not even a very pretty village, but, all the same, I adore it.

WILLY
(to Colette)
Yes, you’re right.
(shouts)
Thank you very much. Next.

A SECOND ACTRESS comes up on stage and starts repeating the line. Colette notices the impressive hourglass silhouette of a woman in the rear doorway.

The woman marches down the aisle and plants herself in front of them. Wearing a schoolgirl smock, she is vibrant, Algerian, with bobbed hair and a tiny waist. This is POLAIRE.
POLAIRE
M. Willy. I am the real Claudine!

Colette and Willy exchange an intrigued look.

WILLY
And you are?

POLAIRE
Me? My name is... Polaire!

115 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Colette and Willy sit, examining photographs of Polaire.

WILLY
Polaire! Polaire! Daughter of the desert. Look at her! Look at her! She knows the role instinctively.

COLETTE
She talks about the book as though it were a religion.

WILLY
A “Sister of Perpetual Claudine.”

COLETTE
It’s interesting. She’s started to copy little gestures and mannerisms that I do.

WILLY
Yes...

COLETTE
Do you think I could act?

WILLY
You? No. It would be a criminal waste.

COLETTE
Waste of what?

Willy shrugs, dismissing the thought. He picks up a photo and examines it closer.

WILLY (cont’d)
That bobbed hair... I’ve never seen anything like it. Have you?

COLETTE
(suspicious)
I always imagined Claudine had long hair.
WILLY
That was the 19th Century
Claudine…this is now.

He holds the picture up beside her.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Would look good on you, actually. Very
fetching.

COLETTE
No. Willy, I couldn’t.

WILLY
It would make you look younger.

COLETTE
Really?

WILLY
You’re turning thirty soon – what
better time to turn the clocks…

COLETTE
Thank you… But I’ve always had my
hair… Sido would kill me.

WILLY
Just think of it… You and Polaire
– The Claudine Twins!

COLETTE
What!?

WILLY
It’ll be a goldmine of publicity.
All Paris will be atwitter.

COLETTE
No! Never… in a thousand years.

116  INT. HAIR SALON – DAY

Scissors hack through thick long tresses.

A HAIRDRESSER shows Colette her new bob in a mirror that
reflects the back. Colette gives a prim, uptight nod.

117  INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT – LIVING ROOM – EVENING

Colette enters the room shorn. The haircut looks awkward –
it hasn’t quite settled in yet. Willy looks up from his
newspaper and stares at her amazed.
WILLY
My word! Where have you gone?

COLETTE
Willy, I hate it.

Willy circles his strange new wife.

WILLY
No... I like it very much.

COLETTE
It’s absurd. My head looks too big for my body.

WILLY
It’ll just take a bit of getting used to...

Colette goes to a mirror.

COLETTE
Oh – what did I do?

Colette covers her face with her hands. She starts to hyperventilate, holding back sobs.

COLETTE (CONT’D)
She butchered me. I look ten years older. You made me do this.

WILLY
Oh come now, you went along with it... you always do.

Unexpectedly, she flies at him. He holds her arms away from his chest. As they struggle –

COLETTE
You bastard! Look at me...and all for your damned publicity?

WILLY
Gabrielle!

COLETTE
You crowd-pleaser! You cheap bastard!! You shit!

She starts beating on his chest. And keeps going... until she is exhausted and breaks into tears.
118 EXT. THEATER - NIGHT

A poster announces “CLAUDINE IN PARIS – TONIGHT” as CROWDS make their way in.

119 INT. THEATER - NIGHT

Starting on the back of Colette’s head, now looking super-chic with the new haircut, we follow Colette and Willy as they take their seats in a private box for the opening night of "Claudine." Next to them are SALONITE and her husband.

SALONITE
Colette, you look ravishing.

She smiles.

The house lights dim, the ORCHESTRA strikes up and the curtain goes up. Polaire makes an exuberant entrance.

POLAIRE
My name is Claudine. I live in Montigny...

Colette’s eyes shine as her heroine becomes flesh.

POLAIRE (CONT’D)
...I was born there in 1881. I shall probably not die there. Montigny is a village, not a town: its streets, thank heaven, are not paved; the showers roll down them in little torrents that dry up in a couple hours; it is a village, not even a very pretty village, but, all the same, I adore it.

120 INT. LA MASCOTTE RESTAURANT/SALON - LATER

An air of celebration - champagne and music. At the far end of the room is Willy, sitting on a throne, holding court with Colette and Schwob by him.

WILLY
I thought of all my novels, this was the one that would translate to theatre.

MME. DE CAILLAVET
I have to give it to you, Willy. It’s going to be a huge success - enjoy your moment of triumph.
VEBER
Now that you are such a celebrity, you’ll become more insufferable than ever.

WILLY
That’s the plan, Veber! That’s the plan!

Willy continues to hold forth.

Someone who appears to be a dapper gentleman dressed as Napoleon approaches Colette. This, we will find out momentarily, is a woman called MISSY.

SCHWOB
Can you believe this crowd? Everyone’s here! Look there’s the Marquise de Belbeuf... or Missy, as she’s known.

COLETTE
A woman?

SCHWOB
Descended from Empress Josephine on one side, the Tsar of Russia on the other - She only shows up for very special occasions.

COLETTE
Fascinating.

The moment is interrupted by a hubbub. Colette looks around the corner where Polaire is making her entrance carried aloft on a litter by FOUR MUSCULAR GUYS. She is showered with praise and flowers.

WILLY
Polaire! Over here!

POLAIRE
Monsieur Willy!

She is deposited before...

POLAIRE (CONT’D)
How was it?

WILLY
Brilliant, my dear! You were perfection!

POLAIRE
Thank you, M. Willy! Colette?
She looks to Colette who raises her glass.

**COLETTE**
You are her. The living Claudine.

Polaire is so excited she physically vibrates.

**WILLY**
Polaire, alight upon my knee...

He pats his knee and she sits.

**WILLY (CONT’D)**
And you Tetette!

He grabs her by the hand.

**COLETTE**
Willy!

**WILLY**
Come here!

She acquiesces and lands on his other knee. Willy is now framed by two “Claudines” with perfect bobbed hair. He waves to a photographer.

**WILLY (CONT’D)**
Here we have the Claudine Trinity.
The father...
  (he indicates himself)
The mother...
  (he indicates Colette)
And the daughter... 
  (Polaire)

**PHOTOGRAPHER**
Hold still!

A magnesium flash goes off, freezing the picture. MUSIC comes up. A MONTAGE SHOWS WILLY’S HIGHLY INNOVATIVE EXPLOITATION OF THE CLAUDINE PHENOMENON.

121  INT. PHOTO SESSION - DAY

Camera flashes capture Colette, Willy and Polaire in a series of poses. Colette plays it coy - kneeling at his feet, batting her eyes at him, sketching him. She has certainly adopted the Claudine persona full tilt. INTERCUT WITH...

122  NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

"CLAUDINE SENSATION" “MENAGE A TROIS” “VIVE CLAUDINE”
CLOSE ON POSTER
It says “Do Not Go and See CLAUDINE IN PARIS - it’s immoral.”

MAGAZINE HEADLINE
“THE YEAR OF CLAUDINE!”

INT. STREET – DAY
A MIDDLE AGED MAN reads a newspaper with the headline MENAGE A TROIS.

INT. SHELF/MAGAZINE RACK
Pan along several CLAUDINE magazines - ending on one that says VIVE CLAUDINE.

INT. BATHROOM
A YOUNG WOMAN picks a bottle of Claudine perfume and applies a few squirts.

INT. HAIR SALON – DAY
A number of WOMEN, including a couple of SALONITES, getting their hair bobbed to look like Claudine.

OMITTED

INT. SHELF/BEAUTY PARLOR
A shelf full of jars selling CLAUDINE FACE CREAM.

INT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE PARK – DAY
A line of WOMEN fanning themselves with CLAUDINE FANS.

EXT. SHOP WINDOW – DAY
SCHOOL GIRLS gaze at MANNEQUINS – all dressed "A la Claudine."

EXT. COURTYARD – DAY
A ROUGH HANDSOME WORKER takes a CLAUDINE Cigarette from the packet with his mouth and lights it.

INT. SHELF/CONFECTIONERS
Boxes of CLAUDINE CANDIES fill the self.
A YOUNG BUSINESSMAN reads a paper that says CLAUDINE
SENSATION while a YOUNG WOMAN reads a magazine that says LE
SECRET DE CLAUDINE.

Children eat CLAUDINE CANDIES.

A YOUNG WOMAN dresses in CLAUDINE LINGERIE.

A young DANDY slicks his hair with CLAUDINE HAIR OIL.

A WOMAN reaches out to pick up a bar of CLAUDINE SOAP.

A BUNDLE OF NEWSPAPERS lands with the headline “EPOCH DE
CLAUDINE.”

TWO YOUNG GIRLS play with CLAUDINE DOLLS.

A group of YOUNG LADS trade CLAUDINE postcards.

...The assembled (including Veber, Schwob, Polaire) bang
rhythmically on the table with glasses, cutlery, and fists
as Willy stands at the head of a large table improvising a
poem. Missy sits far down the table near Colette’s end
with a SUFRAGETTE FRIEND.

WILLY
Claudine, she is a Midas Minx.
Her smile mysterious as a sphinx.
She walks and talks, she laughs – she thinks!
Claudine, Claudine, Claudine...

He starts to move to the rhythm, swaying from side to side.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Claudine’s a girl that knows no bounds.
A fox that’s never caught by hounds.
(MORE)
WILLY (CONT'D)
Exploding star that makes no sound! Claudine, Claudine, Claudine!

Willy beckons a few YOUNG WOMEN up from the table and they link arms forming an impromptu can-can line. The rhythm speeds up and intensifies...

WILLY (CONT'D)
Who is this girl in my heart? (ALL: CLAUDINE!)
Who has been there from the start? (ALL: CLAUDINE!)
And who is a bit of a tart? (ALL: CLAUDINE)
CLAUDINE! CLAUDINE! CLAUDINE!

The merriment in the room is sky high.

WILLY (CONT'D)
Who is the one I admire? (ALL: CLAUDINE)
Who is the queen of desire? (ALL: CLAUDINE)
And who has set Paris on fire? (ALL: CLAUDINE)
CLAUDINE! CLAUDINE! CLAUDINE!

The Marquise scribbles something on a card and passes it to Colette via her friend and then Wague. Colette looks at the card. It has the family coat of arms and says, “Let’s meet.”

WILLY (CONT’D)
Who’s wearing a school girl’s smock? (CLAUDINE)
Who’s causing a hell of a shock? (CLAUDINE)
Who working it all round the clock? (CLAUDINE)
CLAUDINE! CLAUDINE! CLAUDINE!

He raises his hand, slightly out of breath, to quiet the banging, for a more personal last verse that he delivers straight to Colette.

WILLY (CONT’D)
And in a dream, I find myself,
Next to Claudine,
And her magical eyes,
Forgetting all other music
For the laughter of her voice...

He raises his glass. Everyone follows.
WILLY (CONT’D)
To Claudine!

ALL
CLAUDINE!!

Colette and Willy’s eyes connect, sharing a moment of triumph.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Colette and Willy enter laughing, giddy with champagne, and turn on the light. The apartment has been considerably UPGRADED.

COLETTE
I’m exhausted.

WILLY
Me too. There’s more steps everyday. But what a night! We have Paris in the palm of our hand.

They laugh. Then Colette switches on the light and notices something - a Claudine dress laid out on the bed.

COLETTE
Willy..?

WILLY
My dear. I wondered if tonight you would...
   (he indicates the dress)
   It would help me.

They look at each other, the bed - and the dress - between them.

INT. BOUDOIR - NIGHT

Colette puts on the dress and looks at herself uneasily in the mirror.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

She re-enters the dimly-lit room. Willy waits in bed. Colette walks across the room and stands in front of him.

WILLY
My love.

Still seated, he pulls her into him, nuzzling into her bosom.
WILLY (CONT'D)
Oh yes, my love... my Claudine.

Colette stares ahead into the blackness with a mixture of sadness, tenderness, confusion and pity.

EXT. RUE JACOB - DAY - 1904

A hot day in Paris. Heat rises up, making the street look like it is in an impressionist painting. A YOUNG WOMAN in a Claudine outfit, heads towards the apartment. It’s a similar view to scene 38 when Colette walked towards the house, but now, there are motor cars mixed in with the horse drawn carriages.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - STAIRCASE - DAY

The young woman ascends the stairs. ANOTHER YOUNG WOMAN, dressed à la Claudine, is going down the other way.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The gramophone is playing. Colette is having cheese and wine with a friend - Wague, the mime artist from the salon.

COLETTE
Here try this Soumaintrain.
   (he takes a slice)
It reminds me of Saint Sauveur.

WAGUE
Oh yes, delicious.

COLETTE
When are you going on tour?

WAGUE
A few weeks. Some real flea pits too. It’ll be hell.. Again.

COLETTE
Why do you do it then?

The front door bell goes off.

WAGUE
I’m addicted. I love every single dive and wastrel. You should come with us.

COLETTE
I can’t do cantonime.
WAGUE
This isn’t cantomime this is a new kind of pantomime. Pure action – the right gesture is worth a thousand words.

This registers with Colette. The bell rings again. She looks towards Willy’s office to see a seated figure on the phone. (This is PAUL HEON whom we will soon meet.)

COLETTE
Excuse me.

BACKGROUND DIALOGUE

HEON
Willy Gauthier Villars residence...
He’s busy right now can I take a message?... yes...yes...Would you like to make an appointment?...how about next Tuesday?... He maybe has some time the following Thursday... You can’t make that either... Yes, the Wednesday after is clear... I’ll put you down for half an hour... What’s your name? How do you spell that? Good. Look forward to seeing you a week on Wednesday... I’ll tell him...Goodbye.

137 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT – DAY

Colette goes to answer the door and there stands a 23 year-old young woman done up à la Claudine. This is MEG.

COLETTE
Yes?

MEG
Is Monsieur Willy at home? I was hoping he could sign my book.

COLETTE
Follow me.

Colette walks into the living room and calls.

COLETTE(CONT’D)
Héon! Another one.

Outside Willy’s office the newly appointed Afro-Caribbean secretary, PAUL HEON, hangs up the phone.
HEON
This way please.

Meg walks towards Willy’s Office.

HEON (CONT’D)
Go right in...

INT. WILLY’S STUDY - DAY

The door is ajar. The girl sticks her head in.

MEG
Monsieur Willy...?

He looks up from his desk.

WILLY
I am he.

MEG
Hello, I was wondering if you would sign this.

She produces a copy of “Claudine at School.”

MEG (CONT’D)
It’s my favorite book.

WILLY
Thank you. To whom shall I inscribe it?

MEG
My name is Meg... I am the real Claudine.

Willy looks up at her, attracted by her youth and beauty.

WILLY
Where are you from?

MEG
(dropping her “Claudine” voice)
I’m from London.

WILLY
Wonderful! And how old are you?

MEG
I’m older than I look actually. I’m twenty three.
WILLY
Oh, well, I’m younger than I look – I’m forty six.

MEG
(resuming Claudine voice)
I don’t mind.

He hands the book back.

WILLY
Well here you are...

MEG
Thank you, this will be my prize possession. And that was Mme. Colette I met at the door?

WILLY
It would be strange if it wasn’t.

MEG
She’s so beautiful – her eyes! So much depth – and maturity.

She gives Willy a knowing smile.

139 EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE – DAY

In a quiet lane away from the crowds, Colette and Missy walk Toby Chien. The Marquise is very affable but also a little reserved – like a polite gentleman of the day.

COLETTE
Look lilies...

MISSY
Yes, calla palustris.

COLETTE
There’s not many people in Paris who would know their proper name.

MISSY
My maternal grandfather was a botanist. He was always away – collecting samples down in the tropics.

COLETTE
My maternal grandfather spent time in the tropics too. He was a quadroon.
MISSY
Really?

COLETTE
Yes, from Martinique.

Missy raises an approving eyebrow.

MISSY
Wonderful.

Two young women walk by dressed as Claudines, giggling.

MISSY (CONT’D)
Congratulations, by the way. It seems that Claudines are everywhere these days.

COLETTE
Yes... There’s even been a Claudine murderess – in Marseilles. She slit her husband’s throat.

MISSY
Good for her.

Colette can’t help but smile.

MISSY (CONT’D)
But seriously, you’ve done something important. You’ve invented a type.

COLETTE
You mean Willy has.

MISSY
I mean you have. All the young girls between girlhood and womanhood – you give them a voice.

Colette says nothing. A force of personality is breaking through Missy’s reserve...

MISSY (CONT’D)
You should own up to it.

COLETTE
Someone told you?
COLETTE - FINAL SHOOTING SCRIPT

MISSY
Didn’t need to be told. Meeting you was enough. You are a force of nature.

COLETTE
It’s true I...I wrote them. It’s just...

MISSY
I know... It’s a man’s world.

They exchange a look. Ahead of them is a more populated thoroughfare. They hover for a moment, in the shade of the last tree, cherishing their improvised privacy. Colette kisses her fingers and places them on Missy’s lips as a carriage goes rattling past.

139A INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - DAY 139A

Colette is composing a note at her small writing desk.

COLETTE (V.O.)
I hope the path we walked today was merely the beginning... I see your face, Missy.. strong, vulnerable. I’ve never met anyone like you - polite yet direct, reserved yet brave - a true gentle man. I will think of you, if I may, as my chevalier.

She smiles to herself as she writes - Missy has really gotten to her.

140 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY 140

MUSIC COMES UP. An AERIAL SHOT glides over the fields, hedges and forests of the French countryside.

A very early automobile is putt-putting down the road. Willy is driving, with Meg seated by his side. In the back, Colette sits next to Missy.

141 EXT. COLETTE’S COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY 141

Meg and Missy are throwing a ball for Toby Chien down the lawn. Willy and Colette are left alone on the veranda amidst the rubble of a picnic.
WILLY
Meg’s a sweet thing, isn’t she? She can be a little overeager, but there we are...she reminds me of you - ten years ago.

COLETTE
Nothing like. But she is very sweet.

WILLY
We do have a very modern marriage, don’t we?

COLETTE
We do... What do you think of Missy?

WILLY
She’s very pleasant. But she perplexes me. Words in our language are either masculine or feminine. There’s no word for Missy.

COLETTE
(smiling)
Oh, I know one...

WILLY
You seem content, for once. Isn’t there something missing?

COLETTE
What do you mean?

142 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STAIRS/COLETTE’S BEDROOM

Colette and Missy run up the stairs laughing, wild with passion. They round the door and start to kiss hotly. Missy puts her hand down Colette’s skirts and starts to pleasure her. It’s a new level of erotic engagement for Colette.

143 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STUDY

Next door, a different kind of scene. Willy is waiting expectantly on a chaise longue. A quiet knock on the door Meg’s voice comes from the outside...

MEG
Ready..?

WILLY
Yes, I’m ready.
She shuffles out in a full Claudine smock and stands simpering at the foot of the bed.

MEG
My name is Claudine. I live in Montigny. I was born there in...(she calculates)
Should I change the year?

WILLY
No. Keep it the same.

MEG
I was born in 1881...

WILLY
That’s right.

MEG
I will probably not die there.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - OUTDOOR GYMNASIUM - MORNING

Sunshine and bird song. By the weatherworn gym equipment, Missy holds Colette’s feet as she does sit ups on the horse.

MISSY
48...49...50. Well done...

Colette finishes breathing heavily.

COLETTE
Missy, you were married once, weren’t you?

MISSY
Yes, it was awful... We don’t talk anymore, except through the auspices of lawyers. He’s embarrassed by me – if he was married to me, what does that say about him?

COLETTE
It must have been very hard for you, I mean, to put on the trousers...?

MISSY
No, it was entirely natural. I was a rather awkward child - if you can imagine me in pigtails and a dress. I never felt like I belonged. Then one day I tried on my brother’s school uniform.

(MORE)
MISSY (CONT'D)
And I knew I was home for the first time... Of course, it’s far easier for me than for women of no means... but I wanted to show that it can be done. I do imagine a time when all women may wear trousers if that is their wish.

Colette smiles, reflecting.

MISSY (CONT’D)
And you?

COLETTE
What about me?

MISSY
Well, I dress as a man; Willy dresses you as a schoolgirl.

COLETTE
(ironically)
Thank you.
(takes a breath)
I do know what I’m doing, you know.
I’m in on the joke.

MISSY
I don’t doubt it. But are you happy?

COLETTE
Is anybody happy? Willy’s demanding - yes, but he gives me a lot of freedom.

MISSY
It’s a long leash he keeps you on but a leash nevertheless... perhaps you enjoy that.

COLETTE
Do you think that’s terribly wrong?

MISSY
No. That’s entirely your business. But... never mind.

COLETTE
What?
MISSY
Well, I wonder if a time will come when you have to decide - are you Claudine or are you Colette?

Colette absorbs this and looks away.

145 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - DAY 145

Colette ascends the stairs to her own apartment - wearing a suit and trousers.

146 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - DAY 146

She goes through the apartment towards Willy’s study. Paul Héon is working at his desk by the door.

COLETTE
Hello Héon.

HEON
Hello Colette.

COLETTE
Is he there?

HEON
Yes.

COLETTE
What kind of mood is he in?

HEON
The usual. But worse.

147 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - WILLY’S STUDY - DAY 147

Willy is pawing over an account ledger as she enters.

COLETTE
Morning Willy.

WILLY
My word. What are you wearing?

COLETTE
They’re Missy’s.

WILLY
My Dear, I’m surprised you didn’t get arrested. Or beaten up.

Colette shrugs this off.
COLETTE
Willy...I’ve was thinking. You know ‘Claudine Takes Off’ - why don’t we publish it under both our names?

WILLY
Out of the question. Ollendorff will never agree.

COLETTE
Ollendorff or you?

WILLY
My dear, do you want to the kill the goose that’s laying the golden Claudines?

Colette is exasperated.

COLETTE
But there’s little risk. Claudine’s established... And many people, they know already... or suspect ...Surely.

WILLY
No one knows. Unless you’ve been crowing about it to your lady man friend.

COLETTE
Don’t insult Missy.

WILLY
I think she is stripping you of your sense of humour...and your common sense.

COLETTE
That’s not fair Willy.

WILLY
We can’t risk it. Especially not with our present finances. We’re dead broke.

COLETTE
We’re always broke! Yet you gamble and fill this place with all your antiques.

WILLY
They were bought from bankrupts at a debtor’s auction!

COLETTE
The car. The racehorse that went lame?
WILLY
...And you? Your clothes, your hats, the exorbitant mortgage on the country house.

COLETTE
(adamant)
I want my name on the book.

WILLY
No no no. Willy is a brand name. And the fact is, women writers don’t sell.

Colette lets out a gasp of frustration.

COLETTE
Bastard! Selfish, smug, fat, lazy bastard!

WILLY
I’ll give you fat... All the other descriptions are libel.

COLETTE
I need credit for my work! My name on it!

WILLY
Utter nonsense! If you were so concerned about that you never should have agreed to it all.

COLETTE
Godammit Willy...!

WILLY
Without the progenitor, there would be no Claudine!

Colette takes his pile of papers and throws them on the floor and marches out.

148 EXT. PARIS STREETS - DAY 148

The atmosphere is thick, humid, charged with electricity. Colette walks through the gloomy streets, lost in her own thoughts. She feels small, disinherited, angry.

She walks towards the Seine and looks out over the water. Down by the quayside a YOUNG CLAUDINE is with her SWEETHEART, flirting and kissing. Colette looks despondently at something she created but cannot own.

FADE TO BLACK.
INT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY - 1906

The ivories of a piano are being hammered. A BOHEMIAN PIANIST is playing a rhythmic Oriental piece.

Light bounces around the studio, with its polished floors and huge mirrors. Four YOUNG DANCERS in leotards crawl on all fours. WAGUE, the renowned mime, is teaching a class.

The door opens. Colette enters. Watches the class in action. Wague notices her presence, nods curtly, and continues. Colette starts to take off her outer clothes, she wears a leotard underneath.

HALF AN HOUR LATER The dancers gather their things. Colette enters now changed into a leotard with her clothes in a bag.

    WAGUE
    Ready?

    COLETTE
    Yes.

    WAGUE
    Let’s get to work.

A short montage as Wague demonstrates various motions that Colette diligently copies.

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY 150

Willy is reading a newspaper. Colette is in front of a mirror, with a sheet of chiffon draped around her, practicing movement. Matilde is on her knees cleaning the hearth.

    WILLY
    Are you going to write today?

    COLETTE
    No. I’m rehearsing with Wague later.

    WILLY
    Don’t you think you ought to? What are your priorities?
    (he looks at her, frustrated)
    I should start locking you up again.

    COLETTE
    I would scream the house down.

She carries on with the exercises, self-absorbed.
WILLY
It’s a charming hobby, Tetette
but... You are not Sarah
Bernhardt. And if you can’t pull
it off as high art you’ll be doing
the bloody music halls, for god’s
sake. And that would be
scandalous.

COLETTE
And when have you ever considered
scandal a bad thing?

WILLY
True...What does Missy say?

COLETTE
He’s all for it. He comes along to
Wague’s studio with me all the time.

WILLY
How depressing. Does she have no
life of her own whatsoever?

COLETTE
Missy does the movements with me.
He’s rather good.

Willy nods - he’s having one of his famous ‘big ideas.’

COLETTE (CONT’D)
Wague thinks I could be a ready
for the stage in a few weeks. What
do you think, Matilde?

MATILDE
I have to agree with M. Willy,
Ma’am. It’s not very lady-like.

COLETTE
I thought you were on my side!

MATILDE
Suit yourself.

WILLY
So you and the Marquise run around the
studio as potty mimetic lovers do you?
(Colette nods)
And Missy shares your ambition to
go on the stage?

COLETTE
Oh no, he’s far too shy.
INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Willy is pitching a THEATRE MANAGER after a heavy lunch.

WILLY
It’ll be called “The Dream of Egypt.”
Paris will never have seen anything like it. A scandalous sensation—
starring Madame Colette Willy and...
(drumroll on the table)
The Marquise de Belbeuf!!! In the
common or garden music hall! Can you
imagine? It’ll be a full house. Every
night.

THEATRE MANAGER
We do perfectly well with the can-can.

WILLY
I’ve seen it half empty on a week night.

THEATRE MANAGER
You can vouch for the Marquise?

WILLY
It’s in the bag. We can even put the
Belbeuf family crest on the poster.
The press will go wild. You mark my
words.

THEATRE MANAGER
Do you have backers?

WILLY
I only need one. Myself.

THEATRE MANAGER
You’re that confident? That’s a lot of
capital.

Willy bluffs somewhat — in his eyes, a slight worry.

WILLY
Yes... Yes I am.

EXT. MOULIN ROUGE - EVENING

A theatrical poster on a column outside the Moulin Rouge
announces the premiere of "Dream of Egypt," starring Mme.
Colette Willy and the mystery performer "YSSIM."

Excited crowds gather outside the famous red windmill,
anticipating a big night.
INT. MOULIN ROUGE – THE MAIN ROOM

The place is filling up – Rachilde, Veber, Schwob, Madame de Caillavet with Gaston and Jeanne and many SALONITES. On stage, stands a large, solitary sarcophagus.

Willy, accompanied by Meg, makes his way to a table near the stage, greeting various folk.

MEG
My God, there’s Maurice Ravel – and there’s Madame de Caillavet...all of our friends are here.

WILLY
Yes, a lot of the Marquis’ friends are here too.

He indicates a block-booking of starchy-looking aristocrats near the front.

INT. MOULIN ROUGE – HALF AN HOUR LATER

The house lights come down, precipitating a wave of wolf whistles and cat calls. Up on a balcony, a man dressed as ANUBIS strikes a gong. A SMALL ORCHESTRA strikes up a moody Arabian theme.

WILLY
Here we go.

The curtain goes up on a set resembling the interior of an Egyptian tomb – hieroglyphics, statues etc.

Missy enters the stage woodenly, dressed as an archeologist, reading from an old book. The crowd ROARS. A shower of coins, orange peel and garlic cloves rains on the stage.

Undaunted, Missy finds a cartouche on the sarcophagus and carefully brushes the dust off it.

HECKLER
Get a move on, you dyke!

Then, with great effort, Missy opens the lid of the sarcophagus. The lights change. The orchestra ramps up. And something starts to appear.

In the crowd various people react: Mme. de Caillavet, sneering TOP-HATTED GENTLEMEN, Veber, Schwob, Gaston de Caillavet. Willy watches intently, picking up on every murmur of the crowd.
Emerging from the sarcophagus is Colette, cross-legged in a bejeweled outfit inspired by Salome. The audience gasps.

Rhythmic music kicks in and Colette starts to do a series of evocative movements. Missy watches her in stagy wonder.

Some audience members are delighted, others appalled.

A POSH HECKER
Degenerate! Get back to Lesbos!

Now the dance is really heating up. Colette comes down from the pedestal and starts to dance. Missy joins in, framing Colette’s gyrations with her own eccentric movements.

As the crowd starts to boil over, Willy’s eyes are shining.

At the climax of the dance, Colette falls into the Marquise’s arms. Their lips move closer and closer – a huge GASP comes up from the house. Then...

THEY KISS.

The house EXPLODES. People are on their feet, yelling and booing. A barrage of food and glasses are thrown onto the stage, smashing around the embracing couple – even a footstool, which Colette narrowly dodges. The curtain falls.

WILLY
(to Meg)
It may be time to go...

But the rioting audience turn on them.

ANOTHER HECKER
Cuckold! Cuckold!!

A crowd of RUFFIANS advance on Willy and Meg. Willy brandishes his cane, keeping them off as he and Meg make their way to the door. Somebody grabs Meg’s hair and she punches him in the face. The whole auditorium is in a state of revolt.

155 INT. MOULIN ROUGE – BACK STAGE

Anubis, now without his headdress, is talking to a REPORTER, whose attention is suddenly distracted as Colette and Missy exit their dressing room.

REPORTER
Madame Colette, what are your impressions of tonight?
COLETTE
(firing on all cylinders)
My ‘impressions?’ I’m disgusted. These people who threw things are cowards - if I didn’t get a footstool in the face, it’s only because I dodged it.

MISSY
(whispering)
Let it go, Colette.
(to reporter)
There were some gentleman there who came for a fight. We just have to ignore them and go on.

REPORTER
So you intend to continue?

MISSY
No.

COLETTE
Yes!

COLETTE (cont’d) (CONT’D)
They don’t scare me at all. Look am I trembling..?
(holds out her hand)
I will continue to pursue this because I am an artist and a free woman and if Paris won’t have me -- so be it! I’ll go elsewhere to make a living.

156 EXTERIOR - GRAVEYARD - SAINT-SAUVEUR - DAY

In a country graveyard, a coffin is going into the ground. A COUNTRY PRIEST reads the rites. The family are assembled for the funeral of JULES COLETTE. Sido is clearly beside herself with grief. Colette is there - deep in grief, with Willy who sneaks a look at his watch. This doesn’t go unnoticed by Sido.

157 OMITTED

158 INTERIOR - COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - COLETTE’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Colette unlaces a boot and drops it on the floor.

WILLY
How are you bearing up my love?

COLETTE
...I keep thinking I’ll see him in every room. But he’s gone.
WILLY
He was an old soldier. A good solid man.

COLETTE
He was..."was"...

Colette sighs, puzzled by death - exhausted.

WILLY (cont’d)
I saw our creditors yesterday.
Horrific. We lost everything at the Moulin Rouge.

COLETTE
Willy - not today.

WILLY
(interrupting)
Tetette, we need to sell the country house.

Colette is brought up short.

COLETTE
No.

WILLY
We have no choice.

COLETTE
No. No, Willy. You can’t do that.

WILLY
Morally, yes, I need your permission. But legally, well, the house is in my name...

COLETTE
I don’t believe you.

WILLY
Or we file for bankruptcy. What do you think?

She throws her other boot to the corner of the room. Sits there, fuming.

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Through the window, Willy walks around the garden, smoking. Colette brings a dirty plate up to Sido at the kitchen sink.

SIDO
You need to divorce him, Gabri, and quick.
COLETTE
Sido, don’t... please.

SIDO
You ask for a full audit of his accounts, and...

COLETTE
No!

SIDO
You must face reality. The money. His infidelities. And his lies! I never believe a word he says. Not like Missy - so kind and generous and honest.

COLETTE
We should be thinking about papa.

SIDO
He’s dead. You’re alive. Willy’s a mess. A drinker. A gambler. He’s a broken man, Gabrielle.

COLETTE
Don’t say that.

She glances out to see Willy in the garden.

SIDO
He’ll hold you back.

COLETTE
But... I still...

SIDO
Gabri, You have to use your gifts. Forget this “pantomime”! Please! Write something new - under your own name.

COLETTE
I’m going on tour, Sido, with Wague - for the next six months. The contracts are being drawn up. We’re doing a new piece...

SIDO
Oh no, Gabrielle! Get out of it. You have to.

COLETTE
I’m going to do it. Writing’s a nightmare.

(MORE)
COLETTE - FINAL SHOOTING SCRIPT

COLETTE (CONT'D)
All the hours I spent with him
breathing down my neck - the turn of
the key in the lock, the ache in my
fingers. I’m done with it.

Willy appears -- immediately sensing an atmosphere.

WILLY
What did I miss...?

Both women carry on with their kitchen duties without
replying.

WILLY (CONT’D)
Women...knives...all very Greek.

Colette averts her eyes, unable to look at him.

160  EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY  160

An aerial shot over fields and hedges finds a steam train
speeding along.

161  EXT. SMALL RAILWAY STATION - DAY - 1907  161

A train has pulled in. Amongst the disembarking passengers is
a TRouPE OF MUSIC HALL PERFORMERS. We follow them down the
platform: There are SHOWGIRLS, ACROBATS, DOG TRAINERS, A
MAGICIAN. Colette and Wague are with them, dragging a trunk.

162  EXT. THEATER - MONTMARAULT - LATE AFTERNOON  162

It is raining. The troupe walk to the stage door. Outside the
theater a poster announcing the various acts including Mme.
Colette Willy and Wague in “FLESH.”

163  OMITTED  163

164  OMITTED  164

165  INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING  165

Colette stares at herself in the dressing table mirror with
a kind of melancholy blankness. She is thirty-three years
old now and she looks tired.

There’s a knock at the door. It’s Wague.

WAGUE
Colette -
COLETTE
Wague, I don’t know if I’m up to it today. I haven’t slept a wink for the last two nights. I have flea bites all over. I’m exhausted!

WAGUE
We’re all bloody exhausted!

She snorts.

WAGUE (CONT’D)
Have you got any kohl I could borrow?

COLETTE
Yes. Catch.

He looks at her.

WAGUE
You’ll survive.

He exits. Colette turns back to the mirror and sighs.

INT. MONTMARAULT THEATER – NIGHT

With the scene set for a peasant’s cottage, Colette is flirting with a SECRET LOVER.

The AUDIENCE is not paying much attention - they are drinking, talking, eating.

Wague, playing Colette’s husband, discovers them and has a fit of jealous rage; he shoves Colette around, smashing dishes and goes to attack the lover.

Colette pleads and tries to explain (silently, of course), but Wague’s rage just builds. He goes to attack the lover but Colette gets in between them.

Wague grabs her collar and TEARS IT ASUNDER REVEALING HER BREAST. Shocked he prostrates himself on the stage as though struck by lightning.

The audience is awestruck. Colette stands frozen in her pose as the piano restarts. We see something in her expression - the exhilaration that comes with discovering a new source of personal power.
INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - WILLY’S STUDY - DAY

Willy is looking helplessly through a stack of bills. He looks like he’s recovering from a rough night.

Moments later, he is at his desk in front of a typewriter. He cracks his knuckles and prepares to work. In front of him is the GREAT BLANK PAGE.

He types “WHAT CLAUDINE DID NEXT.” Then, “A NOVEL BY WILLY”

But nothing will come. The page remains blank. He stares at it with growing frustration.

He types a letter, the word “I.” Then dots. ...... I... I... then just scrambles on the typewriter anything.

He stops. Then...

He types faster and faster and starts to bang the keys - first with fingers then with his fists so that he is likely to hurt himself. Then he stops, breathes and almost at the point of tears, and looks desperately at a picture of Colette on his desk.

INT. OLLENDORFF PUBLISHING - DAY

Willy walks slowly up the grand staircase.

INT. OLLENDORFF’S OFFICE - DAY

The men are seated on either side of Ollandorff’s wide desk, igniting cigars.

WILLY
Tell me something...the sole rights to the Claudines, Ollandorff... What would you give me for them?

OLLENDORFF
Are you serious? All of them?

WILLY
Make me an offer.

OLLENDORFF
How much are you thinking?
WILLY
Let’s say 25,000. In a few years – they’ll recoup ten times that.

OLLENDORFF
Possibly...but I don’t have that much. Publishing is a volatile business, Willy...

WILLY
(interrupting)
How much then?

OLLENDORFF
...For the sole rights in perpetuity?

WILLY
Yes.

Ollendorff eyes him, calculating. He takes a small slip of paper and scribbles a number on it and passes it over the desk. Willy looks at it, dismayed.

170 INT. A BAR IN STRASBOURG – NIGHT

A warm crowded table in a lively low-roofed cellar filled with life and music. Colette and BAPTISTE, a Vietnamese conjurer, are having an arm wrestle across a table. Wague with a YOUNG FLIRT, a RUSSIAN ACROBAT and some SHOWGIRLS cheer Colette on. There is the feeling of merriment, of circus. Colette almost loses then makes a final mighty push to bring her opponent’s hand down. Cheers from the assembled.

COLETTE
Did you let me win?

BAPTISTE
Of course!

COLETTE
Bastard! That’s worst than losing!

ACROBAT
(to Baptiste)
How about it...?

The Acrobat offers his arm for a wrestle to the Baptiste.

BAPTISTE
No no. I have a great affection for my arm.
Laughter. Across the room, Missy enters at the main door. Wearing a SKIRT.

EVERYONE
Missy! Missy!

Missy expertly detaches the skirt revealing trousers underneath. Everybody cheers.

COLETTE
Hello, my love.

MISSY
I’m sorry the train was waiting for two hours at the Gard du Nord.

COLETTE
Come here...next to me.

Missy snuggles on to the bench by Colette.

MISSY
How was it tonight?

COLETTE
It was like every night. Sheer terror and then bliss.

MISSY
The gang is in a good mood.

BAPTISTE
Hey Missy, I’m going to the bar do you want anything?-

MISSY
Order champagne. Three bottles. Make it five.

Everyone cheers. A drunken showgirl, FLOSSY, plants a kiss on Colette’s cheek.

FLOSSY
Santé, you beautiful gal.

COLETTE
Santé, Flossy. You’re the best.

FLOSSY
You can give it and you can take it... We loves ya, don’t we, Moll?
Her friend, MOLLY, agrees. Colette’s eyes glow at this compliment - far greater and more meaningful than any she received in the salon.

Baptiste pops the champagne cork to more cheers. It seems like the party will go on all night.

INT. COLETTE’S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A small pokey hotel room. Colette and Missy undress for bed by candlelight.

COLETTE
We had a cancellation in Limoges - I have four days off next week.

MISSY
Are you coming back to Paris?

COLETTE
No. I have to go up to Besancon - to pack up the house.

MISSY
Will he be there?

COLETTE
Missy, it’s been a long day. Can’t we just...

MISSY
Yes. I’m sorry.

They get into bed and hold each other close.

MISSY (CONT’D)
You don’t need to worry about Willy. You don’t need to earn your own money or stay in these kind of places. I could arrange everything.

COLETTE
Too much of my life has been “arranged.”

MISSY
I just want you to be able to write if you want to.

COLETTE
I don’t want to. I’m happy. And I like my threadbare lodgings...I like making my own money. Even if it’s only 50 francs a show.
Missy nods, hiding her hurt.

MISSY
I love you. That’s all.

COLETTE
...Thank you.

MISSY
It’s not the traditional reply but I’ll take it for now.

They stare into each other’s eyes. There’s a pounding on the door.

MANAGER
Get up. Now! We’re coming in.

Colette stands using a blanket to cover herself as the MANAGER opens the door with his WIFE in tow.

MANAGER (CONT’D)
Out! Both of you! Get out of here!

MANAGER’S WIFE
You see? I told you!

COLETTE
What the hell?

MANAGER
You degenerates!

MANAGER’S WIFE
We don’t have filth under our roof.

MANAGER
You’ve got five minutes to get out or I’m calling the police.

MISSY
Please fuck off.
   (alternate take)
Oh bugger off.

He slams the door. Colette looks distraught.

COLETTE
What are we going to do now? I have to be up at six to catch the train to Nice.
MISSY
Don’t worry, my dear. We’ll find somewhere else...

Colette looks into Missy’s eyes and finds strength there.

INT. HOTEL - STAIRS - NIGHT

MUSIC COMES UP. Hastily, dressed, Colette and Missy descend the stairs with their bags, past the manager with their heads held high.

EXT. STRASBOURG STREET - NIGHT

As the exiled lovers walk off into the darkness, Missy takes Colette’s hand.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Rain clouds gather over the house.

INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The house has taken on a depressing air - pictures have been taken down, furniture has been moved out. Colette is packing up her collection of paperweights.

Across the room, Willy is packing up some bric-a-brac. They work in silence, at opposite ends of a wide frame.

WILLY
I’ve been thinking about this new craze for moving pictures. Do you think we could adapt Claudine for a cineplay?...

COLETTE
(half to herself)
Do you never stop?

WILLY
We could write a completely fresh story. Claudine by the Sea.

COLETTE
No... Adapt the old ones...

WILLY
Perhaps...

There’s a flash of guilt in Willy’s eyes.

COLETTE
Catch!
She throws the original Paris snow globe across to him. Half the water has leaked out and it looks pretty deteriorated.

    WILLY
    Oh yes! How sad.

Tears come to his eyes but she doesn’t see.

    WILLY (CONT’D)
    I’ve missed you.

    COLETTE
    No, you haven’t.

    WILLY
    Of course I have... your ambiguous smiles, the insane speed of your thoughts, your absurd joys, your brief but violent anger...

Colette is affected by this but won’t let it show. She finishes up a crate and puts the lid on.

    COLETTE
    How’s the book going with Meg...?

    WILLY
    Terrible! All spice and no literature.
       (Colette snorts a laugh)
       She’s not you and she never will be.

Colette sighs. The tug of old forces on her heart.

    COLETTE
    What are we doing, Willy?

They look across to each other but the distance between them seems now unbreachable.

    WILLY
    ...Are we finished?

    COLETTE
    I don’t know.

Willy sighs, wants to cry. He shrugs.

    WILLY
    You can’t.

    COLETTE
    Why can’t I?
WILLY
Because I love you and you at your
most brilliant with me.

COLETTE
Am I?

WILLY
Yes, you know you are. But you still
need your headmaster...

176 INT. COLETTE’S BEDROOM - COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT
Colette lies awake, troubled. There’s a light knock.

COLETTE
Come in.

Willy enters, dressed in his nightshirt.

WILLY
May I get in with you, Gabri?

COLETTE
- Yes. Get in.

WILLY
I couldn’t sleep. It was too quiet.
(a quiet moment)
Listen. The silence. It’s
terrifying isn’t it?

COLETTE
No...I love it.

WILLY
Of course, you do - you country girl.

He kisses her on the cheek.

WILLY (CONT’D)
I have something weighing on me...

COLETTE
What..?

WILLY
I...I don’t sleep with Meg any more.
I mean we sleep. But I can’t...

Willy cannot say it.
COLETTE
It doesn’t matter.

WILLY
It does. It matters very much.

She holds him close, as if he were a child.

COLETTE
Good-night, my love.

177 INT. THEATRE - NIGHT
The audience are applauding. Up on stage Colette and her music hall troupe bow together holding hands.

178 INT. THEATRE - BACKSTAGE
The troupe descend a spiral staircase leading down from the stage. Colette is next to Wague, exhausted after her performance. Flossy turns round out.

FLOSSY
Went well tonight!

Colette waves her hand indicating so-so. She turns to go up some steps when a voice calls out for her.

OLLENDORFF
Madame Willy.

COLETTE
Monsieur Ollendorff!

They shake hands.

OLLENDORFF
I'm here in Lille on some family business, and I was delighted when I found out you were here with the play.

COLETTE
It’s kind of you to come and see it.

OLLENDORFF
It was quite a spectacle.

Colette gives him a tight-lipped smile. Two SHOWGIRLS come down the stairs and bustle past them up.

OLLENDORFF (cont’d) (CONT’D)
I was thinking, if you were free, I would like to take you and the Marquise to dinner.
COLETTE
Thank you. I’m always up for a free feed. And especially in such august company.

OLLENDORFF
It’s the very least I can do for you, Colette. After all the money you’ve made for me. And will continue to make. (he gives a tight-lipped smile)
I wish I had been able to give Willy a better settlement. But one can only pay what one can afford.

COLETTE
I’m not sure I quite understand.

OLLENDORFF
For the Claudines. For the rights to the Claudines.

A STAGEHAND passes between them carrying a bunch of flowers up the stairs.

OLLENDORFF (CONT’D)
Do you mean to say he didn’t tell you?

Colette looks at him stunned.

COLETTE
Willy sold you the Claudines?

OLLENDORFF
Yes. All of them.

COLETTE
He sold you Claudines...

OLLENDORFF
Absolutely. I’m sorry. I thought...

Colette struggles to keep herself under control.

COLETTE
How much did he get for her?

179 INT. TRAIN - DAY
Colette speeds along, gazing out of the window.

180 EXT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - STAIRCASE - DAY
Colette flies up the stairs in a rage.
INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - WILLY’S STUDY - DAY

Paul Héon sits typing while Willy stands, giving dictation. Colette is at the door, livid.

WILLY
...I am most insulted by the implication of your letter. We have transacted business now for over five years without any...

Colette storms in.

COLETTE
Willy, I need to see you alone.

WILLY
Tetette! What a wonderful surprise!

Sensing the impending storm, Héon rises, makes for the door.

HEON
I’ll see you later, Willy, Colette.

He leaves the two of them alone.

WILLY
So?

She just looks at him.

COLETTE
5000 francs, Willy. 5000 francs...

WILLY
Ah... You’ve heard... Yes... Well...I was in a corner.

COLETTE
Traitor. Liar. Thief.

WILLY
Don’t be so melodramatic. I was trying to keep the house for you.

COLETTE
I gave you the house!

WILLY
We still owed the bank so much on it.
COLETTE
You could have sold Veber’s novels. Some of your other trash. You only did it to stick the knife in me. Didn’t you?! DIDN’T YOU?!

WILLY
I wouldn’t have got anything for Veber’s or Schwob’s or anyone else’s. Please calm down...

COLETTE
Why? Why should I calm down? You hurt and you hurt and you think that by saying “I’m a man, that’s what men do,” you clear it all away...

He reaches for her hand. She explodes, recoils as if at an electric shock.

COLETTE (CONT’D)
DON’T YOU TOUCH ME! What you did was not just hateful - it was stupid. Now we’ll have no say over our books and we’ll never see another sou from them.

WILLY
We can write some more...

COLETTE
No! Never again! NEVER!

WILLY
My dear, you’re over-reacting. It was purely a business decision.

COLETTE
That’s what our whole marriage has been! Wasn’t I the best investment you ever made? No dowry but my God, she can write for her keep?

WILLY
If you were an investment then you were a highly speculative one. I gave up my inheritance for you.

COLETTE
I paid you back a thousand times.

WILLY
Colette stop, damn it!! Stop talking about money. You were my ideal, my obsession, my love.
Colette catches her breath and slowly turns to him. Her eyes are burning. When she speaks, it is with unexpected calm.

COLETTE
You’ve killed our child.

Willy stares at her, stunned.

COLETTE (CONT’D)
Those books — they were all we had. Now they’re gone and we’ve no chance of repair.

WILLY
My dear, Claudine was only a...

COLETTE
Don’t! Don’t tell me what Claudine was. I am the real Claudine!!!

(he tries to interrupt)
Everything I thought and felt went into those books. They were me. My childhood, my memories, my opinions. Everything. And then the hours and hours I spent, alone, slaving away for you. Churning out scenes just to try and please you. I am so ashamed of myself for that. But I knew and you knew — that I was bound to do it.

(she shakes her head)
You found me when I knew nothing, Willy. You molded me to your own designs...to your desires. And you thought I could never break free...
But you’re wrong. Claudine is dead now. She’s gone. You betrayed her. And I...I’ve outgrown her.

Willy sinks into a chair. He looks exhausted, deflated. He has finally broken.

WILLY
Please, my dear, I was stupid... I panicked... forgive me. Please.

COLETTE
Goodbye, Willy.

She walks to the door. Willy’s tone turns.

WILLY
No...Tetette...Gabrielle....My love...Stop! I forbid you!!
She leaves, closing the door behind her.

182 EXT. STREETS OF PARIS - MORNING

Evening is coming on. The street of Paris are busy with cars. The electric street lamps turn off automatically.

183 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - MORNING

Willy is looking through the exercise books. Page after page of Colette school notebooks, - the original text of the Claudine novels with the occasional margin note from Willy. He is thinking out loud to Heon...

WILLY
You see - that’s mine, that’s mine - it was a collaboration... she really has a nerve... These prove it.

Heon says nothing. Willy reads his silence.

WILLY (CONT’D)
You know... Could you do me a favor, Héon? Could you destroy these for me?

HEON
Are you sure?

WILLY
Definitely. Burn them. Incinerate.

HEON
Yes, Willy.

WILLY
Thank you.
(sighs)
I’m going out.

He heads out the door. Leaving Héon with the books.

184 INT. CAFE NOIR - MORNING

Willy and Schwob sitting at a dark table nursing an absinthe. A chess set is in front of them but they are barely interested in the game.

SCHWOB
...How many decent salons are left now? Two, maybe three.

WILLY
It’s the end of a dream.
SCHWOB
Paris is losing its gold.

WILLY
Yes, I must confess, I don’t think that this century agrees with me quite as much as the last one.

SCHWOB
I haven’t heard from Colette. I’ve written to her twice but no word.

WILLY
Writing is anathema to her, it always has been.

SCHWOB
You two really are done this time?

WILLY
She’ll pass me on the street and not even look at me. “Claudine Divorced.” So much the worse for her. And for me...

A solemn silence. Across the bar a YOUNG WOMAN (who we remember as LILY - GEORGIE’S ASSISTANT) and her GIRLFRIEND are having coffee at the bar. She says something to her then ventures across the room.

LILY
M. Willy?

WILLY
I am the late Monsieur Willy.

LILY
I’m Lily - Lily Milson. I met you once. Years ago. I used to work for Madame Raoul Duval.

WILLY
Oh yes! I saw you and your friend come in and I thought - what wonderful young creatures! Thank heaven for... you, my dear

This embarrasses Lily.

LILY
I just wanted to say hello.
WILLY
Well, how about you two come and share a drink with a couple of old roués?

He gives her a come on look through bleary eyes. Schwob looks embarrassed.

WILLY (CONT’D) (CONT’D)
It’s never too early...

He pats the seat beside him. Lily looks disillusioned, sad.

LILY
(nervously)
I’m sorry, I have to go... Very nice seeing you.

And she’s gone. Willy stares sadly into his drink.

SCHWOB
Loosing your touch...

WILLY
Lost! The Claudines are done with their headmaster.

He downs the last dregs and sighs.

185 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Héon stokes up the fire in Willy’s study. He takes the first book and is about to throw in on. Then he stops, opens the book and looks at the words for a moment.

Taking a decision, he puts all the books in a leather satchel, and heads out the door.

186 EXT. TRAIN - MOVING - EVENING

The train whizzes through the countryside as evening falls.

187 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - EVENING

Everyone is asleep except Colette, who leans against the side of the compartment, staring into the blackness.

Then Missy stirs. She catches Colette’s eye. Colette returns her gaze with a tired smile, and mouths - I Love You.
EXT. THEATRE - MARSEILLES - MORNING

The three find their way to the theater that displays a giant poster for “FLESH.”

INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

At the venue, Colette is getting dressed. She pulls on a stocking but her big toe pokes through it. It’s torn.

COLETTE
Shit!

She goes over to a large trunk in the corner, opens it up, and rifles around in the tattered sequin gowns. At the bottom of the trunk, she finds something that stops her in her tracks. It is one of her school notebooks - the last one of the original Claudine At School manuscript. She flips through it and about a third of the way in finds the page that says THE END.

Wague sticks his head in the door.

WAGUE
Thirty minutes to curtain.

COLETTE
Thanks, Wague.

She blows him a kiss.

MOMENTS LATER

The nib of a pen is dipped in ink. On the opposite page from the end of Claudine, Colette writes “NOTES ON THE MUSIC HALL.”

She starts to write again - we hear a new authority in her voice.

COLETTE (V.O.)
After two years of music-hall and theatre, I’m still the same – face to face with that painted mentor who gazes at me from the other side of the looking-glass, with deep-set eyes under lids smeared with purplish greasepaint.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Colette walks down the corridor backstage, past SHOWGIRLS changing and ACROBATS warming up - her new world, her new community. She sees Wague who signals to her good luck.
COLETTE (V.O.)
I know she is going to speak to me.
She is going to say: "Is that you
there, all alone under that ceiling
booming and vibrating under the feet
of the dancers? Why are you there, all
alone? And why not somewhere else?"
Yes, this is the dangerous, lucid
hour.

Approaching the stage, we hear the audience chanting "Colette"
over and over in rhythm. The sound gets louder, the audience’s
feet beating a tattoo on the floor; COLETTE, COLETTE, COLETTE.

192 INT. THEATRE – BACKSTAGE

COLETTE (V.O.)
Now, whenever I despair, I no longer
expect my end, but some bit of luck,
some commonplace little miracle
which, like a glittering link, will
mend again the necklace of my days.

Colette takes a deep breath. The curtain goes up, to thunderous
applause. She walks into the brilliant glow of the footlights,
and disappears into white, like a bird disappearing into the
sun.

TITLES comes up, accompanied by ARCHIVAL PHOTOS and MUSIC.

TITLE
In 1911, Colette’s "The Vagabond," based on
her music hall experience, was published
under her own name to great critical acclaim.

TITLE (CONT’D)
Missy and Colette continued their relationship
for many years. Missy often accompanied
Colette on her music hall tours, though never
again opted to appear on the stage.

TITLE (CONT’D)
Willy continued to publish ghost-
written books with Meg, but failed to
replicate the success of the Claudines.
He died in 1931 in relative obscurity.

TITLE (CONT’D)
Paul Héon did not destroy the original
Claudine manuscripts but returned them to
Colette. They became crucial evidence in a
1948 legal battle to establish the true
authorship of the novels... that Colette won.
TITLE (CONT'D)
Colette went on to publish over fifty acclaimed novels and short stories. She became the most celebrated female author in the history of French literature.

In her old age, Colette remarked, “What a wonderful life I’ve had. I only wish I’d realized it sooner.”

THE END