

COLETTE

By Richard Glatzer
& Wash Westmoreland
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FINAL SCRIPT

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1 EXT. BURGUNDIAN COUNTRYSIDE - SUNRISE - 1892 1

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.

2 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING 2

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 7 o'clock. Willy is coming today.

Colette just murmurs.

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.

3 EXT. COUNTRY TRAIN STATION - DAY 3

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

4 EXT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY 4

Dismounting, Willy sees a waiting carriage across the platform.

5 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - PARLOR

5

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. 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!

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.

WILLY

Turn it upside down.

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

She holds it up for her mother.

6

EXT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

6

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!

7

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - STAIRS - MINUTES LATER

7

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

JULES (O.S.)

He's a good man. He has a reputation, yes. But there comes a time in a man's life to settle down.

SIDO

Have you finished the letter to his father?

JULES

I keep starting. But I can't seem to finish it.

(MORE)

JULES (CONT'D)

A girl without a dowry - that just doesn't happen in their circles.

SIDO

Hmmph. Then call it off. The world won't end.

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

JULES

Sido, he clearly adores her - he's visited four times this year.

SIDO

I'm worried he won't understand her.

JULES

Oh, would anyone be good enough for you?

Colette enters the room slightly too loud.

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.

8 EXT. SAINT-SAUVEUR - COUNTRYSIDE - LATE AFTERNOON 8

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.

9 EXT. OLD BARN - LATE AFTERNOON 9

She approaches the gaping black door of a dilapidated barn.

10

INT. OLD BARN

10

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.

Behind a partition, she sees Willy, reclining on a pile of straw.

WILLY (CONT'D)

(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.

She looks down.

COLETTE (cont'd)

How long until your train goes?

WILLY

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

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.

11 INT. COLETTE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT. 11

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. CITY OF PARIS - EVENING - 1893 12

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.

13 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - BOUDOIR - EVENING 13

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.

14 INT. BEDROOM/HALLWAY

14

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.

WILLY

Where's your new dress?

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.

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.

They exit.

15 EXT. ELEGANT PARISIAN STREET - EARLY EVENING

15

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...

16 INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - MAIN ROOM

16

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?

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

17 INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - VARIOUS ROOMS 17

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.

18 INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - SMOKING ROOM 18

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 sees the crowd laughing as a BOHEMIAN pours milk into an upright piano.

19 INT. HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE - MOVING - NIGHT

19

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?

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.

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.

20 EXT. PARIS STREET 20

The carriage rides off into the distance.

21 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - MORNING 21

From directly above, we see Pierre Veber dash up the stairs.

22 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE ROOM 22

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.

23 INT. WILLY'S STUDY 23

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...

(MORE)

WILLY (CONT'D)

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.

24 INT. ENTRANCE ROOM

24

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.

25 INT. WILLY'S STUDY

25

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.

(MORE)

WILLY (CONT'D)

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.

VEBER

It's brilliant.

WILLY

It will be.

26

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT

26

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 watches him go. MUSIC COMES UP FOR THE NEXT SEQUENCE

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 27 | CLOSE ON A PANE OF GLASS | 27 |
| | It is greenish, uneven, and mottled. Using a tiny pair of scissors, a hand is etching the letter "W." | |
| 28 | INT. LA MASCOTTE - NIGHT | 28 |
| | 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. | |
| 29 | INT. THEATRE - NIGHT | 29 |
| | 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. | |
| 30 | INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY | 30 |
| | We see the etching progress - W I L. The creator is none other than Colette, alone, absorbed in this labor of love. | |

- 31 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 31
Colette starts pulling sheets off old furniture in the living room and opening up the blinds.
- 32 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT 32
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.
- 33 INT. ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY 33
Colette completes the etching of W I L L Y on the kitchen window, taking a moment to admire her handiwork.
- 34 EXT. RUE JACOB - AFTERNOON 34
Colette walks towards home, turns into the courtyard and collects the mail.
- 35 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY/LIVING ROOM 35
She enters, already opening the envelope and walks through the house perusing the letter - that is written in green ink. MUSIC ENDS.
- COLETTE
(murmuring)
No...you're a liar.
- Disgusted, she crumples it.
- 36 EXT. STREETS OF PARIS - AFTERNOON 36
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.
- 37 EXT. COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON 37
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.
- 38 INT. LOTTE KINCELER'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON 38
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.

39 EXT. LOTTE'S KINCELER'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON 39

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.

40 EXT. COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON 40

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.

41 EXT. RURAL TRAIN STATION - DAY 41

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

42 EXT. SIDO'S KITCHEN GARDEN - DAY 42

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...

COLETTE

(feels the leaf)
Yes.. it's sticky.

SIDO

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

COLETTE

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.

SIDO

Better to make marriage get used to you.

43

EXT. SAINT SAUVEUR - RIVER BANK - DAY

43

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... 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 would love that.

WILLY

(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

Yes, we got up to all kinds of trouble together.

WILLY

What was she like?

44

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM

44

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)

Brrrrrrr.

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.

45 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR 45

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.

46 EXT. PARIS - MORNING - 1895 46

A shot of the Norte Dame, rooftops, churches, squares and
streets of Paris.

47 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT 47

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.

48 INT. ENTRANCE ROOM - MOMENT'S LATER

48

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 Claudine
A L'école 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...1873.
I shall probably not die there.

49 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - LATE EVENING

From directly above, we see Willy trudging upstairs.

50

INT. BEDROOM - LATE EVENING

50

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!

51 INT. ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY 51

MUSIC STARTS UP. We see Colette writing in a new exercise book.

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."

52 INT. WILLY'S STUDY - MORNING 52

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.

53 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 53

Colette is seated, petting TOBY CHIEN on the floor at her feet. She looks at the grandfather clock in the hall - 1:30.

HALF AN HOUR LATER

Willy emerges with the books. Colette, still seated, stands as he enters the room. 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.

54

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM

54

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

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.

55 INT. WILLY'S STUDY

55

Colette slams the door behind her, eyes brimming with tears.
She opens the notebook and looks at the first page. It says,
"Claudine A L'école 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.

56 INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - MUSIC ROOM - EVENING

56

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.

(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.

57

INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - ENTRY ROOM

57

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.

58

INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - SMOKING ROOM

58

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.

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.

59

INT. CARRIAGE - MOVING - NIGHT

59

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.

60

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - DAY - 1898

60

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.

61 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - OFFICE

61

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. The bailiffs take the desk away while Matilde tidies loose papers.

62 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - WILLY'S STUDY - NIGHT 62

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 glorious - the sap is rising almost indecently."

She scribbles it down.

WILLY (CONT'D)

And here - 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:

63 INT. PRINTERS - DAY 63

The presses are rolling, pumping out copies of the novel.

64 EXT. PRINTER'S COURTYARD - DAY 64

Crates of the book are being loaded onto a HORSE-DRAWN WAGON.

65 OMITTED 65

66 EXT. BOOK SHOP WINDOW 66

A SHOP CLERK builds the Claudine books onto a pyramid-shaped display. Behind is a sign: "CLAUDINE AT SCHOOL, BY WILLY."

67 INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - DAY 67

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."

68 INT. BOOK SHOP - DAY 68

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

69 EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE PARK - DAY 69

A YOUNG NANNY is reading the book, ignoring the CRYING BABY in the perambulator beside her.

70 EXT. CONVENT - DAY 70

A nun has abandoned her holy book to read Claudine.

71 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 71

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

JULES
Look at that!

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

72 INT. SALON - DAY 72

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.

73

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

73

Willy and OLLENDORFF, the publisher, are finishing up a meeting in OLLENDORFF'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

Maybe as rich as you one day, my dear Ollendorff.

They laugh as they leave the room.

74

EXT. PUBLISHING HOUSE

74

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.

(MORE)

OLLENDORFF (CONT'D)

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.

75

EXT. PUBLISHERS - DAY

75

Willy climbs in next to Colette.

WILLY

Gare de Lyon.

COLETTE

Where're we going?

WILLY
You'll find out.

76 INT. CARRIAGE - MOVING - MINUTES LATER

76

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...

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...

Colette smiles.

77

EXT. FOREST - DAY

77

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!

WILLY (CONT'D)

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!

78

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

78

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.

79

INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

79

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

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.

80 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY 80

Inside, WORKERS are scraping the paint off the living room floor. The room is unfurnished with peeling wallpaper.

81 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE 81

A worker carries in a chair. Colette follows carrying a table with another worker.

82 EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY 82

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.

83 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY 83

Colette watches from the window as a carriage pulls into the driveway. The floors are now polished, the wallpaper redone, the place fully furnished.

84 INT. LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER 84

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.

85 INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

85

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

COLETTE

Willy!! This isn't funny.

She bangs on the door, anger building. Willy stands in the
hallway outside the door smoking a cigar.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

LET ME OUT!!

(kicks the door.)

Bastard...absolute...arrogant
bastard!

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."

86 EXT. BOOK SHOP WINDOW - DAY

86

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

87 EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE - DAY

87

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 back, putting in most of the
leg work, he, true to form, is taking it easy in the front,
lifting his legs off the bike in delight.

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....

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...

In the high ceiled 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 Orléans
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.

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.

89 INT. GEORGIE'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - NIGHT

89

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.

90

INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

90

Georgie's apartment, naturally, is very stylish.

COLETTE

What a nice place.

GEORGIE

Thank you. This is my little pied-a-tere. 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.

91 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

91

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

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.

92 INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - DAY 92

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 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.

93 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON 93

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.

He heads off. She continues writing.

94 EXT. GEORGIE'S STREET - AFTERNOON 94

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

95 INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT -DAY 95

Colette slowly unbuttons Georgie's negligee as she leans and they begin to passionately kiss.

96 EXT. GEORGIE'S STREET - EVENING 96

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

97 INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING 97

Colette and Willy make mad passionate love.

99 INT. GEORGIE'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - DAY 99

Colette approaches the door and knocks.

COLETTE

She's expecting you.

Colette walks inside, Colette turns and walks towards Georgie's bedroom.

100 INT GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING 100

Georgie and Colette make love - with equal fervor.

101 INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON 101

Georgie and Willy come to climax.

102 EXT. GEORGIE'S STREET - AFTERNOON 102

Colette walks down the street looks up at the apartment. Someone who looks suspiciously like Willy is at the window.

103 INT. GEORGIE'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - AFTERNOON 103

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.

104 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STUDY - DAY 104

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...

105 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT 105

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.

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.

106

INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

106

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.

107 EXT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - DAY 107

Colette leaves the house in a rage.

108 EXT. PRINTER'S COURTYARD - DAY 108

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.

109 INT. LA MASCOTTE - EVENING 109

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.

COLETTE

She will literally be a *household name*.

They all laugh.

110 INT. THEATRE - DAY - 1903

110

On a blackboard, in chalk is written "CLAUDINE AUDITIONS."

An insipid actress is cooing her way through the dialogue.

INSIPID ACTRESS

My name is Claudine. I live in Montigny. I was born there in 1884. 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!

111 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY 111

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.

112 INT. THEATER - NIGHT

112

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 1884. 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.

113 INT. LA MASCOTTE RESTAURANT/SALON - LATER

113

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.

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.

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!

114

INT. LA MASCOTTE/SALON - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

114

...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 SUFFRAGETTE 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.

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.

115 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT 115

Colette and Willy enter, 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.

116 INT. BOUDOIR - NIGHT 116

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

117 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT 117

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.

118 INT. PHOTO SESSION - DAY 118

MUSIC comes up. A MONTAGE SHOWS WILLY'S HIGHLY INNOVATIVE EXPLOITATION OF THE CLAUDINE PHENOMENON.

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...

119 INT. SHELF/MAGAZINE RACK 119

Pan along several CLAUDINE magazines - ending on one that says VIVE CLAUDINE.

120 INT. HAIR SALON - DAY 120

A number of WOMEN, including a couple of SALONITES, getting their hair bobbed to look like Claudine.

121 NEWSPAPER HEADLINES 121

"CLAUDINE SENSATION" "MENAGE A TROIS" "VIVE CLAUDINE"

122 EXT. SHOP WINDOW - DAY 122

SCHOOL GIRLS gaze at MANNEQUINS - all dressed "A la Claudine."

123 EXT. PARK BENCH - DAY 123

A young woman reads CLAUDINE à PARIS.

124 INT. SHELF/BEAUTY PARLOR 124

A shelf full of jars selling CLAUDINE FACE CREAM.

125 INT. BATHROOM 125

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

126 INT. BATHROOM 126

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

127 INT. BEDROOM - DAY 127

A young DANDY slicks his hair with CLAUDINE HAIR OIL.

128 INT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE PARK - DAY 128

A line of WOMEN fanning themselves with CLAUDINE FANS.

129 EXT. COURTYARD - DAY 129

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

130 INT. BOUDOIR - DAY 130

A YOUNG WOMAN dresses in CLAUDINE LINGERIE.

131 INT. SHELF/BEAUTY PARLOR 131

A shelf full of jars selling CLAUDINE FACE CREAM.

132 EXT. STREET 132

Children eat CLAUDINE CANDIES.

133 EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE - DAY 133

A group of YOUNG LADS trade CLAUDINE postcards.

134 EXT. COURTYARD 134

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

135 EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE - DAY 135

Two young women walk by dressed as Claudines, giggling.

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.

Two young women walk by dressed as Claudines, giggling.

MISSY

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?

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.

137 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - DAY

137

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.

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

138 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - DAY

138

Willy looks over papers in his study as HEON answers the ringing phone outside the office.

HEON

Willy Gauthier Villars residence... He's busy right now can I take a message?

139 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY 139

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 cantomime.

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

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...

(MORE)

HEON (CONT'D)

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.

140 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - DAY

140

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...

141 INT. WILLY'S STUDY - DAY

141

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
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.

142 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY 142

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.

143 EXT. COLETTE'S COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY 143

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.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

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 142

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.

145 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STUDY 145

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 1884.

WILLY

That's right.

MEG

I will probably not die there.

146

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - OUTDOOR GYMNASIUM - MORNING

146

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. 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.

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)

(MORE)

COLETTE (CONT'D)

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.

147

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - DAY

147

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.

148 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - WILLY'S STUDY - DAY 148

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.

149 EXT. PARIS STREETS - DAY 149

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.

150 INT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY - 1906 150

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.

151 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY 151

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

HE 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.

152 INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

152

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.

153 EXT. MOULIN ROUGE - EVENING

153

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.

154 INT. MOULIN ROUGE - THE MAIN ROOM

154

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.

155 INT. MOULIN ROUGE - HALF AN HOUR LATER

155

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 HECKLER

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 HECKLER

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.

156 INT. MOULIN ROUGE - BACK STAGE

156

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		COLETTE
No.		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.

159 EXT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - SAINT-SAUVER

159

Dressed in black, Colette walks through the garden towards her family home. She lingers for a moment before walking to the door.

160 EXT. GRAVEYARD - SAINT-SAUVEUR - DAY 160

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. She looks up to see Willy walking briskly towards them mid-ceremony.

162 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - COLETTE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 162

Colette unlaces a boot and drops it on the floor.

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...

WILLY (CONT'D)

What do you think?

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

163

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

163

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. 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.

164 EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY 164

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

165 EXT. SMALL RAILWAY STATION - DAY - 1907 165

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.

166 EXT. THEATER - MONTMARIAULT - LATE AFTERNOON 166

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."

167 OMITTED 167

168 OMITTED 168

169 INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING 169

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.

166 INT. MONTMARIAULT THEATER - NIGHT

166

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.

170 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - WILLY'S STUDY - DAY 170

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.

HJDGJYGEBNFJHjhgiuyi8t[10845oiodfjnaf;knakgjhuyatuhrtka

He stops. Then...

KSJhdiuyrugjhabvdfjhqyt5pquojbf'auyt[085yioqghohhtuhwgout

He types faster and 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.

171 INT. OLLENDORFF PUBLISHING - DAY 171

Willy walks slowly up the grand staircase.

172 INT. OLLENDORFF'S OFFICE - DAY 172

The men are seated on either side of Ollendorff's wide desk, igniting cigars.

WILLY

Tell me something...the sole rights to the Claudines, Ollendorff... 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.

173 INT. COLETTE'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

173

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.

(MORE)

MISSY (CONT'D)

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.

174 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

174

The house has taken on a depressing air - pictures have been taken down, furniture has been moved out. Colette is packaging 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...

175

INT. COLETTE'S BEDROOM - COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT

175

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.

176 INT. THEATRE - NIGHT

176

The audience are applauding. Up on stage Colette and her music hall troupe bow together holding hands.

177 INT. THEATRE - BACKSTAGE

177

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?

178 INT. TRAIN - DAY 178

Colette speeds along, gazing out of the window.

179 EXT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - STAIRCASE - DAY 179

Colette flies up the stairs in a rage.

180 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - WILLY'S STUDY - DAY 180

Paul Héon sit 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.

181 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

181

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.

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.

182 EXT. TRAIN - MOVING - EVENING

182

The train whizzes through the countryside as evening falls.

183 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - EVENING 183

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.

184 EXT. THEATRE - MARSEILLES - MORNING 184

The three find their way to the theater that displays a giant poster for "FLESH."

185 INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING 185

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.

186 MOMENTS LATER 186

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.

187 INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

187

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.

188 INT. THEATRE - BACKSTAGE

188

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

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, but never again 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)

After their divorce was finalised
Colette and Willy never spoke
again.

TITLE (CONT'D)

The Claudine manuscripts were not destroyed
by Paul Heon who instead returned them to
Colette. She later used them to contest the
novels' true authorship - a battle she
eventually won.

TITLE (CONT'D)

Colette went on to publish over thirty novels
and collections of 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