

# COLETTE

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**FINAL SHOOTING 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 8 o'clock. Willy is coming today.

Colette just murmurs.

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

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

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 OMITTED 4

5 EXT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY 5

Dismounting, Willy sees a waiting carriage across the platform.

6 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - PARLOR 6

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

JULES

And how is Paris these days,  
Willy?

WILLY

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

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

JULES

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

SIDO

La Tosca.

WILLY

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

SIDO

Maybe I'll go and make up my own mind.

WILLY

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

(MORE)

WILLY (CONT'D)

Whereas bad theatre is like dentistry;  
you are compelled to stay in the chair,  
having your skull drilled, until the  
entire grizzly procedure is over.

JULES

Good point, Willy. Painful business!

COLETTE

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

Willy raises an appreciative eyebrow and chuckles.

WILLY

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

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

COLETTE

Thank you. I've read about these.

WILLY

Shake it.

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

COLETTE

Look, Sido. A snow globe.

She holds it up for her mother.

7 EXT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

7

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!

8

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - STAIRS - MINUTES LATER

8

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

SIDO (O.S.)

There's something about him I find suspect... something disingenuous.

JULES (O.S.)

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

SIDO (O.S.)

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

JULES (O.S.)

My dear, would anyone be good enough for you?

SIDO

Hmmph.

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

SIDO (CONT'D)

Have you finished the letter to his father?

JULES

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

SIDO

So they call it off. The world won't end.

As her father talks, Colette sneaks back up the last five stairs...

JULES

Sido, he clearly adores her - he's visited four times. He'll give her status, not to mention a tremendous cultural life - the theater, the opera. He'll give her Paris for heaven's sakes!

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

COLETTE

Can I go now?

SIDO

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

COLETTE

(eye roll)  
I won't...

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

9 EXT. SAINT-SAUVEUR - COUNTRYSIDE - LATE AFTERNOON 9

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.

10 EXT. OLD BARN - LATE AFTERNOON 10

She approaches the gaping black door of a dilapidated barn.

11 INT. OLD BARN 11

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

COLETTE

Where are you?

WILLY

Over here. Enjoying the simple pleasures of country life!

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

COLETTE

You look at home in the hay.

WILLY

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

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

WILLY (CONT'D)

Your fingers are stained.

(he takes her hand)

Mm... Maybe I could just leave Paris behind.

(he takes a blackberry)

You could feed me berries. I'd catch a fish with my teeth. Then come back here to my cave. Like a bear. Bliss.

COLETTE

I'd like that.

WILLY

(he caresses her braids)

Your hair is a phenomenon.

COLETTE

In the village, they call me "the girl with the hair."

WILLY

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

COLETTE

A little.

She looks down.

COLETTE (cont'd) (CONT'D)

How long until your train goes?

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Normally takes me about 15 minutes. Will probably take you 20.

WILLY

Yes. Right. So if my calculations are correct...

COLETTE

We have time - if we're quick.

WILLY

Yes, we do.

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

COLETTE

What?

WILLY

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

COLETTE

So am I.

He holds her by her shoulders firmly.

WILLY

I adore you.

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

11A INT. COLETTE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

11A

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

COLETTE

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

(smiles to herself)

I want to wake up next to you. Trace your profile with my finger while you sleep. Know that the day is ours. That life is ours for the taking. We will be so entire and so happy, my love.

12

EXT. GARDEN - AFTERNOON

12

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

JULES

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

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

JULES (CONT'D)

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

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

SOME TIME LATER - EVENING

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

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

WILLY (cont'd)

This is definitely a country wedding.

COLETTE

It'll make a good story -- in Paris.

WILLY

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

Willy twirls Colette round and round and round...

13 EXT. CITY OF PARIS - EVENING - 1893 13

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.

14 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - BOUDOIR - EVENING 14

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.

15 INT. BEDROOM/HALLWAY 15

Willy returns and prepares to knock again.

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

COLETTE (O.S.)  
I'm coming...

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

COLETTE (CONT'D)  
Is the carriage waiting?

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

WILLY  
Where's your new dress?

COLETTE  
It looks ridiculous. I couldn't  
breathe in it.

WILLY

That thing cost me two hundred and  
thirty-seven francs.

COLETTE

I know. We'll get it adjusted.

WILLY

(half joking)  
More money!

They exit.

16 EXT. ELEGANT PARISIAN STREET - EARLY EVENING 16

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

WILLY

What is it?

COLETTE

...It's tooth paste.

WILLY

(amused)  
My God! Here...

He rubs a little spit on it.

WILLY (CONT'D)

That'll do. Let's go in...

17 INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - HALLWAY 17

They approach the giant door.

WILLY

Ready for the lions...?

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

18 INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - MAIN ROOM 18

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

Willy acknowledges hellos and nods to people along the way.  
With her tight braids and country dress, Colette looks drab  
in this sea of peacocks.

They arrive at a circle of conversation -- that of MME. DE CAILLAVET, the hostess, the debonair COUNT MUFFAT, and a few SALONITES and FRIENDS.

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

COUNT MUFFAT  
At least it's temporary.

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

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

Laughter from the circle.

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

COUNT MUFFAT  
A secret love child?

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

Colette curtsies politely, her cheeks flushing.

COLETTE  
Pleased to meet you.

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

COLETTE  
I'm not sure...

Colette smiles, a little nervously.

MME. DE CAILLAVET  
Where are you from, you sweet thing?

COLETTE

I'm from Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye...  
(no reaction)  
...it's in Burgundy.

MME. DE CAILLAVET

Hence the dress!

COUNT MUFFAT

Have you "relocated," Willy?

This is apparently hilarious and there is laughter.

MME. DE CAILLAVET

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

COLETTE

Our fathers served together in the army...

COUNT MUFFAT

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

COLETTE

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

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

VEBER

Willy, thank God you're back. That  
short story for La Forgue -

WILLY

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

VEBER

What..? Very pleased to meet you.

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

VEBER (CONT'D)

It's due on Tuesday and you  
haven't given me the slightest  
clue.

WILLY

Amuse yourself for a moment, Gabrielle.

COLETTE

I will.

Willy draws Veber aside to continue the shop talk.

WILLY

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

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

COLETTE

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

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

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

19

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

19

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

SCHWOB

Are your ears burning?

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

SCHWOB (CONT'D)

I'm Schwob, a friend of Willy's.

COLETTE

Hello. I'm Gabrielle. Willy described you to me.

SCHWOB

I hope he was kind.

COLETTE

(wryly)  
Hope costs nothing.

Schwob raises an amused eyebrow, then looks out into the room where people are stealing glances at them.

SCHWOB

The modern day mob, aren't they?

(Colette nods)

But their goddess is gossip instead of the guillotine. Are you feeling overwhelmed?

COLETTE

A little.

SCHWOB

They may look grand and intimidating.

But just imagine them shitting. Each and every one of them.

Colette looks at him, incredulous.

SCHWOB (CONT'D)

Well they all do, don't they?

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

SCHWOB (CONT'D)

(to the Gentleman)

Good evening, Sir!

(to Colette)

Try it.

AEROPLANE VERSION

SCHWOB (CONT'D)

They may look grand and intimidating. But just imagine them perched over a chamber pot. Each and every one of them.

20 INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - VARIOUS ROOMS 20

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

21 INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - SMOKING ROOM 21

From the doorway, Colette spies Willy leaning on the mantelpiece talking to a beautiful YOUNG WOMAN in a red dress. The woman leans in close to him, laughing. He whispers something and she laughs even harder.

There's a shrieking coming from the corner of the main room. Colette turns to see the crowd laughing as a BOHEMIAN pours milk into an upright piano.

22

INT. HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE - MOVING - NIGHT

22

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

WILLY

So what did you think of the salon?

WILLY (CONT'D)

That was essentially - what you witnessed tonight - everyone who's anyone in Paris...

COLETTE

Was it..?

WILLY

Who did you like? Who did you talk to?

COLETTE

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

WILLY

I suspect you were more intimidated than bored?

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

She turns to him.

COLETTE

(interrupting)

Did that woman have a capital P?

WILLY

Which one?

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Then why do it?

WILLY

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

Colette sighs, frustrated. Willy changes tack.

COLETTE

Maybe...

WILLY

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

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

23 EXT. PARIS STREET 23

The carriage rides off into the distance.

24 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - MORNING 24

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

25 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE ROOM 25

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.

26

INT. WILLY'S STUDY

26

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

WILLY

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

SCHWOB

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

Willy thinks for a moment.

WILLY

Hmmph - I prefer my version.

He finally acknowledges the new arrival.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Veber!

VEBER

Willy. Schwob.

WILLY

(to Schwob)

So drop in those embellishments  
and file it at *The Echo* before  
six.

SCHWOB

Will do.

(he leaves.)

WILLY

The factory's on fire... We're on fire...! Sit. I've had a remarkable idea - it could be, anyway...

VEBER

What is it?

WILLY

I'm going to launch a novel.

VEBER

What?!

WILLY

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

VEBER

And who's going to write it?

WILLY

...You are!

Veber shakes his head, absorbing this.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Brandy? Cigar?

27

INT. ENTRANCE ROOM

27

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.

28 INT. WILLY'S STUDY

28

Willy is completely absorbed in his pitch, sweat beading  
from his forehead as he paces.

WILLY

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

Willy ends with a flourish, eyes slightly damp.

29 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT

29

Colette gets up from her desk, as Willy escorts Veber  
through the apartment.

WILLY

How long do you think it will  
take?

VEBER

Two or three months?

WILLY

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

VEBER

All right... I'll come back to you if  
I get stuck.

WILLY

Yes...Just write it...and fast!  
Let's get some money coming in.

VEBER

Goodbye, Gabrielle.

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

WILLY

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

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

WILLY (CONT'D)

You've married a literary  
entrepreneur. What a phenomenal  
disaster.

COLETTE

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

WILLY

We're utterly doomed aren't we?

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

WILLY (CONT'D)

Perfect... but how about; "The  
contract you have sent me seems  
*eminently* fair, with *only* one  
shortcoming - the money." Always  
pump something up before you prick  
it. You get more of a "POP" that  
way.

Unexpectedly, Willy farts.

COLETTE

Willy!

WILLY

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

COLETTE

...Goodbye Willy.

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

30 CLOSE ON A PANE OF GLASS 30

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

31 INT. LA MASCOTTE - NIGHT 31

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.

32 INT. THEATRE - NIGHT 32

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.

33 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY 33

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

34 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 34

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

35 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT 35

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.

36 INT. ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY 36

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

37 EXT. RUE JACOB - AFTERNOON 37

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

38 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY/LIVING ROOM 38

She enters, already opening the envelope and walks through the house perusing the letter - that is written in green ink.

COLETTE  
 (murmuring)  
 No...you're a liar.

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

39 EXT. STREETS OF PARIS - AFTERNOON 39

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.

40 EXT. COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON 40

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.

41 INT. LOTTE KINCELER'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON 41

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.

42 EXT. LOTTE'S KINCELER'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON 42

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.

43 EXT. COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON 43

Now walking back down the stairs, Colette is struggling mightily to keep her emotions in check as Willy blusters.

WILLY

She's not a disreputable woman.  
There's even a play about her - it's a  
shit play but nevertheless... I wonder  
who the hell wrote that letter?

COLETTE

I don't care who wrote it.

WILLY

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

Colette flies at him with inarticulate rage.

COLETTE

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

WILLY

It's true - we have no money.

COLETTE

Because you spend it all on her!

WILLY

I really don't!

COLETTE

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

WILLY

I've been inattentive. I'll make amends.

He reaches out to her.

COLETTE

Don't you dare touch me!

She spits out the words with such venom that they bring him  
to a halt as she walks on.

WILLY

Gabrielle! I gave up my  
inheritance for you! My bloody  
freedom!

COLETTE

Go to hell!

She exits through the large beaten-up gateway.

44 EXT. RURAL TRAIN STATION - DAY 44

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

45 EXT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY 45

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

SIDO

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

COLETTE

Really? Why?

SIDO

He inherited a house. In Lorraine.  
I'll miss them.

Colette manages a half smile.

SIDO (CONT'D)

I'm glad that you're home. How  
long do you think you'll stay?

COLETTE

I don't know, Sido.

SIDO

It must seem boring to you. Compared  
to Paris.

COLETTE

No. Not at all.

46 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - PARLOR - DAY

46

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

SIDO  
You must eat something.

COLETTE  
I'm not hungry.

SIDO  
You're always hungry.  
Gabrielle... you're not..?  
{pregnant}

COLETTE  
No. I'll eat later.

Sido turns to leave but looks back at Colette.

SIDO  
Come outside. Help me with the tomatoes.

47 EXT. SIDO'S KITCHEN GARDEN - DAY

47

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.

48

EXT. SAINT SAUVEUR - RIVER BANK - DAY

48

Willy and Colette walk along the dappled banks of the green slow river. She is distant. He is persistent.

WILLY

Are you happy to be here?

COLETTE

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

WILLY

Well, you are a country girl...

She rolls her eyes.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Did you miss me?

COLETTE

(lies)

No, not really.

WILLY

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

His tone grows more emotional. She holds firm.

WILLY (CONT'D)

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

COLETTE

Have you sampled them all?

WILLY

Please don't mock me.

COLETTE

You're happy to mock everybody  
else...

WILLY

It's true. It's all horseshit... Words  
are deceptive little bastards...

(MORE)

WILLY (CONT'D)  
but if you trace mine to their source -  
to my bruised, aching heart...

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

He snorts.

WILLY  
You know me too well.

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

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

She turns faces him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

COLETTE  
I'm being serious.

WILLY

So am I.  
(he looks around)  
This river is so beautiful.

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

COLETTE

No - but she was always with me.

49 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM

49

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.

50 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR 50

Sido, in her nightgown, carries an oil lamp down the  
corridor. From Colette's bedroom comes the rhythmic creaking  
of the bed springs that she does her best to ignore.

51 EXT. PARIS - MORNING - 1895 51

An aerial shot moves over the rooftops, churches, squares  
and streets of Paris.

52 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT 52

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

WILLY

Get out! Both of you! This is harassment!

SCHWOB

Willy, come on. You're not being  
fair.

VEBER

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

WILLY

Then stop coming round and bloody  
well asking!

VEBER

I am close to being evicted. You  
owe me 400 francs. You'd get the  
advance from Ollendorff you said!

WILLY

And I will - by Friday.

VEBER

You said that last week.

SCHWOB

A factory needs to pay its workers, Willy!

WILLY

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

VEBER

You'd better bloody have it!

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

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

WILLY

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

COLETTE

You could get another writer in.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

How can we spend that much?

WILLY

The mortgage, Matilde, restaurants...

COLETTE

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

WILLY

It's expected.

COLETTE

And the casino. And the races...

WILLY

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

COLETTE

I'm just saying we could economize. Mademoiselle Terrain always used to say, "Look after the pennies and.."

Then lightning strikes...

WILLY

You... You!

COLETTE

What?

WILLY

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

COLETTE

My school stories?

WILLY

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

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

53

INT. ENTRANCE ROOM - MOMENT'S LATER

53

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

COLETTE (V.O.)

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

54 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - LATE EVENING 54

From directly above, we see Willy trudging upstairs.

55 INT. BEDROOM - LATE EVENING 55

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!

56 INT. ENTRANCE ROOM - DAY

56

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

COLETTE (V.O.)

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

She is completely absorbed.

COLETTE (V.O.)

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

57 INT. WILLY'S STUDY - MORNING

57

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.

58 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

58

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

HALF AN HOUR LATER

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

COLETTE

What?

WILLY

Well... there we are. You did it.  
I take my hat off to you.

COLETTE

And?

WILLY

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

COLETTE

You don't like it?

WILLY

I do...

COLETTE

Truth?

WILLY

Yes. The nature descriptions  
are... charming.

COLETTE

"Charming...?"

Willy heads off to boudoir.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

What else?

WILLY

Nothing - really - it's a truly  
wonderful depiction.

59

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM

59

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

COLETTE

...And?

WILLY

We won't be able to get it  
published is the shame of it...

COLETTE  
What's wrong with it?

WILLY  
Honestly...?

She nods. He takes a breath.

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

COLETTE  
Yes.

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

COLETTE  
Just tell me.

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

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

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

COLETTE  
Well that was a waste of nine  
months.

WILLY  
Not if you enjoyed it.

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

60

INT. WILLY'S STUDY

60

Colette slams the door behind her, eyes brimming with  
tears. She opens the notebook and looks at the first page.  
It says, "School Notes by Gabrielle-Sidonie Colette." She  
takes a pen, crosses out her name.

And stops, leaving the single word "Colette." She looks at it for a moment, tears in her eyes, and underlines it.

61 INT. MME. DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - MUSIC ROOM - EVENING 61

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

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

COLETTE

Wague's mesmerizing, isn't he?

SCHWOB

Yes - he's the king of  
cantomime...

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

SCHWOB (CONT'D)

Let's get a drink.

MOMENTS LATER

Two champagne glasses are taken off a tray.

COLETTE

(to the servant)

Thank you, Geraud.

SCHWOB

Cheers.

They clink glasses.

SCHWOB (CONT'D)

How's it going with your book?

COLETTE

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

SCHWOB

I can't believe it.

COLETTE

Willy hated it. I don't care. I don't  
need to leave a mark on this world.

(MORE)

COLETTE (CONT'D)

Give me a flock of starlings and that will intoxicate me. Something real. Not just doing lines for the headmaster..

(takes a moment)

Did you always write, Schwob?

SCHWOB

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

COLETTE

Does it make you happy?

SCHWOB

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

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

GASTON

Hello Schwob! Good to see you.

SCHWOB

Hello Gaston, Jeanne. Do you know Colette?

JEANNE

I think we've been introduced but... I don't remember *that* name.

COLETTE

It's new - in a manner of speaking.

JEANNE

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

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

62

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

62

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

MME. DE CAILLAVET

It's so easy. On and off. No more sooty candles.

WILLY

Yes, maybe one day they will do my building.

MME. DE CAILLAVET

It's so much safer too. Even if the light is a little... bright.

WILLY

Indeed. If you'll excuse me.

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

62a

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

62a

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

GASTON

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

COLETTE

And what could that mean?

JEANNE

Who knows?

Gaston laughs, somewhat flirtatiously.

GASTON

So many intersecting lines.

COLETTE

I have the hands of a man - see.

She measures up to Gaston - hers are larger.

JEANNE

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

GASTON

No, I know what it is. You've the soul of Narcissus! Filled with sensuality and bitterness.

COLETTE

My soul is filled with beans and  
bacon rinds. You'll find nothing  
else there.

They all laugh. Willy arrives in front of them.

GASTON DE CAILLAVET

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

WILLY

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

GASTON

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

WILLY

(amused)

Touché Gaston. Your wits are improving...  
somewhat. We'd better go now, darling.

63

INT. CARRIAGE - MOVING - NIGHT

63

WILLY

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

COLETTE

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

WILLY

They're no longer on honeymoon, my  
dear.

Colette looks at him, slightly amused...

COLETTE

Your jealousy is misplaced.

WILLY

Why so..?

COLETTE  
It was actually his wife I found  
interesting.

WILLY  
Jeanne?

COLETTE  
Yes.

Willy considers this.

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

WILLY  
Well, that's a different case.

COLETTE  
It is?

WILLY  
Perhaps...

Willy smiles to himself.

64 INT. STAIRCASE - DAY 64

From above we see two burly men ascending the staircase.

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

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.

66

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - OFFICE

66

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.

67

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - DAY

67

Willy sits on a single chair in the middle of the room. This time he's engaged - gripped! He makes margin notes in spidery handwriting.

WILLY  
(to himself)  
I am a bloody idiot.

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

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

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

WILLY  
...example, "it's a lovely spring morning," liven it up. How about:  
(grand gesture)  
"Perhaps it's the season. It's too fine - almost disgracefully fine."

She scribbles it down.

WILLY (CONT'D)  
And page 29 - that scene with Luce.  
(he finds it)  
I've added: "she brushes up against me *suggestively*, her blue eyes half closed and her mouth half-open."

COLETTE  
That's quite louche.

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

Colette ponders this for a moment - not completely satisfied.

COLETTE  
And you really think they'll take it?

WILLY  
Yes! Ollendorff will go nuts for it.

COLETTE  
(ironically)  
As you did on first reading.

WILLY

Well never mind about that now.  
We've got to work work work...

MUSIC COMES UP AND CONTINUES THROUGH THE FOLLOWING MONTAGE:

69 INT. PRINTERS - DAY 69

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

70 EXT. PRINTER'S COURTYARD - DAY 70

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

71 OMITTED 71

72 EXT. BOOK SHOP WINDOW 72

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

73 INT. MADAME DE CAILLAVET'S SALON - DAY 73

Rachilde (the journalist) is reading her own review out loud to a crowd that includes Willy.

RACHILDE

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

The crowd let's out an "Oooo."

74 INT. BOOK SHOP - DAY 74

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

75 EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE PARK - DAY 75

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

75a EXT. CONVENT - DAY 75a

A nun has abandoned her holy book to read Claudine.

76 INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 76

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

JULES  
Look at that!

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

77 INT. SALON - DAY 77

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.

78 INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY 78

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

Make us all rich, my dear Ollendorff.

They laugh as they leave the room.

79

EXT. PUBLISHING HOUSE

79

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

WILLY

So what size are you thinking of..?

OLLENDORFF

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

WILLY

And what kind of return would that yield?

OLLENDORFF

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

The men push through the double doors and are now fully audible.

OLLENDORFF (CONT'D)

Mme. Willy, a great honor.

COLETTE

A pleasure to meet you.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Excellent.

OLLENDORFF

I believe that Willy based "Claudine" in part on your school days?

COLETTE

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

Ollendorff chuckles. Willy's smile is stretched thin.

OLLENDORFF

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

80 EXT. PUBLISHERS - DAY

80

Willy climbs in next to Colette.

WILLY

Gare de Lyon.

COLETTE

Where're we going?

WILLY

You'll find out.

81 INT. CARRIAGE - MOVING - MINUTES LATER

81

Willy is uncharacteristically quiet.

COLETTE

Is something wrong?

WILLY

What do you think is wrong?

COLETTE

What..?

WILLY

Finally...finally we've a success.  
And then you imply that I'm not  
the true author of it.

COLETTE

I didn't... Most books are "based  
on" something.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

It was only Ollendorff. He's your  
publisher, Willy.

WILLY

Schwob also said something.

COLETTE

Schwob's part of the factory.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

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

WILLY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. Perhaps I  
overreacted... Anyway, I've a  
surprise for you.

COLETTE

What is it?

WILLY

Then it wouldn't be a surprise...  
We're going to the country.

Colette smiles, puts her head on his shoulder.

COLETTE

Good. This city is driving me mad.

82

EXT. FOREST - DAY

82

Colette and Willy walk through trees, holding hands.

WILLY

What's that one?

COLETTE

Lime.

WILLY

And that one?

COLETTE

Douglas Fir.

WILLY

And that one?

COLETTE

Chestnut...A weeping Chestnut.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Animals are honest at least. They  
never lie.

WILLY

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

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

WILLY (CONT'D)

Look at that!

COLETTE

Yes, it's somebody's house.

WILLY

Wonder who lives there.

COLETTE

It's beautiful.

WILLY

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

He marches towards the house. She follows.

COLETTE

Willy, they might shoot at us!

83

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

83

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.

84

INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

84

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

WILLY

What do you think?

COLETTE

...Whose house is it?

WILLY

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

COLETTE

What?

WILLY

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

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

COLETTE

Willy, I can't believe it.

WILLY

Somewhere for you to write. And be alone.

Colette hugs him lovingly, then breaks off.

COLETTE

So...where did you get the money?

WILLY

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

COLETTE

For what?

WILLY

For the next book. "Claudine in Paris."

COLETTE

What?! I can't do another Claudine.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Willy...

WILLY

We'll talk about the details later.

(he looks up at the house)

So...do you like it?

Colette takes in the house's impressive dimensions.

COLETTE

It's indescribable.

WILLY

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

85 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY 85

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

85a INT. COUNTRY HOUSE 85a

Two workers carry in a sofa. Colette follows carrying a chair.

86 EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY 86

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

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

88 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY 88

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

89

INT. LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

89

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.

90

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

90

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

COLETTE

Willy!! This isn't funny.

She bangs on the door, anger building.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

LET ME OUT!!

(kicks the door.)

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

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

MOMENTS LATER

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

91

EXT. BOOK SHOP WINDOW - DAY

91

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

92

EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE - DAY

92

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

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

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

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

LILY  
(whispering)  
Colette and Willy are here!

GEORGIE  
So they are. Don't stare.

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

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

MOMENTS LATER

Post-exercise the couple are eating cake.

COLETTE  
Mmmm. It's good.

WILLY  
Indeed.

He looks round.

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

COLETTE  
I don't know.

WILLY

At least three quarters, I'd say.  
And those who haven't yet will soon  
catch up.

He notices Lily weaving through the tables towards them.

WILLY (CONT'D)

(to himself)  
What comes this way?

LILY

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

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

WILLY

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

LILY

Yes.

WILLY

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

LILY

(thrilled)  
I will!

And off she goes.

COLETTE

Who is she?

WILLY

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

COLETTE

They sound a bit dull.

WILLY

He is. She is anything but.  
(glances at her)  
We don't have to...

COLETTE

No. Let's go...

93

INT. CAFE NOIR - EVENING

93

In the high ceillinged 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. Of me.

LILY

Oh thank you!

He hands it back. Georgie looks impatient.

LILY (CONT'D)

And yours too Madame Colette.

GEORGIE

Oh come now...

COLETTE

Not at all. Spirit should always  
be rewarded.

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

WILLY

Good night, my dear.

LILY

Good night!

She hurries off.

GEORGIE

Well... I live at 74 Rue Goethe. If you'd like to stop by for at nightcap...

The question hangs in the air.

WILLY

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

GEORGIE

Are you sure now?

COLETTE

Willy...

WILLY

We'll play again soon, my dear.

GEORGIE

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

And she's gone. Willy weighs this.

COLETTE

You don't want to go?

WILLY

The invitation was clearly for you.

This really lands for Colette.

COLETTE

... Should I?

WILLY

Yes, of course.

COLETTE

You don't mind?

WILLY

I'd be a hypocrite if I did, wouldn't I?

Colette considers this.

WILLY (CONT'D)

If it's any comfort to you, I will be at home lying in bed, thinking of the two of you in the fondest way possible.

94 INT. GEORGIE'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - NIGHT 94

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.

95 INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 95

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.

96

INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

96

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

Colette enters, also acting cool.

WILLY

My dear...

COLETTE

Have you fed Toby Chien?

WILLY

I forgot. I thought Matilde does it.

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

WILLY (CONT'D)

How was last night?

COLETTE

It was..interesting.

WILLY

What happened?

COLETTE

What do you think happened?

WILLY

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

Colette rolls her eyes.

COLETTE

I won't be writing it down.

WILLY

But you must... It's prime material!

COLETTE

No!

She heads out.

WILLY

Will you see her again?

COLETTE

(calling out)

Probably.

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

97 INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

97

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

GEORGIE

(murmurs)

One moment, my darling.

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

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

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

Oh.

WILLY

Wonderful, you're here.. I was just passing by...

GEORGIE

Yes...

He continues to stare at her. She flushes slightly.

WILLY

Well -

GEORGIE

You'd better come in.

97a INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - ENTRANCE ROOM -  
LATE AFTERNOON

97a

Colette is working away in her small room. The front door goes and Willy comes in.

WILLY

How's the writing going?

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

He heads off. She continues writing.

98 EXT. GEORGIE'S STREET - AFTERNOON 98

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

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

Colette approaches the door and knocks.

COLETTE

Is she in?

LILY

Yes, please come in.

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

LILY (CONT'D)

She's expecting you.

Lily gives Colette a smile and leaves discreetly.

100 EXT. GEORGIE'S STREET - EVENING 100

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

101 INT. GEORGIE'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - EVENING 101

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

102 INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - DAY 102

Colette and Georgie make mad passionate love.

103 INT GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING 103

Now Georgie is making love to Willy - with equal fervor.

103a INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 103a

Colette and Georgie;s passion continues to heat up...

103b INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON 103b

Georgie and Willy come to climax.

104 EXT. GEORGIE'S STREET - AFTERNOON 104

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

105 INT. GEORGIE'S BUILDING - STAIRCASE - AFTERNOON 105

Colette marches up the stairs, rings the bell.

COLETTE

Georgie! I know you're in there.

Still no answer. Colette knocks hard on the door.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

Georgie. Open up!

More loud knocks. Eventually Georgie answers in a nightgown.

GEORGIE

Colette, I was taking a nap.

Colette pushes past her.

COLETTE

Who's been in here?

GEORGIE

No one. What are you doing?

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

106 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STUDY - DAY 106

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...

107 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT

107

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.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

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

An uneasy truce has been declared.

WILLY (cont'd)

You know what? I'm tempted to go  
back and put even more Georgie into  
Rezi.

COLETTE

Willy, we have to draw the line  
somewhere.

WILLY

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

108 INT. PRINTING PRESS - DAY 108

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

109 INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE - DAY 109

Ollendorff hands a brand new hardback copy of "Claudine en  
Menage by Willy" to Willy who nods approvingly.

110 INT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

110

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

GEORGIE

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

COLETTE

What?

GEORGIE

I've put him off. Hopefully it won't come to that.

(she looks at Colette)

You've read it, yes?

COLETTE

I have.

GEORGIE

How worried should I be?

Georgie walks across to her with the drink.

COLETTE

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

GEORGIE

I don't believe you. Everyone is chattering about it - saying it will be salacious in the extreme.

(She clears her throat)

I know you have no time for me since our separation and I know I behaved badly.

But I'm begging you... Ask Willy to change it - before publication?

Colette slowly shakes her head.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)

Please Colette... One woman to another? Please...

COLETTE

No, I can't.

GEORGIE

You'd let me suffer?

COLETTE

It's not just Willy, Georgie,  
it's... the book itself...Willy  
thinks it's a work of art.

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

GEORGIE

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

COLETTE

What? You can't do that.

GEORGIE

He has already accepted.

COLETTE

The sly bastard. You can't. You just  
can't.

GEORGIE

We have. And that is how it is.

Colette finally snaps.

COLETTE

You are a duplicitous bitch.

GEORGIE

I had a good teacher.

Colette leaves slamming the door. Georgie looks after her.

111 EXT. GEORGIE'S APARTMENT - DAY 111

Colette leaves the house in a rage.

112 EXT. PRINTER'S COURTYARD - DAY 112

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.

113 INT. LA MASCOTTE - EVENING

113

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

WILLY

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

COLETTE

I said it would be a "hot book."

WILLY

The thing is though, Ollendorff signed the deal but unfortunately failed to mention...

(drum rolls the table...)

That he didn't own the copyright. I do.

SCHWOB

Unbelievable!

WILLY

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

SCHWOB

How do you two do it?

COLETTE

I think we got very lucky...

WILLY

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

SCHWOB

With the play?

WILLY

Not just that. We'll have Claudine perfume, Claudine lingerie, Claudine soap.

COLETTE

She will literally be a *household name*.

They all laugh.

114 INT. THEATRE - DAY - 1903

114

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

An insipid actress is cooing her way though the dialogue.

INSIPID ACTRESS

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

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

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

WILLY

She's not bad.

COLETTE

She's terrible.

INSIPID ACTRESS

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

WILLY

(to Colette)

Yes, you're right.

(shouts)

Thank you very much. Next.

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

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

POLAIRE

M. Willy. I am the real Claudine!

Colette and Willy exchange an intrigued look.

WILLY

And you are?

POLAIRE

Me? My name is...Polaire!

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

Colette and Willy sit, examining photographs of Polaire.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

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

WILLY

A "Sister of Perpetual Claudine."

COLETTE

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

WILLY

Yes...

COLETTE

Do you think I could act?

WILLY

You? No. It would be a criminal waste.

COLETTE

Waste of what?

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

WILLY (cont'd)

That bobbed hair... I've never seen anything like it. Have you?

COLETTE

(suspicious)

I always imagined Claudine had long hair.

WILLY

That was the 19th Century  
Claudine...this is now.

He holds the picture up beside her.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Would look good on you, actually. Very  
fetching.

COLETTE

No. Willy, I couldn't.

WILLY

It would make you look younger.

COLETTE

Really?

WILLY

You're turning thirty soon - what  
better time to turn the clocks...

COLETTE

Thank you... But I've always had my  
hair... Sido would kill me.

WILLY

Just think of it... You and Polaire  
- The Claudine Twins!

COLETTE

What!?

WILLY

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

COLETTE

No! Never... in a thousand years.

116 INT. HAIR SALON - DAY

116

Scissors hack through thick long tresses.

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

117 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Colette enters the room shorn. The haircut looks awkward -  
it hasn't quite settled in yet. Willy looks up from his  
newspaper and stares at her amazed.

WILLY

My word! Where have you gone?

COLETTE

Willy, I hate it.

Willy circles his strange new wife.

WILLY

No... I like it very much.

COLETTE

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

WILLY

It'll just take a bit of getting  
used to...

Colette goes to a mirror.

COLETTE

Oh - what did I do?

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

COLETTE (CONT'D)

She butchered me. I look ten years  
older. You made me do this.

WILLY

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

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

COLETTE

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

WILLY

Gabrielle!

COLETTE

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

She starts beating on his chest. And keeps going... until  
she is exhausted and breaks into tears.

118 EXT. THEATER - NIGHT 118

A poster announces "CLAUDINE IN PARIS - TONIGHT" as CROWDS make their way in.

119 INT. THEATER - NIGHT 119

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

SALONITE

Colette, you look ravishing.

She smiles.

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

POLAIRE

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

Colette's eyes shine as her heroine becomes flesh.

POLAIRE (CONT'D)

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

120 INT. LA MASCOTTE RESTAURANT/SALON - LATER 120

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

WILLY

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

MME. DE CAILLAVET

I have to give it to you, Willy. It's going to be a huge success - enjoy your moment of triumph.

VEBER

Now that you are such a celebrity,  
you'll become more insufferable than  
ever.

WILLY

That's the plan, Veber! That's the plan!

Willy continues to hold forth.

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

SCHWOB

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

COLETTE

A woman?

SCHWOB

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

COLETTE

Fascinating.

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

WILLY

Polaire! Over here!

POLAIRE

Monsieur Willy!

She is deposited before...

POLAIRE (CONT'D)

How was it?

WILLY

Brilliant, my dear! You were  
perfection!

POLAIRE

Thank you, M. Willy! Colette?

She looks to Colette who raises her glass.

COLETTE  
You are her. The living Claudine.

Polaire is so excited she physically vibrates.

WILLY  
Polaire, alight upon my knee...

He pats his knee and she sits.

WILLY (CONT'D)  
And you Tetette!

He grabs her by the hand.

COLETTE  
Willy!

WILLY  
Come here!

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

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

PHOTOGRAPHER  
Hold still!

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

121 INT. PHOTO SESSION - DAY 121

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

122 NEWSPAPER HEADLINES 122

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

123 CLOSE ON POSTER 123  
It says "Do Not Go and See CLAUDINE IN PARIS - it's immoral."

124 MAGAZINE HEADLINE 124  
"THE YEAR OF CLAUDINE!"

124a INT. STREET - DAY 124a  
A MIDDLE AGED MAN reads a newspaper with the headline MENAGE A TROIS.

124b INT. SHELF/MAGAZINE RACK 124b  
Pan along several CLAUDINE magazines - ending on one that says VIVE CLAUDINE.

124c INT. BATHROOM 124c  
A YOUNG WOMAN picks a bottle of Claudine perfume and applies a few squirts.

125 INT. HAIR SALON - DAY 125  
A number of WOMEN, including a couple of SALONITES, getting their hair bobbed to look like Claudine.

126 OMITTED 126

126a INT. SHELF/BEAUTY PARLOR 126a  
A shelf full of jars selling CLAUDINE FACE CREAM.

126b INT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE PARK - DAY 126b  
A line of WOMEN fanning themselves with CLAUDINE FANS.

127 EXT. SHOP WINDOW - DAY 127  
SCHOOL GIRLS gaze at MANNEQUINS - all dressed "A la Claudine."

127a EXT. COURTYARD - DAY 127a  
A ROUGH HANDSOME WORKER takes a CLAUDINE Cigarette from the packet with his mouth and lights it.

127b INT. SHELF/CONFECTIONERS 127b  
Boxes of CLAUDINE CANDIES fill the self.

- 127c EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE - DAY 127c  
 A YOUNG BUSINESSMAN reads a paper that says CLAUDINE SENSATION while a YOUNG WOMAN reads a magazine that says LE SECRET DE CLAUDINE.
- 127d EXT. STREET 127d  
 Children eat CLAUDINE CANDIES.
- 128 INT. BOUDOIR - DAY 128  
 A YOUNG WOMAN dresses in CLAUDINE LINGERIE.
- 128a INT. BEDROOM - DAY 128a  
 A young DANDY slicks his hair with CLAUDINE HAIR OIL.
- 128b INT. BATHROOM 128b  
 A WOMAN reaches out to pick up a bar of CLAUDINE SOAP.
- 129 EXT. COURTYARD 129  
 A BUNDLE OF NEWSPAPERS lands with the headline "EPOCH DE CLAUDINE."
- 129a INT. BEDROOM 129a  
 TWO YOUNG GIRLS play with CLAUDINE DOLLS.
- 129b EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE - DAY 129b  
 A group of YOUNG LADS trade CLAUDINE postcards.
- 130 INT. LA MASCOTTE/SALON - DINING ROOM - NIGHT 130  
 ...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.

(MORE)

WILLY (CONT'D)  
 Exploding star that makes no  
 sound! Claudine, Claudine,  
 Claudine!

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

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

The merriment in the room is sky high.

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

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

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

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

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

He raises his glass. Everyone follows.

WILLY (CONT'D)  
To Claudine!

ALL  
CLAUDINE!!

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

131 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT 131

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

COLETTE  
I'm exhausted.

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

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

COLETTE  
Willy..?

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

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

132 INT. BOUDOIR - NIGHT 132

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

133 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT 133

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.

134 EXT. RUE JACOB - DAY - 1904 134

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

135 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - STAIRCASE - DAY 135

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

136 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY 136

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

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

137 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - DAY

137

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...

138 INT. WILLY'S STUDY - DAY

138

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

MEG

Monsieur Willy...?

He looks up from his desk.

WILLY

I am he.

MEG

Hello, I was wondering if you would sign this.

She produces a copy of "Claudine at School."

MEG (CONT'D)

It's my favorite book.

WILLY

Thank you. To whom shall I inscribe it?

MEG

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

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

WILLY

Where are you from?

MEG

(dropping her "Claudine" voice)

I'm from London.

WILLY

Wonderful! And how old are you?

MEG

I'm older than I look actually. I'm twenty three.

WILLY

Oh, well, I'm younger than I look -  
I'm forty six.

MEG

(resuming Claudine voice)  
I don't mind.

He hands the book back.

WILLY

Well here you are...

MEG

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

WILLY

It would be strange if it wasn't.

MEG

She's so beautiful - her eyes! So  
much depth - and maturity.

She gives Willy a knowing smile.

139

EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE - DAY

139

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

COLETTE

Look lilies...

MISSY

Yes, *calla palustris*.

COLETTE

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

MISSY

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

COLETTE

My maternal grandfather spent time  
in the tropics too. He was a  
quadroon.

MISSY

Really?

COLETTE

Yes, from Martinique.

Missy raises an approving eyebrow.

MISSY

Wonderful.

Two young women walk by dressed as Claudines, giggling.

MISSY (CONT'D)

Congratulations, by the way. It seems that Claudines are everywhere these days.

COLETTE

Yes... There's even been a Claudine murderess - in Marseilles. She slit her husband's throat.

MISSY

Good for her.

Colette can't help but smile.

MISSY (CONT'D)

But seriously, you've done something important. You've invented a *type*.

COLETTE

You mean Willy has.

MISSY

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

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

MISSY (CONT'D)

You should own up to it.

COLETTE

Someone told you?

MISSY

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

COLETTE

It's true I...I wrote them. It's  
just...

MISSY

I know... It's a man's world.

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

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

Colette is composing a note at her small writing desk.

COLETTE (V.O.)

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

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

140 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY 140

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

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

141 EXT. COLETTE'S COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY 141

Meg and Missy are throwing a ball for Toby Chien down the lawn. Willy and Colette are left alone on the veranda amidst the rubble of a picnic.

WILLY

Meg's a sweet thing, isn't she?  
She can be a little overeager, but  
there we are...she reminds me of  
you - ten years ago.

COLETTE

Nothing like. But she is very sweet.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

COLETTE

(smiling)  
Oh, I know one...

WILLY

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

COLETTE

What do you mean?

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

143 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - STUDY 143

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

MEG

Ready..?

WILLY

Yes, I'm ready.

She shuffles out in a full Claudine smock and stands simpering at the foot of the bed.

MEG

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

WILLY

No. Keep it the same.

MEG

I was born in 1881...

WILLY

That's right.

MEG

I will probably not die there.

144

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - OUTDOOR GYMNASIUM - MORNING

144

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

MISSY

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

Colette finishes breathing heavily.

COLETTE

Missy, you were married once, weren't you?

MISSY

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

COLETTE

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

MISSY

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

(MORE)

MISSY (CONT'D)

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

Colette smiles, reflecting.

MISSY (CONT'D)

And you?

COLETTE

What about me?

MISSY

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

COLETTE

(ironically)

Thank you.

(takes a breath)

I do know what I'm doing, you know. I'm in on the joke.

MISSY

I don't doubt it. But are you happy?

COLETTE

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

MISSY

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

COLETTE

Do you think that's terribly wrong?

MISSY

No. That's entirely your business. But... never mind.

COLETTE

What?

MISSY

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

Colette absorbs this and looks away.

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

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

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

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

COLETTE

Hello Héon.

HEON

Hello Colette.

COLETTE

Is he there?

HEON

Yes.

COLETTE

What kind of mood is he in?

HEON

The usual. But worse.

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

Willy is pawing over an account ledger as she enters.

COLETTE

Morning Willy.

WILLY

My word. What are you wearing?

COLETTE

They're Missy's.

WILLY

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

Colette shrugs this off.

COLETTE

Willy...I've was thinking. You know  
'Claudine Takes Off' - why don't we  
publish it under both our names?

WILLY

Out of the question. Ollendorff  
will never agree.

COLETTE

Ollendorff or you?

WILLY

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

Colette is exasperated.

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Don't insult Missy.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

That's not fair Willy.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

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

WILLY

They were bought from bankrupts at  
a debtor's auction!

COLETTE

The car. The racehorse that went lame?

WILLY

...And you? Your clothes, your hats,  
the exorbitant mortgage on the country  
house.

COLETTE

(adamant)

I want my name on the book.

WILLY

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

Colette lets out a gasp of frustration.

COLETTE

Bastard! Selfish, smug, fat, lazy bastard!

WILLY

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

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Godammit Willy..!

WILLY

Without the progenitor, there  
would be no Claudine!

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

148

EXT. PARIS STREETS - DAY

148

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

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

FADE TO BLACK.

149 INT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY - 1906

149

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.

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

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

WILLY

Are you going to write today?

COLETTE

No. I'm rehearsing with Wague later.

WILLY

Don't you think you ought to?

What are your priorities?

(he looks at her,  
frustrated)

I should start locking you up again.

COLETTE

I would scream the house down.

She carries on with the exercises, self-absorbed.

WILLY

It's a charming hobby, Tetette  
but... You are not Sarah  
Bernhardt. And if you can't pull  
it off as high art you'll be doing  
the bloody music halls, for god's  
sake. And that would be  
scandalous.

COLETTE

And when have you ever considered  
scandal a bad thing?

WILLY

True...What does Missy say?

COLETTE

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

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Missy does the movements with me.  
He's rather good.

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

COLETTE (CONT'D)

Wague thinks I could be a ready  
for the stage in a few weeks. What  
do you think, Matilde?

MATILDE

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

COLETTE

I thought you were on my side!

MATILDE

Suit yourself.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

Oh no, he's far too shy.

151 INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

151

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.

152 EXT. MOULIN ROUGE - EVENING

152

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.

153 INT. MOULIN ROUGE - THE MAIN ROOM

153

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.

154 INT. MOULIN ROUGE - HALF AN HOUR LATER

154

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.

155 INT. MOULIN ROUGE - BACK STAGE

155

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.

156	EXT. GRAVEYARD - SAINT-SAUVEUR - DAY	156
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In a country graveyard, a coffin is going into the ground. A COUNTRY PRIEST reads the rites. The family are assembled for the funeral of JULES COLETTE. Sido is clearly beside herself with grief. Colette is there - deep in grief, with Willy who sneaks a look at his watch. This doesn't go unnoticed by Sido.

157	OMITTED	157
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158	INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOUSE - COLETTE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT	158
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Colette unlaces a boot and drops it on the floor.

WILLY  
 How are you bearing up my love?

COLETTE  
 ...I keep thinking I'll see him in  
 every room. But he's gone.

WILLY

He was an old soldier. A good solid man.

COLETTE

He was... "was"...

Colette sighs, puzzled by death - exhausted.

WILLY (cont'd)

I saw our creditors yesterday. Horrific. We lost everything at the Moulin Rouge.

COLETTE

Willy - not today.

WILLY

(interrupting)

Tetette, we need to sell the country house.

Colette is brought up short.

COLETTE

No.

WILLY

We have no choice.

COLETTE

No. No, Willy. You can't do that.

WILLY

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

COLETTE

I don't believe you.

WILLY

Or we file for bankruptcy. What do you think?

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

159

INT. COLETTE FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

159

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

SIDO

You need to divorce him, Gabri, and quick.

COLETTE

Sido, don't...please.

SIDO

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

COLETTE

No!

SIDO

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

COLETTE

We should be thinking about papa.

SIDO

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

COLETTE

Don't say that.

She glances out to see Willy in the garden.

SIDO

He'll hold you back.

COLETTE

But...I still...

SIDO

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

COLETTE

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

SIDO

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

COLETTE

I'm going to do it. Writing's a nightmare.

(MORE)

COLETTE (CONT'D)

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

Willy appears -- immediately sensing an atmosphere.

WILLY

What did I miss..?

Both women carry on with their kitchen duties without  
replying.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Women...knives...all very Greek.

Colette averts her eyes, unable to look at him.

160 EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY 160

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

161 EXT. SMALL RAILWAY STATION - DAY - 1907 161

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

162 EXT. THEATER - MONTMARSAULT - LATE AFTERNOON 162

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

163 OMITTED 163

164 OMITTED 164

165 INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING 165

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

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

WAGUE

Colette -

COLETTE

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

WAGUE

We're all bloody exhausted!

She snorts.

WAGUE (CONT'D)

Have you got any kohl I could borrow?

COLETTE

Yes. Catch.

He looks at her.

WAGUE

You'll survive.

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

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.

167 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - WILLY'S STUDY - DAY 167

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[085yioqhohhtuhwqout

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.

168 INT. OLLENDORFF PUBLISHING - DAY 168

Willy walks slowly up the grand staircase.

169 INT. OLLENDORFF'S OFFICE - DAY 169

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.

170

INT. A BAR IN STRASBOURG - NIGHT

170

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

COLETTE

Did you let me win?

BAPTISTE

Of course!

COLETTE

Bastard! That's worst than losing!

ACROBAT

(to Baptiste)  
How about it..?

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

BAPTISTE

No no. I have a great affection  
for my arm.

Laughter. Across the room, Missy enters at the main door.  
Wearing a SKIRT.

EVERYONE  
Missy! Missy!

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

COLETTE  
Hello, my love.

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

COLETTE  
Come here...next to me.

Missy snuggles on to the bench by Colette.

MISSY  
How was it tonight?

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

MISSY  
The gang is in a good mood.

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

MISSY  
Order champagne. Three bottles.  
Make it five.

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

FLOSSY  
Santé, you beautiful gal.

COLETTE  
Santé, Flossy. You're the best.

FLOSSY  
You can give it and you can take  
it... We loves ya, don't we, Moll?

Her friend, MOLLY, agrees. Colette's eyes glow at this compliment - far greater and more meaningful than any she received in the salon.

Baptiste pops the champagne cork to more cheers. It seems like the party will go on all night.

171 INT. COLETTE'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

171

A small pokey hotel room. Colette and Missy undress for bed by candlelight.

COLETTE

We had a cancellation in Limoges -  
I have four days off next week.

MISSY

Are you coming back to Paris?

COLETTE

No. I have to go up to Besancon -  
to pack up the house.

MISSY

Will he be there?

COLETTE

Missy, it's been a long day. Can't  
we just...

MISSY

Yes. I'm sorry.

They get into bed and hold each other close.

MISSY (CONT'D)

You don't need to worry about  
Willy. You don't need to earn your  
own money or stay in these kind of  
places. I could arrange  
everything.

COLETTE

Too much of my life has been "arranged."

MISSY

I just want you to be able to  
write if you want to.

COLETTE

I don't want to. I'm happy. And I  
like my threadbare lodgings...I  
like making my own money. Even if  
it's only 50 francs a show.

Missy nods, hiding her hurt.

MISSY

I love you. That's all.

COLETTE

...Thank you.

MISSY

It's not the traditional reply but  
I'll take it for now.

They stare into each other's eyes. There's a pounding on the door.

MANAGER

Get up. Now! We're coming in.

Colette stands using a blanket to cover herself as the  
MANAGER opens the door with his WIFE in tow.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Out! Both of you! Get out of here!

MANAGER'S WIFE

You see? I told you!

COLETTE

What the hell?

MANAGER

You degenerates!

MANAGER'S WIFE

We don't have filth under our  
roof.

MANAGER

You've got five minutes to get out  
or I'm calling the police.

MISSY

Please fuck off.  
(alternate take)  
Oh bugger off.

He slams the door. Colette looks distraught.

COLETTE

What are we going to do now? I have  
to be up at six to catch the train  
to Nice.

MISSY

Don't worry, my dear. We'll find  
somewhere else...

Colette looks into Missy's eyes and finds strength there.

172 INT. HOTEL - STAIRS - NIGHT 172

MUSIC COMES UP. Hastily, dressed, Colette and Missy descend the stairs with their bags, past the manager with their heads held high.

173 EXT. STRASBOURG STREET - NIGHT 173

As the exiled lovers walk off into the darkness, Missy takes Colette's hand.

174 EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON 174

Rain clouds gather over the house.

175 INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON 175

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...

176

INT. COLETTE'S BEDROOM - COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT

176

Colette lies awake, troubled. There's a light knock.

COLETTE

Come in.

Willy enters, dressed in his nightshirt.

WILLY

May I get in with you, Gabri?

COLETTE

- Yes. Get in.

WILLY

I couldn't sleep. It was too  
quiet.

(a quiet moment)

Listen. The silence. It's  
terrifying isn't it?

COLETTE

No...I love it.

WILLY

Of course, you do - you country girl.

He kisses her on the cheek.

WILLY (CONT'D)

I have something weighing on me...

COLETTE

What..?

WILLY

I...I don't sleep with Meg any more.  
I mean we sleep. But I can't...

Willy cannot say it.

COLETTE  
It doesn't matter.

WILLY  
It does. It matters very much.

She holds him close, as if he were a child.

COLETTE  
Good-night, my love.

177 INT. THEATRE - NIGHT 177

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

178 INT. THEATRE - BACKSTAGE 178

The troupe descend a spiral staircase leading down from the stage. Colette is next to Wague, exhausted after her performance. Flossy turns round out.

FLOSSY  
Went well tonight!

Colette waves her hand indicating so-so. She turns to go up some steps when a voice calls out for her.

OLLENDORFF  
Madame Willy.

COLETTE  
Monsieur Ollendorff!

They shake hands.

OLLENDORFF  
I'm here in Lille on some family business, and I was delighted when I found out you were here with the play.

COLETTE  
It's kind of you to come and see it.

OLLENDORFF  
It was quite a spectacle.

Colette gives him a tight-lipped smile. Two SHOWGIRLS come down the stairs and bustle past them up.

OLLENDORFF (cont'd) (CONT'D)  
I was thinking, if you were free,  
I would like to take you and the  
Marquise to dinner.

COLETTE

Thank you. I'm always up for a free feed. And especially in such august company.

OLLENDORFF

It's the very least I can do for you, Colette. After all the money you've made for me. And will continue to make.  
(he gives a tight-lipped smile)  
I wish I had been able to give Willy a better settlement. But one can only pay what one can afford.

COLETTE

I'm not sure I quite understand.

OLLENDORFF

For the Claudines. For the rights to the Claudines.

A STAGEHAND passes between them carrying a bunch of flowers up the stairs.

OLLENDORFF (CONT'D)

Do you mean to say he didn't tell you?

Colette looks at him stunned.

COLETTE

Willy sold you the Claudines?

OLLENDORFF

Yes. All of them.

COLETTE

He sold you Claudines...

OLLENDORFF

Absolutely. I'm sorry. I thought..?

Colette struggles to keep herself under control.

COLETTE

How much did he get for her?

179 INT. TRAIN - DAY 179

Colette speeds along, gazing out of the window.

180 EXT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - STAIRCASE - DAY 180

Colette flies up the stairs in a rage.

181 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - WILLY'S STUDY - DAY181

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.

182 EXT. STREETS OF PARIS - MORNING 182

Evening is coming on. The street of Paris are busy with cars. The electric street lamps turn off automatically.

183 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING 183

Willy is looking through the exercise books. Page after page of Colette school notebooks, - the original text of the Claudine novels with the occasional margin note from Willy. He is thinking out loud to Heon...

WILLY

You see - that's mine, that's mine - it was a collaboration... she really has a nerve... These prove it.

Heon says nothing. Willy reads his silence.

WILLY (CONT'D)

You know... Could you do me a favor, Héon? Could you destroy these for me?

HEON

Are you sure?

WILLY

Definitely. Burn them. Incinerate.

HEON

**Yes,** Willy.

WILLY

Thank you.  
(sighs)  
I'm going out.

He heads out the door. Leaving Héon with the books.

184 INT. CAFE NOIR - MORNING 184

Willy and Schwob sitting at a dark table nursing an absinthe. A chess set is in front of them but they are barely interested in the game.

SCHWOB

...How many decent salons are left now? Two, maybe three.

WILLY

It's the end of a dream.

SCHWOB

Paris is losing its gold.

WILLY

Yes, I must confess, I don't think that this century agrees with me quite as much as the last one.

SCHWOB

I haven't heard from Colette. I've written to her twice but no word.

WILLY

Writing is anathema to her, it always has been.

SCHWOB

You two really are done this time?

WILLY

She'll pass me on the street and not even look at me. "Claudine Divorced." So much the worse for her. And for me...

A solemn silence. Across the bar a YOUNG WOMAN (who we remember as LILY - GEORGIE'S ASSISTANT) and her GIRLFRIEND are having coffee at the bar. She says something to her then ventures across the room.

LILY

M. Willy?

WILLY

I am the *late* Monsieur Willy.

LILY

I'm Lily - Lily Milson. I met you once. Years ago. I used to work for Madame Raoul Duval.

WILLY

Oh yes! I saw you and your friend come in and I thought - what wonderful young creatures! Thank heaven for... you, my dear

This embarrasses Lily.

LILY

I just wanted to say hello.

WILLY

Well, how about you two come and share a drink with a couple of old roués?

He gives her a come on look through bleary eyes. Schwob looks embarrassed.

WILLY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

It's never too early...

He pats the seat beside him. Lily looks disillusioned, sad.

LILY

(nervously)

I'm sorry, I have to go... Very nice seeing you.

And she's gone. Willy stares sadly into his drink.

SCHWOB

Loosing your touch...

WILLY

Lost! The Claudines are done with their headmaster.

He downs the last dregs and sighs.

185 INT. COLETTE AND WILLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

185

Héon stokes up the fire in Willy's study. He takes the first book and is about to throw in on. Then he stops, opens the book and looks at the words for a moment.

Taking a decision, he puts all the books in a leather satchel, and heads out the door.

186 EXT. TRAIN - MOVING - EVENING

186

The train whizzes through the countryside as evening falls.

187 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - EVENING

187

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.

188 EXT. THEATRE - MARSEILLES - MORNING 188

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

189 INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING 189

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.

190 MOMENTS LATER 190

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.

191 INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT 191

Colette walks down the corridor backstage, past SHOWGIRLS changing and ACROBATS warming up - her new world, her new community. She sees Wague who signals to her good luck.

COLETTE (V.O.)

I know she is going to speak to me.  
 She is going to say: "Is that you  
 there, all alone under that ceiling  
 booming and vibrating under the feet  
 of the dancers? Why are you there, all  
 alone? And why not somewhere else?"  
 Yes, this is the dangerous, lucid  
 hour.

Approaching the stage, we hear the audience chanting "Colette"  
 over and over in rhythm. The sound gets louder, the audience's  
 feet beating a tattoo on the floor; COLETTE, COLETTE, COLETTE.

192

INT. THEATRE - BACKSTAGE

192

COLETTE (V.O.)

Now, whenever I despair, I no longer  
 expect my end, but some bit of luck,  
 some commonplace little miracle  
 which, like a glittering link, will  
 mend again the necklace of my days.

Colette takes a deep breath. The curtain goes up, to thunderous  
 applause. She walks into the brilliant glow of the footlights,  
 and disappears into white, like a bird disappearing into the  
 sun.

TITLES comes up, accompanied by ARCHIVAL PHOTOS and MUSIC.

TITLE

In 1911, Colette's "The Vagabond," based on  
 her music hall experience, was published  
 under her own name to great critical acclaim.

TITLE (CONT'D)

Missy and Colette continued their relationship  
 for many years. Missy often accompanied  
 Colette on her music hall tours, though never  
 again opted to appear on the stage.

TITLE (CONT'D)

Willy continued to publish ghost-  
 written books with Meg, but failed to  
 replicate the success of the Claudines.  
 He died in 1931 in relative obscurity.

TITLE (CONT'D)

Paul Héon did not destroy the original  
 Claudine manuscripts but returned them to  
 Colette. They became crucial evidence in a  
 1948 legal battle to establish the true  
 authorship of the novels... that Colette won.

TITLE (CONT'D)

Colette went on to publish over fifty acclaimed novels and short stories. She became the most celebrated female author in the history of French literature.

In her old age, Colette remarked, "What a wonderful life I've had. I only wish I'd realized it sooner."

THE END