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Dramatic Publishing

LADY OF THE CAMELLIAS

Adapted for the stage by
WILLIAM LANG

From the French of
ALEXANDRE DUMAS, fils



Dramatic Publishing

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WILLIAM LANG

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(LADY OF THE CAMELLIAS)

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LADY OF THE CAMELLIAS

A Drama in Two Acts
For Three Men and Four Women

CHARACTERS

COUNT DE VARVILLE . . . a distinguished-looking roue, 40s
NANINE maid to Camille
MLLE. MARGUERITE GAUTIER (Camille) a beautiful
courtesan, 20s
MLLE. PRUDENCE DUVERNOY a milliner, friend to
Camille, flamboyant, middle-age
M. ARMAND DUVAL a handsome gentleman, early 20s
M. GEORGES DUVAL the Receiver General, father to
Armand, tall, distinguished, 50s
MLLE. BLANCHE DUVAL sister to Armand, 17

TIME: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, 1848.

PLACE:

Act I, Scene I and II: The home of Marguerite Gautier, Paris.
Act II, Scene I: A house in the country.
Act II, Scene II: The Club, a gaming establishment, Paris.
Act II, Scene III: The home of Marguerite Gautier, Paris.

ABOUT THE SETTING

There are no complete sets for this play. The playing area, surrounded by black drapes, occupies the center of the stage. Furniture of the period, including a piano, chaise, table, chairs, and other pieces are the scenery. Plants and ferns, but no flowers, abound. Set pieces to suggest doorways and windows may be used if theatre architecture and financial considerations allow.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *The actress playing NANINE, in costume, enters carrying a placard which she places on an easel DL just outside of the playing area. The placard reads: ACT I: SCENE I: A LATE AFTERNOON IN MAY, 1848: THE HOME OF MARGUERITE GAUTIER, PARIS: "THE SUPPER SCENE." She exits.*

The COUNT DE VARVILLE, stands alone C holding a bouquet of roses. He glances about the room and places the roses on a table UC and then strolls to the piano. Idly he plays a bar or two on the keyboard. NANINE enters from R. She stops and stares at VARVILLE.

NANINE. Sir?

VARVILLE (*turns to her*). Champagne.

NANINE. I beg your pardon, sir?

VARVILLE. Champagne. Bring me a glass of champagne.

NANINE. Yes sir. (*She exits R. VARVILLE plays a few bars more, then stops. He walks to a window U and looks out.*)

(NANINE enters carrying a glass of champagne on a silver tray. She crosses to VARVILLE.)

NANINE. Sir? (*He turns and without a word takes the glass of champagne. He takes a slow sip.*) Mademoiselle Gautier is not in.

VARVILLE. I am aware of that.

NANINE. Sir?

VARVILLE. What is your name?

NANINE. Nanine.

VARVILLE. Well, Nanine, don't let me disturb you. Go about your business.

NANINE. If it please you, sir. *(She walks back across the room. As she gets almost to the door VARVILLE stops her with his voice.)*

VARVILLE. Nanine. In the future I shall require chilled champagne.

NANINE. Yes sir.

VARVILLE. You will see to it, won't you?

NANINE. Yes sir.

VARVILLE. That will be all. *(She curtsies and exits R.)*

(After a long moment, MARGUERITE GAUTIER, called CAMILLE, enters from L. She is surprised to see VARVILLE.)

CAMILLE. Oh! Count de Varville, how pleasant to see you.

VARVILLE. Ah, Mademoiselle Gautier, the pleasure is indeed mine.

CAMILLE. Had I known you were here to greet me I would have rushed home sooner.

VARVILLE. There was really no need.

CAMILLE. No?

VARVILLE. I am a man of patience.

CAMILLE. Are you?

VARVILLE. My destiny is to wait for you.

CAMILLE. My dear Count, I sincerely hope your destiny has more exciting prospects than standing about waiting for me.

VARVILLE. None at the moment.

CAMILLE. I beg your pardon?

VARVILLE. My prospects, at the moment, could be no more delightful than waiting for you.

CAMILLE. Flatterer.

VARVILLE. No, romantic. And to prove my point may I present you with a small token of my esteem. *(He walks to the table, picks up the roses, and presents them to her.)*

CAMILLE. Roses. How lovely. *(She walks to a table and picks up a small summoning bell. She rings the bell and places it back on the table.)*

VARVILLE. Were you shopping or visiting friends?

CAMILLE. I was riding in my carriage.

VARVILLE. Shopping or visiting friends?

CAMILLE. Enjoying the healthful spring air, as, my dear Count, I am wont to do.

VARVILLE. Perhaps, some afternoon, we might ride together, in your carriage.

(NANINE enters from R.)

NANINE. Madame? *(CAMILLE hands the bouquet of roses to NANINE.)*

CAMILLE. Take these, and throw them out. No. On second thought you keep them. Put them in water, and put them in your room.

NANINE. Yes madame.

CAMILLE. Nanine, has the Count de Varville been waiting long?

NANINE. I don't know.

CAMILLE. You don't know?

NANINE. He was here...

CAMILLE (*interrupting her*). Thank you, Nanine, that will be all. (*NANINE exits R. To VARVILLE.*) How did you gain entrance to my house?

VARVILLE (*takes a key from his pocket and holds the key in the air*). You see this? It's called a key. And remarkably enough this key fits your door.

CAMILLE. The Count de Giray?

VARVILLE. The very same.

CAMILLE. The man is a despicable cad.

VARVILLE. Now, now, let's not be nasty, shall we? The Count de Giray was kind enough to give me this key since he had no further need for it, and I don't think we should besmirch his generosity by resorting to calling him a despicable cad.

CAMILLE. Give me the key, please.

VARVILLE. Haste is the enemy of logical and orderly thought, a quality we French are known to possess to a fault.

CAMILLE. The key, please.

VARVILLE. I can see why the good Count de Giray tired of your impetuosity.

CAMILLE. The key.

VARVILLE. That was rude, what you did with the roses.

CAMILLE. I can only abide camellias.

VARVILLE. It was still rude.

CAMILLE. Count, how sad, our interview has come to a conclusion. Thank you so much for calling on me. Thank you also for your gift of the roses. I have no doubt my maid will enjoy them as much as I would had they been camellias. And, oh yes, as you leave you might take the key given you by the Count de Giray, that despicable cad, and place it on the table there by the door.

VARVILLE. I don't think I'd want to do that.

CAMILLE. It will require little effort on your part.

VARVILLE. That's not what's at issue.

CAMILLE. What's at issue is the key will be useless to you since you will have no further need for it.

VARVILLE (*pauses for a moment and looks at CAMILLE with a certain wonder*). I'm amazed. I was told you were a woman of extraordinary extravagances and peculiarities, but I had no idea! All this fuss over a stupid key! (*A pause. VARVILLE takes a step or two before he speaks.*) Mademoiselle Gautier, I did not come here to haggle with you over a piece of hardware.

CAMILLE. Why did you come?

VARVILLE. I came on a matter of business (*Suddenly CAMILLE begins to cough, and she turns away.*) You're not ill, are you? (*She coughs again, violently.*) My goodness, we are ill, aren't we? What you need is fresh air and sunshine. (*CAMILLE rings the summoning bell on the table.*) Why don't you, in the afternoon, go for a ride in your carriage?

(*NANINE enters from R.*)

CAMILLE. A glass of water, please.

VARVILLE (*holds his champagne glass out to NANINE*). While you are at it, Nanine, more champagne would be appropriate. (*NANINE takes his glass and exits R.*) That cough has an ugly sound about it. Has anyone in your family had consumption?

CAMILLE. No.

VARVILLE. Lucky for you. Perhaps you should practice moderation.

CAMILLE. What do you mean?

VARVILLE. Excesses are a vice of the age. All that rich food, drinking far beyond one's capacity, attendance at the theatre every night, addiction to baccarat, *chemin de fer*, the gaming tables...There's a whole category of excesses which sadly enough have led young women much like yourself...astray.

(NANINE enters with a glass of water and a glass of champagne. She gives the water to CAMILLE and the champagne to VARVILLE.)

CAMILLE. Thank you. *(CAMILLE drinks the water. NANINE exits R.)* Count de Varville, you said you were here on a matter of business. What is it?

VARVILLE. Always the pragmatist, directly to the point... one of your more endearing qualities. *(A pause.)* In the last three nights you lost 15,000 francs at the gaming table.

CAMILLE. That is none of your affair.

VARVILLE. It could be. The imagination is staggered by the thought that one single, charming, young woman could incur a debt of that magnitude with but a turn of the cards.

CAMILLE. That is none of your affair.

VARVILLE. Shall I be the pragmatist, blunt and direct and to the point? Aside from the mystery of how someone could let themselves be put in a position of gambling away a fortune, how in heaven's name are you going to pay your debt?

CAMILLE. I'll find a way.

VARVILLE. Indeed, you will have to.

CAMILLE. I shall.

VARVILLE. It would take you ten years slaving yourself to the bone in a shop to accumulate half of what you owe.

CAMILLE. I am not concerned.

VARVILLE. I hear the sound of your creditors banging at your door.

CAMILLE. I'll pay them.

VARVILLE. How?

CAMILLE. I don't know at the moment, but I shall.

VARVILLE. Let's turn your creditors scurrying away, shall we?

CAMILLE. I don't think I like this.

VARVILLE. I don't think you have much choice.

CAMILLE. State your piece, Count.

VARVILLE. Very well! I want to put this delicately for I am, as you are well aware, your most humble and obedient servant. (*He pauses, takes a step or two to one side, and bows slightly.*) I shall graciously assume your obligations, the gambling debt, and all.

CAMILLE. How kind of you!

VARVILLE. The least I can do under the circumstances.

CAMILLE. You are the answer to a young maiden's prayer. What must my obligations be in return?

VARVILLE. I have need of a companion, a young, beautiful, effervescent creature, again delicately, who would minister to my needs.

CAMILLE. You flatter me.

VARVILLE. I'm glad you think so.

CAMILLE. These needs?

VARVILLE. The same you obliged to the despicable cad, the Count de Giray. (*A pause.*)

CAMILLE. Yours alone, a bird in a gilded cage?

VARVILLE. Yes.

CAMILLE. I'm not interested.

VARVILLE. The footsteps are growing louder, they're almost at your door.

CAMILLE. You're very amusing, my dear Count. When may we expect your debut on the stage at the Theatre Comique?

VARVILLE. The evening of the day your creditors haul you into court, my dear Mademoiselle.

CAMILLE. Please, I'm tired.

(NANINE enters from R.)

NANINE. Excuse me, madame.

CAMILLE. What is it?

NANINE. Mademoiselle Duvernoy and a gentleman to see you.

CAMILLE. Send them in. *(NANINE exits R.)*

VARVILLE. Shall I leave you to ponder your fate?

CAMILLE. Amuse me no more, please.

VARVILLE. No laughing matter. *(He walks to the door L.)*

CAMILLE. The key? *(He ignores her remark. At the door VARVILLE stops and turns back to address her.)*

VARVILLE. One thought.

CAMILLE. Yes?

VARVILLE. Remember, as a rule one generally comes to accept the inevitable. Adieu. *(He exits L. CAMILLE looks after him, then breaks into a fit of coughing.)*

(PRUDENCE DUVERNOY and ARMAND DUVAL enter, escorted by NANINE who stands discreetly to one side. PRUDENCE goes to CAMILLE and they embrace.)

PRUDENCE. My dear, you look ill! A tinge of color? Are you feverish?

CAMILLE. It's nothing.

PRUDENCE. I brought you some *raisins glacés*. *(PRUDENCE holds up a bag of sweets.)*

CAMILLE. How thoughtful of you.

PRUDENCE. Now don't say a word, not a single word. I know exactly what's the matter. You're not getting enough sleep. I can see it in your eyes. We must get you back to the peak of good health. A sallow pallor is unbecoming, especially to one of youthful age and demeanor.

CAMILLE. My dear Prudence, you are the soul of charity.

PRUDENCE. Well, I should know, shouldn't I? I was in bed for six months and didn't stir out of the house all that time. It was dreadful. I was lonely. Can you imagine? An absence of friends and my few lingering admirers. I wouldn't wish that condition on my worst enemy.

CAMILLE. Prudence, my dear, who is your companion?

PRUDENCE. My goodness gracious, I completely forgot! How dreadful of me! You'll have to forgive me, won't you? What a wretched creature I've turned out to be. Awful! I shouldn't be allowed in polite society.

CAMILLE. Prudence, your companion? (*ARMAND steps forward and bows slightly. PRUDENCE goes and sits on the chaise. She takes the raisins glacés and starts to eat them.*)

ARMAND. Permit me, mademoiselle, to present myself. I am Armand Duval, at your service.

CAMILLE. Armand Duval? Are you related to Monsieur Duval, the Receiver General?

ARMAND. He is my father. Have you met him?

CAMILLE. No, I regret to say I haven't. But I have met your mother. Some time ago when I first came to Paris I was introduced to your mother at a reception at the Baroness de Nersays. I remember she was a very beautiful and charming woman.

ARMAND. My mother died three years ago.

CAMILLE. Forgive me, I'm so sorry.

ARMAND. I am always glad to be reminded of my mother.

Her memory burns like a flame in my heart.

CAMILLE. You are a poet.

ARMAND. No. You are the poet in whose imagination my humble words strike a spark of recognition.

CAMILLE. Do you think so?

ARMAND. I think so. Gladly, I think so.

CAMILLE. And your name is Armand?

ARMAND. Yes, Armand.

CAMILLE. And you may call me Camille.

ARMAND. Camille?

CAMILLE. After the flower. They are my favorite.

ARMAND. Red or white?

CAMILLE. For twenty-five days of the month white, for the rest, red.

ARMAND. And why?

CAMILLE. They please me.

ARMAND. And so they should. The lady of the camellias. There aren't many of you bustling about Paris these days, are there?

CAMILLE. I would hope not.

ARMAND. The uniqueness of your fancy for camellias complements the singleness of your beauty.

CAMILLE. Thank you, you are too kind.

PRUDENCE (*on the chaise, comes to life*). She loves camellias, did she tell you that?

ARMAND. Just as you spoke.

PRUDENCE. Oh, really? How marvelous! It's a curiosity, don't you think?

ARMAND. No, it's a charming idiosyncrasy.

PRUDENCE. A charming what?

ARMAND. A delightful fancy.

CAMILLE. And why, Monsieur Duval, has your shadow graced my door?

ARMAND. I have been on an errand of mercy for my sister.

CAMILLE. One of Mademoiselle Duvernoy's hats?

ARMAND. Exactly. The love of my sister's life, a stuffy...I shouldn't speak ill of my future brother-in-law, love is blind you know...my future brother-in-law dreams of my sister as the pinnacle of fashion. She wants to oblige him, and with Mademoiselle Duvernoy's hats...what can one say?

PRUDENCE. One can say a great deal.

ARMAND. And so one shall. Fantastic. I came to Mademoiselle Duvernoy to get one of her fantastic hats for my sister so she might impress her stuffy young man, and so my shadow graced your door.

PRUDENCE. Actually, Camille, I found him in the gutter, and I took pity on him, gave him a decent meal, and set him about the correct path of life.

ARMAND. For which I am eternally grateful.

PRUDENCE. As well you should be. *(She crosses to CAMILLE, takes her by the arm, and leads her D.)* Excuse us for an instant, Armand, Camille and I have to talk, and it's none of your damned business.

ARMAND. I'll drift off, out of sight, shall I?

PRUDENCE. You do that. *(ARMAND walks over to the piano.)*

CAMILLE. What is it?

PRUDENCE. Last week, the baker, Monsieur Martin, he beats his wife, said I would receive no more credit. Of course I thumbed my nose at him, and I told him God had punished him enough, what with his big nose and cauliflower ears. Madame LeFebvre who does indeed have a heart of gold, tarnished as it may be now and then from

excesses, but gold nonetheless, came to me with a tale of woe the likes of which would melt the reserve of the most stubborn concierge. Madam LeFebvre's husband, Claude, ran off with a young girl of sixteen, leaving behind his lawfully-wedded wife and his six children, all girls and ugly as sin. Their faces would stop a clock, and no dowry in sight. Then, to add insult to injury, my cousin Marcelle, from Brittany, not too bright but hard working, decided to leave the farm and seek her fortune in Paris. She knocked at my door. She was wearing wooden shoes.

CAMILLE. You would like a loan?

PRUDENCE. Strange you should ask, but that was exactly what I was coming to.

CAMILLE. How much?

PRUDENCE. The hat for Monsieur Duval's sister is a bit of help admittedly, but what with my cousin Marcelle, from Brittany, not too bright but hard working, and Monsieur Martin who beats his wife...

CAMILLE. How much?

PRUDENCE. Five hundred francs.

CAMILLE. Five hundred francs?

PRUDENCE. Life is cruel.

CAMILLE. Indeed, it is.

ARMAND (*plunks at the piano*). This piano has a unique sound.

CAMILLE. Do you play?

ARMAND. On occasion.

CAMILLE (*turns to PRUDENCE*). The five hundred francs are yours. I could not deny you, my dear friend.

PRUDENCE. You have earned a place in heaven among the angels. (*CAMILLE crosses to her handbag which she had placed on an end table at the D end of the door. She takes*

the five hundred francs from her purse and gives them to PRUDENCE.)

CAMILLE. Heaven and the angels? Where in goodness name is the mercy of the angels here on earth?

PRUDENCE. Do I detect a note of melancholy?

CAMILLE. No.

PRUDENCE. You cannot hide from me, lady of the camellias. I hear gloom, and I won't have any of it. You are young and beautiful, and he is handsome and a rich young man. Need one say more? *(She steps to ARMAND at the piano.)* Play for us. Do you know, "Invitation a la Valse"?

ARMAND. No, I don't. But I do know this. *(He sits at the piano and plays a haunting melody that seems to capture both the spirit of melancholy with the promise of love.)*

CAMILLE. That is absolutely enchanting.

ARMAND. Do you like it?

CAMILLE. More than words can express.

ARMAND. It is my own composition.

CAMILLE. You have a rare talent that captures my heart.

ARMAND. It is your words that capture my heart.

CAMILLE. You are too kind.

PRUDENCE. Isn't it time for tea?

CAMILLE. It is time for supper and I hope you two will join me in a light repast.

PRUDENCE. I cannot speak for him but I certainly can speak for myself, and loudly too. I would proclaim to all of the wasters warming their bottoms on the chairs at the cafes on the *Champs-Elysees* that supper with Camille this evening would be in perfect order.

ARMAND. I echo her sentiments.

CAMILLE. 'Tis done. *(Rings the summoning bell.)* Play some more.

ARMAND. As you wish.

(*NANINE enters from R.*)

NANINE. Madame?

CAMILLE. Mademoiselle Duvernoy and Monsieur Duval will be dining with me this evening, and we are famished!

NANINE. Supper will be served momentarily.

CAMILLE. Thank you, Nanine. (*NANINE exits R. ARMAND plays the piano.*) Your music transforms me.

ARMAND. It is a trifle.

CAMILLE. What other talents have you? Do you paint?

ARMAND. Goodness, no. Nor write, although I would be tempted to put into verse my most favorable impressions of this charming gathering of three.

PRUDENCE. You wouldn't mention my age, would you?

ARMAND. Never!

CAMILLE. Do you live in Paris?

ARMAND. All the world would love to live in Paris.

CAMILLE. Do you?

ARMAND. Yes, I do.

CAMILLE. And do you love the life of the green table?

ARMAND. Do you mean, do I gamble?

CAMILLE. Yes. Do you gamble?

ARMAND. Only on sure things.

CAMILLE. Like?

ARMAND. Like the innocence of a young child, the sound of horses hooves in the *Bois de Boulogne*, the laughter at the *Palais Royale* when Molière is being played.

CAMILLE. Cards?

ARMAND. Yes, cards. And you?

CAMILLE. On occasion.

ARMAND. And are you lucky at cards?

CAMILLE. Not lucky enough.