

Impromptu

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Early 1800's. PLACE: France.

We hear a tumbling rush of piano MUSIC, brilliant, romantic:
Frederic Chopin's "Fantaisie-Impromptu in C Minor."

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - SEQUENCE OF SHOTS - DAY

A dark-haired little GIRL of eleven is running ecstatically
through the woods. A voice calling her grows more and more remote.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Aurore! Aurore!...

Deep in the forest, the girl flings herself to her knees before an
ancient tree trunk. In the crotch of two massive roots she has
arranged a little altar of moss and shells and pine cones. She
takes some colored stones from her apron pocket and contributes
them to the offerings on the altar. The piano MUSIC slows and
becomes tender, earnest.

AURORE

(prays fervently)

Hear me, oh, Corambe, Corambe...thou
who art man, woman, and God in one,
hear me...

She fumbles in her pocket again, and brings out a frightened little wren pulsing its wings in her cupped hands.

AUORE (cont'd)

I free this bird in thy name.

She lifts her face to a shaft of holy light filtering through the cathedral-like pine trees, and opens her hands. The bird flutters up and disappears into the light. Aurore's face is bathed in saintly attitude, her eyes filled with tears.

AUORE (cont'd)

Come to me, sublime being. I want to know the meaning of life and--and--I want to find perfect, perfect love.

She searches in her apron pocket once more, and raises her cupped hands into the light.

AUORE (cont'd)

I free this lizard in thy name--

(opens her hands)

Oh, balls.

She looks down. The tiny lizard in her hand has expired. We are TIGHT ON her bowed head, DISSOLVING TO:

INT. NOHANT ESTATE - DRAWING ROOM - TWENTY-THREE YEARS LATER -
DAWN

A woman's bowed head is resting on her arm: she has dozed off in the midst of writing at her desk. Aurore has become GEORGE SAND, 32, famed prolific novelist and free spirit of the Romantic Era in France. Extinguished cigarettes overflow the ashtray; the candle flame glows weakly in the pale dawn light. The windows are open, giving us a view of the lawn of this peaceful rustic estate. A rooster CROWS.

EXT. REAR COURTYARD - A LITTLE LATER - EARLY MORNING

The COOK drags a chicken out of the henhouse and beheads it on a stump.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER - MORNING

The cook is arranging the plucked chicken in a stewpot while URSULE the maid prepares a tray of coffee. MALLEFILLE enters. He is a bearded, attractively fierce-looking young Creole. Without a word he takes the coffee tray from the maid and exits. Ursule and the cook exchange a look of knowing contempt.

EXT. REAR COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS - MORNING

We overhear a scene between George's two children, her son MAURICE, 12, and daughter SOLANGE, 7.

Maurice comes upon Solange wrestling with a fishing pole between her knees. She wears boys' clothes. She is attempting to tie the bloody scarlet-combed chicken's head to the line on the pole, whether as a lure or as bait one couldn't guess.

MAURICE

Cretin. That won't work.

SOLANGE

No, no, fish are attracted to a bright color.

MAURICE

Your fish will die of fear first.

SOLANGE

Are you coming?

She slings the pole over her shoulder, picks up a basket, and walks toward the meadow. We TRACK with them as Maurice walks alongside.

MAURICE

Mallefille will come looking for us.
We're supposed to have our lessons this
morning.

SOLANGE

No, he won't. He's sleeping with Mummy
and she doesn't get up 'til noon.

MAURICE

He's not sleeping with Mummy. She
doesn't like him anymore.

SOLANGE

I never liked him.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - MORNING

Mallefille, balancing the coffee tray on one hand, KNOCKS at the
door to the drawing room.

MALLEFILLE

(calls softly)

My love...

(a beat; KNOCKS again)

My soul...

He TRIES the knob: it's locked.

DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - MORNING

Wrapped up in her dressing gown, George is asleep on a chaise. We PAN OVER to the writing table, where a pile of pages RUFFLES in the breeze from the windows.

EXT. STREET IN PARIS - ANOTHER DAY

It's a hot, stifling day in June. The Carriages CLATTER to and fro, and the dust of Paris' unpaved streets billows up. George crosses the street and heads for her publisher's office. Wearing a worker's smock and loose trousers, her hair cropped to shoulderlength, George looks like an ordinary laborer; PASSERSBY, gentlemen dandies and fashionable ladies, don't give her a second look.

INT. GROUND-FLOOR OFFICE - PUBLISHER - CONTINUOUS - DAY

George enters the office of the Revue des Deux Mondes, a thriving literary revue. CLERKS and EDITORS rush about, JOURNALISTS drape themselves over any available desk to scribble their reviews. An editor intercepts George, taking her for a printer's apprentice.

EDITOR

(angrily)

Hey! Are you from the printer? We've
been waiting--

She smiles calmly. Suddenly he recognizes her and realizes his
mistake.

EDITOR (cont'd)

(backs away)

Oh, Madame Sand, pardon, please...

As she moves through the office to the stairs, men glance up from
their work; we hear excited WHISPERS of "Madame
Sand...George...it's George Sand..." etc.

SECOND-FLOOR PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - SECONDS LATER

The publisher BULOZ, a thick-set middle-aged curmudgeon, is eating
lunch at his desk. Seated opposite is his visitor, ALFRED, a
handsome young poet/playwright, 26. A CLERK opens the door and
sticks his head into the office.

CLERK

Madame Sand is on her way up!

(exits)

With a look of alarm, the young man springs up from his chair. He crosses to the window, flings it open wide, and leaps up onto the sill, perilously poised to jump.

BULOZ

Don't do that.

ALFRED

(looks down)

It is rather far.

(gets off sill)

I'll have to face her, that's all. I'll be perfectly behaved...even a little scornful.

BULOZ

No, you won't, you'll be impossible. I won't have a scene. Get in here.

He opens a nearby closet door and pushes Alfred inside. He sits back at his desk and begins buttering a slice of bread.

George enters. Buloz nods familiarly to George, considering her with greed successfully masked as indifference.

BULOZ

Hullo, George. I wasn't expecting you
'til next month. How are the children?
How's the country?

He gestures for her to sit in the chair just vacated by the young man. She ignores the gesture, and tosses a pile of pages onto his desk.

GEORGE

(impatiently)

Fine, fine. I need three thousand
francs' advance.

Buloz brushes aside his lunch and starts scanning the manuscript.

BULOZ

I'll lend you five hundred.

GEORGE

For God's sake, you know my expenses.
There's the children, the estate, my
mother's in a nursing home, the divorce
fairly
picked my bones clean--

BULOZ

George, give me one more installment--

GEORGE

(exasperated)

How? I've got no place to work.

BULOZ

(peels a hardboiled egg)

What's wrong with the country?

GEORGE

Mallefille is there. The children do
need a tutor, but...

She has crossed to the open window, stares out moodily.

GEORGE (cont'd)

I can't bear his presence anymore. I
tell him outright I want him to
leave, and he just as plainly refuses.

GEORGE (cont'd)

(sighs)

I'm a coward, you know. I've never been
able to simply boot my lovers down the
stairs--

ALFRED'S VOICE (O. S.)

Ha!

George turns around in surprise. Buloz looks embarrassed, his mouth full of egg.

GEORGE

What?

Buloz COUGHS apologetically into his napkin; one foot steals out and discreetly TAPS the closet door as a warning.

BULOZ

Why can't you stay here in Paris and write?

GEORGE

Because Alfred is here! I've got to go somewhere, anywhere, I don't know, maybe I should just curl up and die. Listen, you rodent, give me three thousand francs now or I can't predict what I'll do.

BULOZ

(unmoved)

Let me read this and we'll talk tonight at the Baroness' party.

GEORGE

I hadn't planned to attend...Can you
promise me Alfred won't be there?

BULOZ

I know for a fact he won't!

EXT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER - DAY

George dons a man's cap and strides away.

INT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

BULOZ

She's gone.

The closet door opens. Alfred comes out of hiding. Buloz doesn't
look up; he has resumed reading George's pages.

BULOZ (cont'd)

(to himself)

Marvelous...marvelous!

ALFRED

What's that, her memoir? Am I in it?

BULOZ

No, this part's about her childhood. I expect you'll come in later, after she chews up her husband and about a hundred other fellows.

Alfred crosses to the window and watches George walk away down on the street; his brooding expression and pose is identical to George's earlier at the window. His proud face is pale and ravaged by dissolute living and hyperactive emotions.

ALFRED

It's true, she's a cannibal. She would drink the blood of her children from the skull of her lover and not feel so much as a stomachache--

BULOZ

(wearily)

Alfred, go home, put it into verse, I'll publish it, and then and only then will you get paid.

ALFRED

(fetches his hat)

Thanks to you, I can't go to the Baroness' party. In fact, I'll have to leave Paris.

BULOZ

No more advances!

ALFRED

(haughtily)

I don't need your money, old sow. I've had an invitation to the country. From a duchess, no less.

ALFRED (cont'd)

Good day.

(exits)

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE FRANZ & MARIE'S APARTMENT - LATER - DAY

George KNOCKS on the street door of an apartment building. As we PAN UP the building's facade, we hear wild bombastic PIANO music coming from an open second-story window. A white-gloved hand reaches out and closes the window.

INT. FRANZ & MARIE'S APARTMENT - MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The owner of the white gloves, a MAN whose face is backlit and therefore not clearly seen, resumes his chair in the shadows of the room's corner. He coughs apologetically into an immaculately

white handkerchief, and speaks in a slight Slavic accent to his host, FRANZ, who is seated at a piano.

MAN

The summer dust is ruinous to my lungs.
I hope the air will be better in
Angers.

Franz, 26, is the very picture of a Romantic: pallid, slim, dressed completely in black, with long hair to his shoulders and visionary fire in his eyes.

FRANZ

Has the Duchess d'Antan invited you,
too? How delightful.

MAN

(coughing subsides)

Now, then, please continue, dear
fellow.

Franz attacks the keyboard once again with dazzling technique, shaking the walls with fortissimo MUSIC.

DELETED

PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

PIANO continues O. S. George enters. The Countess MARIE d'Agoult, 27, beautiful, blonde, statuesque, is asleep on a divan. Her dress is open to the waist and one breast hangs free, its nipple inches away from the mouth of an infant, also asleep, in the crook of her arm. She awakes with a CRY.

GEORGE

Good day, Countess.

MARIE

George!

GEORGE

I've frightened you.

MARIE

I had the most fearful dream...

She moves the baby onto the upholstery beside her.

MARIE (cont'd)

Blandine was a terrible creature with
fly's wings who was draining my life
from me...phew!

She fastens her breast back inside her dress. George lights a cigar and bends over the infant.

GEORGE

They are deadly little charmers. I wanted so badly to die when I was giving birth to my son. The pain! But then I saw him--this pure new soul, so full of trust and hope. I sat straight up and ordered coffee!

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Franz is excitedly demonstrating a new keyboard effect to his guest.

FRANZ

--and while the left hand plays all the black keys, I use the nail of the second finger on my right hand to run up the whites--chromatic glissando! It's an absolutely new technique! Listen--a butterfly...

(plays delicate treble effect)

Or...the wrath of God!

With a diabolical grin he throws his whole weight onto his hands and shakes the walls with raucous PIANO chords and runs.

PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

George and Marie jump in their chairs, jolted by the CRASH of music O. S. The baby stirs. The MUSIC FINISHES.

MARIE

He wakes the baby, and then he
complains the crying makes him crazy.

GEORGE

(amused)

How is Franz?

MARIE

He's a saint, he is sublime.

GEORGE

He'll even stay that way, if you don't
marry him.

The PIANO begins again O. S., but with a completely different kind of music: gentle, enchanting, like healing waters.

MARIE

There's no danger of that. The Count
won't divorce me.

GEORGE

(exhaling smoke)

It's funny. I thought I'd die of
suffocation when I was married. And
now...it's my freedom that's killing
me.

MARIE

What is the matter with you? Every
other word you utter is death, death,
death.

George is barely listening. She has become aware of the MUSIC O.
S. Her cigar smoke drifts over the baby, who COUGHS and WHIMPERS.
Marie gathers her up. The MUSIC BREAKS OFF. George is
disappointed.

MARIE (cont'd)

Now tell me, have you been invited to
Angers next week? No? The Duke and
Duchess d'Antan have asked us to their
estate for a fortnight--

The child starts to WAIL in Marie's arms.

MARIE (cont'd)

(calls)

Sophie!...Where is that wretch?

Please excuse me.

She gathers up the baby and exits quickly. George waits, glancing at the closed door to the music room. Then she rises and moves to the door; KNOCKS timidly.

GEORGE

Franz?

No answer. She slowly opens the door.

DELETED

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The men have left. George crosses to the window and looks down into the street.

STREET - GEORGE'S POV - CONTINUOUS

Franz is saying goodbye to his guest, who has just stepped from view into a waiting carriage. The white-gloved hand closes the carriage door and the vehicle departs.

INT. EUGENE'S STUDIO - LATER - DAY

George watches, smoking, as her friend EUGENE paints. In his late thirties, he is dark and taciturn.

GEORGE

You're not going to Angers, too! Oh, Eugene. A whole fortnight among some tiresome old aristocrats?

EUGENE

A fortnight of free food, exquisite scenery, and no bills.

GEORGE

Hmm.

EUGENE

And all you have to be is brilliant at dinner.

ANGLE ON CANVAS - CONTINUOUS

The painting Eugene is completing shows a woman half-fleeing and half-swooning in the jaws of a ferocious tiger, whose fangs have caught her by the waist.

GEORGE (O. S.)

She doesn't seem bothered she's being
eaten alive.

EUGENE (O. S.)

No.

RESUME ON GEORGE AND EUGENE - CONTINUOUS

GEORGE

I think she'd say: better to feel
something than nothing.

EUGENE

Even if it's teeth.

The two friends CHUCKLE grimly.

INT. MANSION - HALL - LATER - THAT NIGHT

SERVANTS are setting up refreshments on a table in this reception hall. Beyond the closed doors to the adjacent salon, someone is playing a majestic funeral march on the PIANO. The piece finishes; MUFFLED APPLAUSE of gloved hands. The BARONESS LAGINSKY (in her fifties) slips out of the salon and rushes toward the servants to give them instructions, then spots George arriving late.

BARONESS

(with a theatrical GASP)

Madame Sand!

The PIANO player commences another piece O.S. George pauses to greet her hostess. She is wearing turkish pants and pointed slippers, a tunic and a turban, and a stiletto dagger in a sheath at her belt. The Baroness clasps George's hand fervently.

BARONESS (cont'd)

You do great honor to my humble salon.

GEORGE

(aloofly)

Delighted to meet you, Baroness. I'm looking for my publisher, Monsieur Buloz.

BARONESS

(walking George to closed doors)

He's in the ballroom with the others. I'm afraid you'll have to wait to go

in....I've always wanted to meet you. I
knew your father when I was young.

GEORGE

Really?

BARONESS

We girls were enraged, you know, when
we heard he got married to that--
dancer, whatever she was.

GEORGE

You mean my mother.

George is already tuning out the Baroness and listening to the
PIANO music playing within the salon.

BARONESS

Oh! Of course. Is she still living?

GEORGE

Yes, but she's quite ill now.

BARONESS

Tsk! How sad. And what a tragedy your
father died so young. The Count de
Saxe! So dashing--

At the sound of a WHOOSH behind them, the Baroness turns and sees blue flames shooting up from the punch bowl.

BARONESS (cont'd)

Oh! Those idiots. Excuse me...

(calls to servants)

Not yet!

She bustles over to the refreshment table to upbraid the servants. Left alone, George leans against the closed door to the salon. She becomes aware that the MUSIC within is the same piece she heard at Marie d'Agoult's apartment. We MOVE TOWARD her face as it grows and overwhelms her. It is both erotic and pure, passionate and precise, powerful and wounded....

George, in a trance, presses her ear, her cheek, her body, against the door, as if somehow to merge with the notes--when the Baroness pounces on her again.

BARONESS (cont'd)

(in breathless whisper)

Now, Madame Sand, is it true you're writing a memoir?

George stares at her as if she's an hallucination.

GEORGE

Do you pray, Baroness?

BARONESS

(surprised; gamely)

I? Well, if you must know, I'm secretly devout.

GEORGE

Do you ever hear an answer?

BARONESS

To my prayers? Goodness, no.

George signals the Baroness to listen to the MUSIC.

GEORGE

There is the answer.

BARONESS

Ah, you mean Monsieur Chopin, how clever. He is sublime, isn't he? He only consented to play tonight because I told him my party was to benefit the Polish refugees. It is very rare to hear him play, you know. The Duchess d'Antan is having him for a whole fortnight at her house in

Angers. I could wish I were a fly on the wall, but there is already such a crowd of flies out there--I do find the provinces beastly.

The PIANO ends; gloved APPLAUSE again.

BARONESS (cont'd)

Monsieur Liszt will play next. And now with you here, one can say the air is positively choked with genius!

SALON - SECONDS LATER

George enters amid the HUBBUB of conversations. There are perhaps fifty GUESTS present, ranged around the sumptuous furniture, with the piano placed at the room's center. The aristocrats and the upwardly mobile bourgeois guests are bedecked in fashionable dress, while all the artists are, like George, wearing exotic and weird costumes to proclaim their superior spirituality.

The Countess Marie signals George to join her on a couch in the artists' camp.

MARIE

You want to sit over here, my dear. All the respectable people are on the other side.

GEORGE

(sits)

Can you point out Monsieur Chopin to me?

MARIE

But he left. Don't you know him? He's as frail as a holy wafer.

We CUT TO SHOTS of various aristocratic women on the opposite side of the room. They whisper and glare at Marie.

MARIE (O. S.; cont'd)

Look at those hypocrites.
They've been shunning me all evening.
Well, I'm thrilled not to be one of them anymore, their lives are so boring.

We PAN OVER to FRANZ, who enters and sits at the piano, to ardent APPLAUSE.

MARIE (O. S. cont'd)

See? Every single one is throbbing for
him.

We RESUME on the high-born ladies opposite. At the sight of Franz,
their eyes fill with infatuation, their lips part moistly, they
press their fans to their heaving bosoms.

MARIE (O. S.; cont'd)

They know perfectly well why I ran off
with him.

We RESUME on Marie and George.

GEORGE

(enigmatically)

For his teeth.

Franz lifts his hands to the keyboard and CRASH! he brings them
down again with all his force on the opening chords.

EXT. CHATEAU - GROUNDS - SEQUENCE OF SHOTS - DAY

We hear the CRACK of a gunshot, and its rocketing ECHO in the air.
The DUCHESS Claudette D'Antan, holding an opened letter, runs
excitedly down a lawn, past SERVANTS tending the grounds...past a

small mirror lake whose edges are lined with swans...under a grape arbor to:

FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Her husband the DUKE Charles d'Antan, standing in an open field with a game bag on his shoulder, SHOOTS again and lowers his rifle. His hunting dog takes off across the field in search of the bird the Duke just felled. The Duchess arrives, panting. She is around 30, petite, spirited, desperate for thrills, and woefully pretentious. Her husband, by contrast, is some thirty years older, stolid, self-satisfied, and suspicious of anything unrelated to hunting.

DUCHESS

(ebullient)

Darling! Charles! I've just had the most extraordinary letter. Madame George Sand is quite brazenly inviting herself to the fortnight.

The Duke, uninterested, trains his eye on the adjacent field.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

You know the one, she wears men's clothes and leads the most depraved

life imaginable. I'm dying to meet her.
Charles?...

He GRUNTS, still not listening.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

(teasing)

She writes that marriage is barbaric,
darling. They say no marriage is safe
around her. Just think, she may take a
fancy to your turkey wattles--

She tweaks the loose skin under his chin, then follows his eyes to
the adjacent field.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

(horrified; calls)

Didier!

ADJACENT FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The hunting dog is running toward the spot where the partridge
fell. An eight-year-old boy, the Duke and Duchess' son DIDIER, is
already there, bending down to inspect the kill. He has obviously
been dressed by his mother, in effeminately tailored frockcoat and
breeches.

DUCHESS (O. S.; cont'd)

Don't touch that! Come here!

The boy straightens up obediently. The dog snaps up the partridge and races back to:

RESUME ON DUKE AND DUCHESS - CONTINUOUS

DUCHESS (cont'd)

(chatters on)

...But I'm in a bit of a quandary. I invited Alfred de Musset already, and everyone knows he and Madame Sand had an affair where they practically tore each other to pieces, and now I'm petrified if those two so much as clap eyes on each other there will be--

Suddenly she looks down and SHRIEKS. The dog has laid the bird at her feet, streaking the hem of her gown with blood.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Two carriages proceed along the road to Bordeaux. In the second, George's daughter Solange leans out the window, trying to see if she can jam the spokes of the carriage wheel with a parasol. She is dressed in boys' clothes. George's maid Ursule pulls her back

inside. The other passengers are George's son Maurice, and Marie's baby in the arms of her maid Sophie. PAN FORWARD to the first carriage, and George's face in the window.

INT. FIRST CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

George and the painter Eugene sit across from Marie and Franz. They are all in high spirits except George, who turns her melancholy gaze out the window.

FRANZ

(teasingly)

Tell us, George, by what method did you manage to leave the children's tutor behind?

MARIE

She sent him to Bourges on an errand. When he comes back--pouf! nobody home.

EUGENE

That's not courageous, George. You're not the man I thought you were.

George shrugs and smiles wanly; she changes the subject.

GEORGE

Has anyone ever met this duchess?

They all look at each other, shaking their heads no, then burst out LAUGHING.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Then why are we invited?

FRANZ

She must be one of those titled tarts who's stuck in the provinces with an uncouth husband--she's probably famished for culture and determined to import it at any cost. Marie was one of those, once. Weren't you, my own?

Marie tenses up, embarrassed.

GEORGE

(kindly)

By now you must be used to Hungarian humor.

MARIE

I 'm not.

EXT. CHATEAU - TERRACE - SAME DAY

Offscreen we can hear the hectic sound of three PIANOS being tuned. In the excitement of last-minute preparations, the Duchess rushes about with her son Didier in tow.

DUCHESS

Oh, Didier. Just think of the music we shall hear on our poor little pianos! Go put on your pink waistcoat, darling.

(calls to GARDENER working in flower beds)

Gustave, attach little bags of seed to the branches. I want thousands of birds singing from every tree when they come up the avenue.

A GUNSHOT O. S. dispatches one of said birds.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

(furious)

Oh, that man!

STABLES - MINUTES LATER

The Duchess runs up, to find her husband slinging his rifle over his shoulder and making ready to mount his horse. Nearby a hunting party of SERVANTS with dogs and horses are waiting.

DUCHESS

Charles, you mustn't scare the birds
today--where are you going?

His STEWARD helps the Duke up into the saddle.

DUKE

Hunting. Goodbye, Claudette. I'll be
back in a few days.

DUCHESS

You can't! Our guests are arriving this
afternoon.

DUKE

Precisely.

DUCHESS

You blockhead--don't you realize these
are the great geniuses of
our time, all gathered together in our
home--

DUKE

They're a gang of parasites, my dear,
and after a few days of

DUKE (cont'd)

their company I expect you'll come to
your senses.

(signals to steward, who mounts
horse)

DUCHESS

(stamps her foot)

You'll humiliate me if you don't
receive them! Charles!

(as he rides away with hunting
party; calls)

You don't want me to be a success!

DELETE

EXT. CHATEAU ENTRANCE - LATER - DAY

George and the other guests descend from their carriages. The
Duchess comes down the steps from the house with her arms
outstretched dramatically.

DUCHESS

Welcome, welcome!

She is followed by a SERVANT carrying some crowns woven out of laurel leaves. The Duchess insists on placing a crown on each of the guests' heads, to the embarrassment of all.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

In my house, you are the nobility. The nobility of genius!

(crosses to George with her children)

Madame Sand, I'm melting with delight. And you've brought your two boys!

SOLANGE

I'm a girl.

INT. CHATEAU - SEQUENCE OF SHOTS

Duchess escorts her guests around, opening doors and displaying rooms.

DUCHESS

(showing a study)

And here, Madame Sand, is your work room. If you open the doors to the terrace, perhaps our southern moonlight will inspire

DUCHESS (cont'd)

you to write those sublime novels which
I so admire...

She gestures for a BUTLER to open another door.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

And here, master--

(bows her head ceremoniously to
Eugene)

--I have given you my own studio. The
light, you can see, is perfection.

EUGENE

Do you paint, Duchess?

DUCHESS

Call me Claudette...

(demurely)

Yes, I paint little atrocities which I
would only show you if you threatened
my life.

She leads them around a corner, out of sight. The butler turns and
looks back mistrustfully at Maurice and Solange, then follows the
others.

SOLANGE

Filthy aristocrats.

The two children darkly examine the elegant furnishings. Solange tips a porcelain statuette onto the floor. Maurice KICKS in the leg on a delicate Louis XV side table.

MAURICE

Tyrants.

Suddenly they turn and see, standing in a doorway, the little duke Didier in his pink satin waistcoat. They glare at him. He grows pale and flees. Maurice and Solange give chase.

ANOTHER PART OF CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Franz, Marie, George and Eugene follow the Duchess as she continues her tour of the chateau.

GEORGE

When is Monsieur Chopin arriving?

DUCHESS

The day after tomorrow, or so he wrote
me.

The duchess opens another door, revealing a room with a small
stage constructed at one end.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

And here is our theater. Sometimes we
indulge ourselves with little amateur
productions.

(escorting them to the stairs)

Perhaps you, Madame Sand, will honor us
with a playlet...?

GEORGE

I'm not really a playwright.

DUCHESS

(mischievously)

Too bad. Perhaps one will appear.

(mounting stairs)

Now then, Monsieur Liszt, both you and
Monsieur Chopin have pianos in your
chambers upstairs, but I most abjectly
beg you to consider giving us a recital
on the grand piano in the salon,
perhaps even tonight?....

EXT. CHATEAU - NIGHT

The lights in the salon are ablaze; we hear Franz playing on the PIANO, and dogs BAYING in the distance. We PAN ALONG the terraced ground-floor to another window and the subtler glow of candlelight, where we see George working on a manuscript.

DELETED

INT. CHATEAU - STUDY - LATER - MORNING

Still seated at the desk, George has fallen asleep on her manuscript. Franz bursts through the French doors from the terrace and shakes her shoulder.

FRANZ

Up! Up! Quick! We've got food for a picnic, and a donkey. Come, we've got to be off before the dreaded Duchess finds us.

RECEPTION & CORRIDOR - A LITTLE LATER

Duchess escorts a black-frosted PRIEST into the corridor.

DUCHESS

I'm charmed by your little surprise
visit, Abbe, and of course you will
want to meet my distinguished guests...

She KNOCKS on the door to George's study.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

Madame Sand?

She opens the door and peeks inside.

DELETED

DUCHESS (cont'd)

She's not here.

(proceeds down corridor)

I hope you don't expect to convince
them to attend services in the village.
These artists are a bit sour on the
church, you know.

She pauses before the closed door to the salon. Some CRASHING
CHORDS are heard on the piano within.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

Ah! That must be Monsieur Liszt
playing.

She opens the door to the salon. There is no one inside except Solange and Maurice, who are BEATING Didier's head against the keyboard, producing the dissonant chords the Duchess had heard in the corridor.

EXT. BORDEAUX COUNTRYSIDE - MEANWHILE - DAY

In a SEQUENCE OF SHOTS we see Franz, Eugene, and George hiking through the countryside, revelling in their freedom. Marie rides, Madonna-like, on a donkey, followed by her maid Sophie carrying the ersatz holy infant Blandine. The weather and surroundings are magnificent.

HILLSIDE AT EDGE OF WOODS - LATER

All are seated on the grass around a blanket on which the remains of a picnic are strewn. Franz, Eugene, and George

pass a hookah pipe among them, and Marie nurses the baby a little distance away.

George gets up abruptly and retreats to the background, climbing up some rocks to view the panorama of farmlands below.

FRANZ

(obviously stoned)

What is wrong with our Georgie?

MARIE

She is incurably disgusted.

FRANZ

With what?

MARIE

Love, I suppose.

FRANZ

She should only have what we have.

Marie shoots him a sharp look, gets up and goes to give Sohpie the baby. The two men lie back on the blanket.

FRANZ

(sighs)

Only God deserves love.

(closes his eyes)

I adore this silence.

The baby CRIES O. S. Franz winces. Eugene looks for George: she has disappeared.

EUGENE

George has gone off, it seems. Shall we go look for her?

FRANZ

Can you walk?

EUGENE

Not presently.

FRANZ

I need this rest. My tour next month is twenty cities.

EUGENE

Really? Where are you going?

FRANZ

Vienna, Geneva--

He stops, opens his eyes. A shadow has fallen over his face. Marie has returned from the background and is standing over him.

MARIE

You are going on a tour?

FRANZ

Darling, did I forget to tell you?

MARIE

But--what of your writing, your work--
what of me? Am I going with you?

Franz hesitates; his expression says no.

FRANZ

Let's talk about it later.

She marches away in a tearful rage, beckoning to Sophie.

MARIE

Sophie! We're going back.

Franz turns over on the blanket with a GROAN.

WOODS - LATER

George is walking through the woods. Then she freezes, hearing another sound suddenly, somewhere in an unseen part of the woods nearby: horses CRASHING through the underbrush, their hooves POUNDING on the pine-needle floor of the forest, men SHOUTING, dogs BARKING.

The sounds gradually FADE and the hunters are gone. George continues walking. Then she hears a HUNTING HORN blowing--not loudly, but a weak, strangled sound like an big animal whimpering. She proceeds toward the sound, then hears a prolonged GROAN, clearly from a horse. She comes to a clearing and sees:

CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

The Duke d'Antan is standing before his fallen horse. The poor animal has broken its leg and is writhing in agony. The Duke, stunned and weeping, tries to blow his horn again to

summon help, but his emotion has overcome his strength. He looks up helplessly as George approaches him.

Wordlessly she picks up his rifle from the ground and lifts it to her shoulder. She glances at him for permission. He nods through his SOBS. George SHOTS the horse in the head. It goes limp, released from pain. The sound of the shot appears to bring the Duke partially to his senses. He stops crying, but remains dazed. GEORGE pats his shoulder in naturally masculine fashion.

DUKE

Thank you, young man.

GEORGE

What a magnificent beast. He must have
been a great hunter.

(Duke nods)

Shall I--?

(indicating horn)

DUKE

They're too far away by now. I can walk
back to the stables and bring help.

TRACKING WITH GEORGE AND DUKE - CONTINUOUS

as they proceed out of the woods into a field.

GEORGE

May I join you? I was just taking some
exercise.

DUKE

I'd be grateful. I would invite you to
my home for a drink, but I've got a
house full of fops. Guests of my
wife's. I won't let her move to Paris,
so she's trying to bring Paris here.
Ah, well, it's her money. And I love
her for it! Ha, ha!...Where are you
from, lad? Staying at the inn?...

CLEARING - LATER

EUGENE AND FRANZ (O. S.)

George!...George!...

The two men burst into the clearing and see the dead horse.
Fascinated, Eugene whips out his sketchpad.

EXT. CHATEAU TERRACE - LATER - DAY

The Duchess Claudette and the Countess Marie are taking afternoon tea together on the terrace. The Duchess spies a carriage making its way down the avenue to the chateau.

DUCHESS

That is either Monsieur Chopin or
Monsieur de Musset.

MARIE

You haven't invited Alfred!

DUCHESS

I'm afraid so, Countess. Do you think
it will be a disaster?

(Marie goes into cruel gales of
LAUGHTER)

Why do you laugh?

They watch the carriage stop in the cul-de-sac at the foot of the chateau. A single male passenger gets out and starts toward the steps. The carriage turns and leaves.

MARIE

This will be Judgement Day for George.
Well, she should pay for her sins like
any other fallen woman. She can't avoid
everything by being a man.

(suddenly rises, surprised)

But...it's not Alfred at all. Oh, this
gets better and better.

DUCHESS

(stands)

Who is he?

MARIE

Felicien Mallefille. He is the
children's tutor.

DUCHESS

At last, somebody to discipline those two savages. I wonder where shall I put him, though.

MARIE

(a wicked gleam in her eye)

In George's room, of course. That's what he's accustomed to.

DUCHESS

(gleefully scandalized)

No!...He is a handsome brute. How does she merit all these men?

MARIE

Oh, dear, he looks angry. I don't think he appreciated being left behind at Nohant.

DELETED

EXT. STABLES - A LITTLE LATER - DAY

As George and the Duke come abreast of the stables, the Duke signals a STABLEBOY to bring up some fresh horses.

DUKE

I'll give you a horse to ride back to
the inn.

GEORGE

I think it's time I confessed something
to you--

DUKE

Drat! We've been seen.

George's follows the Duke's eyes over to:

GEORGE'S POV

The Duchess and Marie are on their way over to the stables, having spotted George and the Duke. Ahead of them strides Mallefille, glaring stormily at George.

RESUME ON GEORGE

GEORGE

Shit.

Without further ado, George vaults onto the back of a horse the stableboy has just brought out.

DUKE

Not that one, Monsieur! He's a devil--

She LAUGHS, grabs the reins and takes off on the animal, jumping fences and heading back across the field into the woods.

DUKE (cont'd)

(admiringly)

By God, what a fine seat that fellow
George has!

DUCHESS

(arrives; triumphantly)

Madame George Sand, dear. The
authoress.

(he is stupefied)

I wonder if we can expect her back in
time for dinner. Come along, Charles,
and present yourself to our guests.

Trapped, he lets himself be led away. He glances back toward the field and the dwindling figure of George fleeing on horseback.

ANGLE ON MALLEFILLE

watching the same, clenching and unclenching his fists, as
lovelorn as he is furious.

EXT. ROAD - A LITTLE LATER - DAY

Yet another carriage travels the route to the chateau. George gallops her horse across the road in front of the vehicle. Horse and rider vanish into the woods along the path.

ANGLE ON CARRIAGE WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

We hear the passenger inside COUGH, from the dust raised by George's horse. An immaculately white gloved hand closes the window.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - LATER - DAY

In a SEQUENCE OF SHOTS we see George racing her horse headlong through woods and fields, LAUGHING wildly.

STREAM - LATER - TWILIGHT

George heads her horse straight for a stream, urging him to jump-- but he balks and stops short. She is flung over his neck and with a WHUMP! hits the ground. The force of her fall knocks the wind out of her, and she lies momentarily unconscious, her legs sprawled in the gushing water. The horse canters away for home, as darkness falls.

EXT. REAR OF CHATEAU - LATER - NIGHT

By the time George staggers in from the fields, it is nearly midnight. The dogs in the kennel BARK as she passes. She goes in the servant's entrance so as to avoid meeting anyone.

INT. GEORGE'S BEDROOM - A LITTLE LATER - NIGHT

Bedraggled, mauled, and exhausted, George gratefully flings herself on her bed. Suddenly a voice is heard from a chair in the corner.

MALLEFILLE

Are you ready now to face me?

Recognizing the voice right away without looking, George sits up defensively. Mallefille rises and advances threateningly.

GEORGE

(exasperated)

Oh, God, Mallefille, not now.

MALLEFILLE

Yes, now.

(seizes her roughly)

No kisses? Where's my greeting?

GEORGE

(shakes him off)

Didn't you get the letter I left?

MALLEFILLE

Your message was clear indeed--between
the lines. You have attacked my honor.
I will defend my position.

GEORGE

Oh, balls. You're not in the army
anymore. You have had an affair, not a
pitched battle.

She takes his face tenderly between her hands and speaks
soothingly, as if to a child.

GEORGE (cont'd)

My poor boy, it won't hurt for long.

MALLEFILLE

(melting; petulant)

George, you promised to love me.

GEORGE

(wearily)

I didn't promise to succeed.

His fury aroused again, he breaks away.

MALLEFILLE

Whom have you come here to meet?

She sinks back on the bed and extends her boot to him.

GEORGE

No one. Help me off with my boots.

MALLEFILLE

You'd better get to work on his
epitaph, because I'm going to kill him!

GEORGE

Your rival is imaginary. If you won't
help me, then go find somewhere to
sleep and leave me alone.

MALLEFILLE

Make that two epitaphs! Because I'll
kill you, too, if I find--oh!

He sinks to his knees in front of her, seeing a bloody scrape
through her torn trousers on her leg.

MALLEFILLE (cont'd)

My love, you're hurt. You're bleeding!

GEORGE

Yes, be a dear and go ask Ursule to
bring me something for a bandage.

MALLEFILLE

(rising)

Of course. Don't move.

He crosses to the door, opens it, then thinks twice: he removes
the key from the inside lock. He goes into the corridor and LOCKS
the door behind him from the outside.

George leaps to her feet and seizes the door knob, RATTLES it
without success. She KICKS the door.

GEORGE

Bastard!

She looks around. There is only one other exit: the balcony.

EXT. BALCONY - SECONDS LATER

George peers quickly around her. Below is the terrace, and to
either side are balconies attached to the other guests' rooms. She
climbs up on the parapet, and feels along the wall between her
balcony and the next. Her hand finds a fragile ivy vine to grip;

her toe finds a groove in the masonry. She inches along the wall toward the second balcony. The vine tears loose, and she twists as she falls backwards, diving toward the other balcony.

EXT. SECOND BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

George lands with a soft THUMP inside the balcony and pitches forward on her face. She lifts her head. Inches from her nose is the base of the door, open a crack, to the apartment inside, and through the crack comes the purling sounds of Frederic Chopin's PIANO.

INT. CHOPIN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Polish composer, wearing a silk dressing gown, and a scarf around his neck, is seated at a piano in his chamber. He is 26; his long hair is tousled; his elegant, finely boned profile is haloed by candlelight; his head is bent back and he stares at the ceiling as he plays. The MUSIC speaks of deep, intimate pain longing for release.

We see the French door to the balcony behind him is slightly ajar. Now it slowly opens wider.

A sudden DRAUGHT from the wide-open door causes him to COUGH; then the breeze blows out his candle. He stops playing.

CHOPIN

(in darkness)

Oh, bother.

We dimly see him go SHUT the door. He relights his candle, sits, and resumes PLAYING.

INT. GEORGE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mallefille's KEY turns in the lock outside; he OPENS the door and enters. He finds the room empty. He strides out on the balcony and looks around frantically. Seeing nothing, he re-enters the bedroom and begins to CRY in frustration. He flings a porcelain pitcher at the wall.

INT. CHOPIN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The CRASH of the pitcher against the wall next door breaks Chopin's trance and he stops playing.

GEORGE (O. S.)

Ah, don't stop.

Chopin jumps up, petrified by the sound of a voice out of nowhere. George slides out from underneath the piano. Unmindful of her

strange position and her ragged, unkempt appearance, she grins charmingly.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Monsieur Chopin, you were in the middle of a miracle, and I am not quite yet cured. I beg you to continue.

Shocked, Chopin recoils, clutching his dressing gown to his throat.

CHOPIN

How did you get in? Who are you?

GEORGE

(rising)

I am your slave, and you have summoned me, with your music.

Now that she's on her feet, he can size her up: the cropped hair, grimy men's clothes, roguish smile.

CHOPIN

(regaining his composure)

I should say: what are you? Yet I think I know. I have heard you described. Madame Sand, rumor has it you are a

woman, and so I must ask you to leave
my private chambers.

GEORGE

(matching his genteel tone)

Do I offend your modesty? I apologize.
Only play me one more piece, and I'll
go.

CHOPIN

This is ridiculously improper, and
frightening as well. Please leave now.

Chopin goes firmly to the door and opens it. George moves
obediently to exit.

GEORGE

Still, I am content. I have seen you at
last. And I'm delighted to find...

(pauses to look, wonderingly,
at his face)

...you are not a man at all. You are an
angel. Hands...

With her fingertips, as if to touch a holy relic, she touches his
hands gripping his silk lapels.

GEORGE (cont'd)

...halo, wings, everything. Goodnight,
my dream.

She leaves. Chopin hurriedly CLOSES the door behind her, breathing a SIGH of relief. He catches sight of his agitated face in a mirror; he nervously adjusts his ruffled hair.

INT. SERVANTS' QUARTERS - URSULE'S BEDROOM - LATER - NIGHT

Ursule wakes up to find George seated on the edge of her bed and pulling her boots off.

URSULE

My poor lady, you are a wreck.

GEORGE

(happily)

I am a resurrected wreck.

George climbs, fully clothed, into bed with Ursule.

EXT. GLADE BEHIND CHATEAU - NEXT MORNING

It is mid-morning; the birds SING gamely in the burgeoning heat. In this peaceful wooded glade, we discover the little duke Didier

tied to a tree. He struggles, successfully loosening the vines which bind him.

ANOTHER PART OF GLADE - CONTINUOUS

Maurice and Solange are playing "Reign of Terror" nearby.

SOLANGE

Citizen Maurice, the prisoner is ready
for execution.

A frightened bullfrog's head peers out of her cupped hands.

MAURICE

(sternly; to frog)

Viscount de Swamp, you have been found
guilty of crimes against the people of
France.

We TRACK with the children marching through the glade, chanting.

SOLANGE AND MAURICE

To the guillotine! To the guillotine!

They hear a RUSTLE nearby, and spot Didier fleeing ahead of them.

MAURICE

The King has escaped!

Solange stuffs the frog into her apron and they set off in hot pursuit.

ANOTHER PART OF GLADE - MINUTES LATER

Solange and Maurice have caught Didier and are pinning him against a tree.

MAURICE

Tyrant! You will be brought to justice!

SOLANGE

(spits at Didier's feet)

Long live the Republic!

Suddenly a GUN goes off in the distance. Solange and Maurice look at each other fearfully.

SOLANGE

The King's guard! We're surrounded!

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS - DAY

More GUNSHOTS. The Duke and Mallefille are engaged in pistol practice, aiming at a target at twenty paces.

EXT. GLADE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The SHOTS continue O. S.

MAURICE

(grips Didier tighter)

We'll hold the King as hostage.

SOLANGE

(taking out frog)

We'll shoot the Viscount and throw them
his body and demand their surrender.

MAURICE

Do we have enough ammunition to hold
them off, Citizenness?

DIDIER

(caught up in excitement)

I can help you!

Solange and Maurice, surprised, regard him mistrustfully.

DIDIER (cont'd)

My Papa's got plenty of gunpowder. I'll
show you...I renounce my royal crown.
Citizens, I will join you in your
glorious struggle.

Solange and Maurice release him approvingly.

INT. STOREHOUSE - A LITTLE LATER - DAY

Didier folds his arms proudly as Maurice and Solange gaze in awe at the casks of gunpowder on the floor. The walls of this small room in the stables are covered with mounted rifles, pistols, muskets, powderhorns, etc.

INT. CHATEAU - STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The Duchess, a smock covering her morning gown, busily dabs paint on a small still-life on her easel. Her subject, a vase full of velvet flowers, sits on a stand nearby. Eugene enters.

DUCHESS

Good morning, master.

EUGENE

Good morning, Excellency.

DUCHESS

(corrects him)

Claudette!

EUGENE

Ah, velvet flowers.

Eugene touches the flowers, composing his face so as not to reveal how he feels about velvet flowers.

EUGENE (cont'd)

Did you make these, Claudette?

DUCHESS

I have a tiny talent and an enormous amount of time...Have you come to work?

I will leave you in peace.

(puts down brushes)

Eugene comes around to look at her work; she removes the painting from the easel and turns it to her chest so he can't see. He moves to snatch it from her; she dodges, GIGGLING. Then she holds the painting away in mock horror: it has left colorful smudges on her smock.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

Oh!

EUGENE

(examines painting on her
chest)

It's quite good.

With a nervous LAUGH she runs out the door. Eugene grins to himself, and returns to his easel. He removes the cloth from a study he is working on. It is a picture of a ravenous tiger devouring a dead horse....Offscreen, another pistol SHOT.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The Duke inspects the target with Mallefille.

DUKE

(impressed)

You're a fine shot, sir. I can see
you're not of those perfumed prancers
in there.

(shrugs toward house)

What do you say to a little hunting
this afternoon?

Mallefille casts a wary glance over at the gardens where George is walking with Marie.

MALLEFILLE

To be frank, I am standing guard on my mistress.

DUKE

That one? She doesn't need your protection, by God. A fascinating creature! I'm sure she'd rather hunt with us than sit around arranging her flounces like other women.

EXT. GARDENS - CONTINUOUS - DAY

George smokes nervously as she strolls with Marie who, under the shade of her parasol, reads aloud from a letter.

MARIE

"...I adore you. One warm word from you, and I live. One brutal word, and I die. It doesn't matter, for I am not afraid of death anymore. I have already visited the beyond, in your music."

GEORGE

Will you take it to him?

MARIE

Why don't you deliver it yourself?

GEORGE

I've been avoiding him all morning. He has had a poor first impression of me, I fear. Before we see each other again, I want him to be convinced of my complete sincerity.

(indicates letter)

What do you think? You know him. How will he respond?

MARIE

I can't imagine any man resisting this prose. It would melt the Alps. But why do you pounce on our poor Chopin? My dear, he's got one foot in the grave.

GEORGE

Oh, no. We shall all be in our graves soon enough--but Chopin is eternal.

Marie's eyes narrow. Considering George's statement, she looks up toward the chateau. PIANO MUSIC is drifting down the lawn from the salon. Inside, Franz and Chopin are playing Liszt's transcription of Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony.

MARIE

Hmph! The only permanent thing about him is his cough.

GEORGE

(sighs happily)

No, no, he's adorable. I am entirely doomed.

Mallefille and the Duke are approaching. With a nod to George, Marie quickly hides the letter in her bodice.

GEORGE (cont'd)

(whispers)

Thank you, my friend.

DUKE

Madame Sand! Will you delight us with your company on a hunt after lunch?

GEORGE

I must decline, Your Excellency. My
maid is fitting me for a dress this
afternoon.

George links her arm in Marie's and the two women walk off.

MALLEFILLE

A dress?!

Mallefille's suspicions flare; he glowers after her.

EXT. GLADE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Solange holds the bullfrog down on a tree stump while Maurice and
Didier painstakingly fasten a little sack of gunpowder with a fuse
to its neck.

The frog suddenly makes a leap for freedom. It scrambles away,
trailing the fuse behind it. The children chase it.

MAURICE

Catch the fuse!

Didier dives and grabs down the fuse, stopping the frog's flight.

DELETED

DELETED

DELETED

DELETED

INT. CHATEAU - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The last moments of the Beethoven symphony are being played out on the PIANO O. S. On a table, Marie expertly folds off George's signature at the bottom of the letter and tears it off the page. Then she signs "Marie," instead, to George's love confession.

SALON - CONTINUOUS

Chopin and Franz, sitting on the bench together, finish the piece with a LAUGHING flourish. Marie appears behind them.

MARIE

(to Franz)

Darling, George proposes a game of
croquet.

FRANZ

I wouldn't mind. Chopin, will you join
us?

CHOPIN

(glances through window; sees
George on lawn outside)

Please excuse me. I do not like the
sun.

As Franz turns his back to leave, Marie deftly slips the letter
into Chopin's vest pocket.

MARIE

(following his gaze out the
window to George)

Dear friend, I don't wish you to be
burned.

(exits with Franz)

EXT. LAWN - A LITTLE LATER - DAY

The croquet game is in progress. George WHACKS a ball with her
mallet.

GEORGE

(to Marie)

Is he reading it? Can you see?

Marie turns and looks up at the salon windows. Chopin is standing
there, the opened letter in his hand, looking at her.

MARIE

Yes.

STUDIO - A LITTLE LATER

Eugene looks up from his painting as Chopin enters.

CHOPIN

May I talk to you, my friend? I've
never felt so awkward in my life.

He hands Eugene the letter.

EXT. LAWN - CONTINUOUS - DAY

George removes to another part of the lawn, out of earshot.

FRANZ

(to Marie)

George seems more cheerful.

MARIE

She has a crush on Chopin.

FRANZ

The Polish corpse?

MARIE

They couldn't be more different.

FRANZ

Then they will definitely fall in love.
I suppose as friends we
should help them along.

MARIE

Absolutely not, Franz, you and I must
pose ourselves between them at every
opportunity. He is so

MARIE (cont'd)

frail, darling, you know George will
finish him off!

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - DAY

EUGENE

(reads letter)

So the Countess d'Agoult is making
advances to you.

CHOPIN

She is my friend's mistress! She has
borne his child!

EUGENE

I don't think he'd mind if she changed hands.

CHOPIN

Really, I don't understand the behavior of you people! Are we at a rummage sale? She is a woman, not a bolt of cloth.

EUGENE

Are you in love with her, perhaps?

CHOPIN

I don't even want to think about it.

EUGENE

(reads from letter)

"I am not full of virtues and noble qualities; I love, that is all. But I love strongly, exclusively, steadfastly."

CHOPIN

It's like something out of novels like that dreadful woman writes. If you can call her a woman.

EUGENE

George? Ah, there you're mistaken. She makes a great hash of her life, but she's got a rare good heart. That's why so many men don't want to let go of her. George knows how to love--while she loves, that is....

EUGENE (cont'd)

(glances at letter)

The Countess has an extraordinary style. I would not have guessed there was a volcano under all that ice.

DELETED

EXT. GLADE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Maurice, Solange, and Didier stand watching at a safe distance, as a loud orange **EXPLOSION!** in the grass sends dirt and entrails flying into the sky.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The Duke and Mallefille lower their guns and peer around in confusion as the **ECHO** from the explosion reverberates through the atmosphere.

EXT. GLADE - MINUTES LATER - DAY

The children regroup after searching the glade for remnants of frog.

DIDIER

(to Maurice)

We can't find anything, Citizen.

SOLANGE

The Viscount has been completely obliterated.

EXT. CHATEAU - LATER - NIGHT

Several carriages arrive at the base of the steps.

INT. CHATEAU RECEPTION - MINUTES LATER - NIGHT

The Duke greets several dinner guests from the neighborhood: a PRIEST (whom we saw briefly in an earlier scene), an old baron who fancies himself a PHILOSOPHER, a MARQUIS and MARQUESS and two or three more provincial ARISTOCRATS.

Suddenly all eyes glance up to the staircase behind the Duke. He turns to see his wife the Duchess making her entrance down the steps. She is wearing men's clothes a la George. Acknowledging the

guests' stares with a naughty smile, she strikes a pose with a riding crop.

DUKE

Good God, Claudette! Go back upstairs
and change!

Advancing to welcome the guests, she SMACKS his rump with her crop as she passes him.

DUCHESS

Pooh!

INT. CHATEAU - SALON - LATER - NIGHT

Everybody except George is present: the neighborhood guests, the Duke--glowering with embarrassment at the Duchess in her men's attire--Chopin, Eugene, Franz, Marie, Mallefille.

All heads turn when George enters. Her hair is styled with clusters of curls on either side of her face; she is wearing a splendid white gown with a scarlet sash.

DUCHESS

(greet's her)

At last, Madame Sand! Now we're all
here.

She leads George forward to meet the other guests. George's eyes
find Chopin, who stares helplessly back. He is struck by this
vision of George as the beautiful woman she really is.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

(aside, to George)

Everyone is staring at me. But it's a
revelation, wearing trousers! I feel
quite the bully!

(pulls her past Chopin)

Madame Sand, may I present some of our
friends and neighbors? Abbe Jaoul from
our local church, and Baron Vilcocq,
who has written several books on
philosophy...

ANGLE ON FRANZ AND MARIE - CONTINUOUS

FRANZ

George in a dress?!

MARIE

(sourly)

Red and white--the colors of the Polish flag. That's a bit of overkill.

ANOTHER ANGLE - CONTINUOUS

DUCHESS

(announces)

Dinner is served. Shall we go in?

(to Eugene)

May I take your arm? My husband is in a temper tonight. I'm wearing his breeches.

As the other guests arrange themselves in couples to enter the dining room, George and Chopin's eyes meet once again. She makes a move toward him, when suddenly Mallefille and Franz appear on either side of her. They wheel her around and march her off as if she is under house arrest. Marie slides into position at Chopin's side.

MARIE

Will you partner me? I am marooned.

He obliges stiffly.

TRACKING WITH FRANZ, GEORGE, AND MALLEFILLE - CONTINUOUS

George casts a look over her shoulder at Chopin with Marie.

FRANZ

(whispers)

Have a heart, George. He doesn't
deserve to be collected.

Before George can protest, Mallefille angrily gives Franz a PUSH.

MALLEFILLE

What's this? A secret?

(to George)

Is he the one you came here to meet?

GEORGE

(jerkng him back into place;

in a low tone)

Mallefille, if you can't behave, go to
your room.

They proceed into the dining room.

DINING ROOM - LATER

All are seated at a long table. A serving MAID circulates with a platter of carved roast partridge; and two BUTLERS pour water and wine. George, still flanked by Mallefille and Franz, is placed

directly opposite Chopin, who is bounded by Marie and a local Marquess. The aristocrats are slaving away to produce witty and elevated conversation. The guest artists contribute graciously, except for Mallefille BANGING his silverware about and sulking.

PHILOSOPHER

(to Eugene, opposite him)

I understand many of you are atheists.

EUGENE

Atheists? Oh, no, we feel God exists. He's just not considered worth all the trouble of denying him.

ARISTOCRATS

(titter ad lib)

Shocking...!

PRIEST

The Baron is baiting you, Monsieur. He and I often have lively discussions on the subject of faith, always the same. He maintains there is no scientific evidence of God. And I reply: because civilization has poured dust on His traces. God has been buried by science-
-but alive.

MALLEFILLE

(darkly)

God exists, but He is no longer loved,
so He hides away, to conceal His broken
heart.

ARISTOCRATS

(smile; murmur ad lib)

Charming...!

FRANZ

Certainly God is difficult to find in
our age. Artists are the only
hope. We will locate Him again. We are
a search party, if you will, of
orphans, with only our emotions for a
lantern in the dark.

ARISTOCRATS

(applauding)

Brilliant...!

GEORGE

Our greatest hope may be Monsieur
Chopin, in whose music we find

both emotion and science in the most perfect rapport.

She raises her glass and toasts him; everyone follows suit. Chopin is surprised and pleased; she sends him her warmest glance. He stands and raises his glass to the Duke and Duchess.

CHOPIN

May I in turn toast our host and hostess. Without the noble patronage of the aristocracy, we are orphans indeed. They understand us and nurture us, they are our model and inspiration.

The artists drink without enthusiasm to this, except George, who pauses awkwardly.

MARIE

George, you're not drinking.

(to Chopin, who sits)

You must pardon Madame Sand, she is allergic to the aristocracy.

The aristocrats squirm. Marie assumes an expression of affectionate teasing when George looks at her in surprise.

PRIEST

(leaps into the treacherous
pause)

Surely that can't be. Madame Sand, my
hobby is genealogy, and if I am
correct, you are a baroness by
marriage, and your father's mother was
the Countess de Horn.

ARISTOCRATS

Really!

GEORGE

(evenly)

Yes, but my mother's father was a
birdseller.

There is another uneasy pause.

DUCHESS

(with a peal of laughter)

Really. Well, there you are,
philosopher, scientific proof of God.
The lion may lie down with the lamb,
and the baroness with the birdseller.

DUKE

(his mouth full of fowl)

Since you must know birds, what do you think of our local partridge, Madame Sand?

As the Duke warms to his subject, we CUT TO:

UNDER THE TABLE

We see George's toe slip out of her shoe and move to Chopin's ankle. At the same time, Marie presses her leg against his other side.

DUKE (O. S.; cont'd)

We flushed four of them in a field this afternoon and your friend Mallefille shot three of them. The other I only wounded and it flew away--

ANGLE ON CHOPIN AND MARIE

His face is turning red, then pasty white. Marie slips her hand under the table.

DUKE (O. S.; cont'd)

--but when we were walking back we found it thrashing about in the garden. The dogs had hold of it--

DUCHESS

(disgusted)

Charles!

Chopin bursts into a fit of COUGHING. With a strangled APOLOGY he rises, leaves the room.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

See what you've done!

DUKE

What the devil's the matter with him?

EUGENE

(looking after Chopin with
concern)

He has trouble with his lungs. It makes
a misery of his life.

The main course is being cleared by MAIDS. The two butlers once again discreetly replenish everyone's water and wine.

DUCHESS

But he should be bled! We have an
excellent physician. He has developed a
special variety of leeches. Painless,
and they leave very little mark.

FRANZ

Better yet, send George in to Monsieur
Chopin. She leaves no marks at all.

George is taken aback: here is another treacherous jibe from a
supposed friend, even though he says it in an affectionately
teasing manner.

MARIE

Hungarian humor, George.

Mallefille leaps to his feet.

MALLEFILLE

(furious; to Franz)

You are too familiar! Apologize!

GEORGE

(exasperated by Chopin fiasco,
loses temper)

Oh, calm down, you great ass.

MALLEFILLE

You imagine I don't know what's going
on between you two?

The aristocrats suck in their breath. The Duchess is torn between embarrassment and orgasmic glee.

DUCHESS

(whispers to neighbor)

She has made love with Monsieur Liszt,
too?!

MALLEFILLE

Apologize, or I'll rip your throat out!

He drags Franz up out of his seat, behind George's chair. At that moment, the butler who has just arrived at Mallefille's place to replenish his water DUMPS the contents of his pitcher over Mallefille's head.

Mallefille, drenched, releases Franz. Everyone is stupefied. George, also soaked in the deluge, turns and recognizes the butler.

GEORGE

ALFRED!!!!

ALFRED

(bows)

St. George.

MALLEFILLE

What are you doing here?!

ALFRED

(bows contemptuously to
Mallefille)

And the dragoon. I was invited.

(to Duchess)

Forgive me, Duchess, I only just now
arrived. Thank God I was in time to
defend Madame Sand's shattered honor.

He reaches for Mallefille's glass of wine on the table.

MALLEFILLE

He's the one!

(raging, to George)

You're starting up with him again!

GEORGE

(half-laughing, half-crying)

Oh, no, Alfred, not you here, too--

Alfred, with a sadistic smile, raises the wineglass in toast to her. Mallefille STRIKES the glass from Alfred's hand, then SLAPS his face.

MALLEFILLE

Choose your seconds and meet me at
dawn, sir.

ALFRED

(shrugs)

I accept.

GEORGE

(stands)

That tears it! You are not--

MALLEFILLE

(coldly)

George, this is men's business.

GEORGE

(shrieks)

MEN?! YOU'RE NOT FIT TO BE MEN! MORONS!

IDIOTS!

She runs from the room. Alfred takes two bottles of wine from the other butler and offers them to Mallefille.

ALFRED

Choose your weapons, Mallefille. Red or white?

Alfred LAUGHS as Mallefille storms out after George.

DUKE AND DUCHESS' BEDROOM - LATER

The Duke, in his nightshirt, is sitting on the edge of his bed and having a last smoke from his pipe. The Duchess in a peignoir enters with a pile of his clothes which provided her earlier masquerade.

DUCHESS

Thank you for the loan, my dear. It was most instructive. You will be getting up before dawn for the duel, so I shall sleep in my own bed tonight.

(kisses him)

Oh, I do wish I could be there tomorrow. You will make sure no one is killed, won't you? I abhor killing, but a good fight is something to see.

DUKE

Good night, Claudette.

She leaves.

SECOND-FLOOR CORRIDOR - SECONDS LATER

As the Duchess passes down the hall, a man's arm suddenly snakes out from an open door and drags her inside.

EUGENE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eugene is shirtless; he quickly yanks the Duchess' nightclothes down below her breasts, then embraces her hotly, sinking his teeth into the flesh of her neck. She is so terrified and excited her breath comes in erratic bursts and she can do no more than utter little inarticulate sounds of "UH!" and "AH!" while Eugene gnaws her all over, making GROWLING tigerish noises in his throat. He backs her up to his bed and pins her down with one hand, loosening his trousers with the other. She stares mutely at him, dazed, hypnotized. He grins, and GROWLS again. She answers him with a stupefied smile. He lowers himself and enters her.

GROUND FLOOR CORRIDOR - LATER

Mallefille TAPS on the door to George's study.

MALLEFILLE

George?

He TRIES the knob. It's locked, too. He looks up: Alfred ambles up, clutching a bottle of wine and drinking from a glass.

ALFRED

You know what she's doing in there.

She's writing. Leave her alone.

Mallefille turns away from the door and marches down the corridor to the stairs. Alfred keeps stride with him.

ALFRED (cont'd)

(getting drunk)

Did you ever know of anything which could interfere with her nightly regurgitation of twenty pages? We could both be lying in pools of blood outside that door, she wouldn't open it. The only reason she needs us at all is to provide characters and plots for her awful novels. That's why there are so many of us, because she must turn out two or three books a year, and she hasn't the imagination to invent us--

MALLEFILLE

(stops at foot of stairs;
interrupts)

I trust you have no objection to
pistols.

ALFRED

What?

MALLEFILLE

For tomorrow.

ALFRED

(from the depths of his world-
weariness)

My boy, I really don't care.

Mallefille mounts the stairs while Alfred stares after him,
draining his glass.

EXT. CHATEAU - LATER - DAWN

Dawn approaches. All the lights of the chateau are extinguished
except in George's study.

INT. CHATEAU - STUDY - CONTINUOUS - DAWN

George is asleep on the sofa, hugging a pillow to her chest. Over on the desk, her night's labor of twenty pages is stacked.

EXT. STABLES - CONTINUOUS - DAWN

Alfred is trying to fit a bridle on a horse, all the while clutching a bottle of wine. He is hopelessly drunk and hopes to get drunker.

ALFRED

(pushes bit into horse's mouth)

Open those big lips, darling... show me
your tongue...What is that scent? Ah,
oats...oats de cologne.

Now he tries to fling himself onto the animal's bare back. On his third attempt he succeeds.

INT. STUDY - MINUTES LATER - DAWN

Suddenly the French doors fly open with a CRASH. Alfred rides his horse into the room. George awakes with a start.

The horse, alarmed to be indoors, STUMBLES against the dainty furniture. Alfred swigs from his bottle of wine.

ALFRED

Goodbye, George! I am going to my
death. But before I die--

He falls from the horse and lands all over her on the sofa.

ALFRED (cont'd)

One kiss from you is all I ask.

GEORGE

(angrily)

What are you ranting about? Get off me!
Get that animal out of here!

ALFRED

But darling, I will be dead soon.
Mallefille is going to shoot me.

GEORGE

(remembers; pleads)

You two can't be serious! Alfred, don't
go. I'll talk to Mallefille.

ALFRED

But I want to die. I want to be on your
conscience. You destroyed my youth. You
buried my springtime in shadows.

GEORGE

(scolds fondly)

Alfred, I was much too good to you. I spoiled and petted you, I gave you money, I nursed you when you were sick-

-

ALFRED

Yes, and then you fucked the doctor!

GEORGE

(heaves him off her)

You were sick because you'd been out every night drinking and screwing all the whores in Venice, while I sat in the hotel room writing so we could have enough money--

Suddenly she SHRIEKS. She sees the horse lift its tail and deposit a heap of brown dung all over her manuscript on the desk.

ALFRED

(crows)

Ha! The horse is a critic!

An infuriated George pushes Alfred, LAUGHING insanely, toward the French doors.

GEORGE

Go, go! Get yourself killed! I hate
you!

She plants a foot on his rear and KICKS him onto the terrace. Then she gives the horse a WHACK on the behind, too; the beast bolts through the doors, which she SLAMS after him.

EXT. FIELD - LATER - DAWN

Daybreak is obscured by the heavy clouds which sag over the field; in the distance, THUNDER rumbles as a rainstorm approaches

Mallefille and Alfred stand with their backs touching and their pistols cocked. Mallefille's seconds, the Duke and his butler, wait at one end of the field; Alfred's seconds, Franz and Eugene, are at the opposite end, chasing some sheep off.

At a signal, the two duelists walk apart, counting out the paces. Mallefille strides confidently, his face taut with determination. Alfred, however, is staggering drunk, and veers off at a right angle instead of straight...

ANGLE ON MALLEFILLE

At the final step, he wheels around with his pistol held at arm's length and FIRES, simultaneously with another GUNSHOT O. S. When the puff of smoke clears, he sees:

MALLEFILLE'S POV

There's no opponent there opposite him. We PAN OVER to Alfred, who is about twenty yards away from where he's supposed to be, looking down at the smoking gun in his hand with bemusement. We PAN TO over to Alfred's seconds. One of them, the Duke's faithful butler, is clutching his wounded arm and WHIMPERING.

INT. NURSERY - CHATEAU - THREE DAYS LATER - DAY

Maurice, Solange, and Didier stare out the window. Outside, it is RAINING steadily in torrents.

SOLANGE

I want to go home.

MAURICE

Mummy said we can't go 'til the road dries up.

SOLANGE

But it's been raining for three days.

It's no use. We're prisoners.

DIDIER

Prisoners of the Bastille.

The children's eyes begin to light up. A new game has begun.

SOLANGE

Guards are everywhere.

MAURICE

We'll blast our way out!

DELETED

SALON - LATER

The RAIN cascades down the windows. The butler, his arm in a sling, stokes a fire. Chopin noodles listlessly on the PIANO. George, Franz, Marie, Eugene, Mallefille, all with sullen expressions, play cards at a table. Over near the piano, the Duchess is making velvet flowers, one of those inane skills at which aristocratic women excel. She steals little glances at Eugene as she talks, but he ignores her.

DUCHESS

(whines)

Monsieur Chopin, that sounds so like
the raindrops outside, it's quite
magical, but I must ask you to produce
a little sunshine for us instead. I am
about to go mad
from the sound of horrid rain, day in
and day out.

No one notices the children who enter, drag some heavy logs from
the fireplace, and exit.

DUCHESS (cont'd)

Ordinarily I would go to bed and take a
bromide and sleep through it all, but
one has guests to entertain....And yet,
to have so much genius under this roof
is so--paralyzingly--exceptional, one
can't complain.

(sighs)

Stupid, stupid rain...

Her voice trails off. The cardplayers look at each other; each
would like to murder a certain hostess. Suddenly Alfred's head
pops up from the chaise in the corner where he's been lounging out
of sight.

ALFRED

There's no need to entertain us, Your Excellency. Rather it is our turn to entertain you. I have just this minute completed a little play for your theater.

DUCHESS

(claps her hands)

Oh! How gay!

He gets up and walks toward the others, a scribbled manuscript in his hand.

ALFRED

Eugene will paint the scenery, George and Marie's maids can do the costumes, Chopin will provide us with an accompaniment.

CHOPIN

Delighted.

George has taken the manuscript from Alfred and is perusing it with a little grin.

ALFRED

We will all play the parts. And you
will sit back and enjoy this tribute
from your grateful geniuses.

GEORGE

The style is a little precious. Do you
mind if I rewrite it?

ALFRED

Not at all. We'll have a horse sent in.

They glare at each other.

DUCHESS

And what is the subject of your play?

ALFRED

Noah and the Flood.

(everyone chuckles)

DUCHESS

How very appropriate!

DELETED

NURSERY - LATER

With a hammer and stake, Didier POUNDS a deep tunnelling hole in a log of firewood. Nearby Maurice and Solange are filling similar holes in other logs with gunpowder from a horn, then stopping the holes with wood plugs. At the sound of a KNOCK at the door, they hastily hide the ammunition. George sticks her head in.

GEORGE

Hello, darlings. What a mess! Looks like fun. Come downstairs to the theater. You're needed for rehearsal.

THEATER - MINUTES LATER

The children troop in, dragging a sack full of logs. The adults are too busy to notice: onstage, Franz, George and Alfred are DISPUTING the script, Eugene is painting a backdrop; Marie directs Sophie and Ursule cutting costumes on a table.

The children discreetly unload their logs into a carrier next to the fireplace on the rear wall of the theater.

THEATER - THAT NIGHT

The Duke and Duchess enter in evening dress, followed by Chopin, the philosopher and the priest, and the butler. Over near the stage, which is concealed by a drawn curtain, Marie is sitting beside a piano; she beckons to Chopin.

The Duke, Duchess, and two guests sit on the chairs set out for the audience, a little distance from the stage. Behind them, the butler tends the blazing logs in the fireplace.

PHILOSOPHER

A spectacle! This is a treat.

DUCHESS

I am as excited as if it were an opening night at the Comedie Francaise. Still, I can't believe you two rode over in all this rain.

PHILOSOPHER

We threw all caution to the winds,
Madame Duchess--

PRIEST

(overlapping)

--we felt we must see your distinguished guests again before they depart--

PHILOSOPHER

The question of the existence of God,
you see, was hardly settled last time
at your soiree--

PRIEST

--we were hoping for another chat.

ANGLE ON CHOPIN AND MARIE

as he sits beside her at the piano.

CHOPIN

(nervously)

You are not acting in this piece?

MARIE

I have no stomach for farce. I am here
to cue you. Whenever I signal you like
so--

(lays hand gently on his
sleeve; he tenses)

--you must play something which
suggests rain.

CHOPIN

I expect this will be very amusing.

MARIE

Yes, Alfred and George have really outdone themselves this time. Do you know, I think they are still in love with each other.

Chopin looks disappointed. O. S. the traditional three KNOCKS announce the start of the play.

Franz enters in front of the curtain. Dressed in his customary black, he is holding an open fan painted with clouds in front of his face. The Duchess APPLAUDS.

FRANZ/GOD

Good evening. I am God.

The priest in the audience looks a little seasick; smiles gamely.

FRANZ/GOD (cont'd)

(peeks out coquettishly from behind fan)

In the year I am relating, I have grown disappointed in my master creation, the human race. Mind you, I endowed them with everything: the riches of the land and sea and air, and enough intelligence to worship me. But, to my

horror, they have become arrogant and pampered. I will destroy them. All except one man and his family.

The curtain opens. The backdrop depicts a big hot sun. Alfred, dressed in a Biblical adaptation of the Pierrot costume, is asleep in a chair with a musket cradled in his arms. His face is made up in the traditional Pierrot whiteface.

FRANZ/GOD (cont'd)

This is my servant Noah...

George stands fanning Alfred with an enormous palm frond. She wears Pierrette makeup and costume.

FRANZ/GOD (cont'd)

...and his wife, Noette...

Maurice, Solange, and Didier sit glumly to one side, all dressed in Biblical tunics. Their attention is enlivened when they notice, behind the Duke and Duchess, the butler is carrying a load of familiar logs over to the fire.

FRANZ/GOD (cont'd)

...and their three children. In their hands do I place the future of mankind.

Franz steps to one side. George wipes her brow as she sweeps the palm to and fro.

GEORGE/NOETTE

Oh, this heat. Will it never
rain?...Here sleeps my stupid lout of a
husband. I don't know what God sees in
him. Ah, who can express the despair of
youth
married to age? My husband Noah is
six hundred years old, while I am but
one hundred and fifty!

The palm frond SMACKS Alfred in the face. He sits up with a CRY,
aims his rifle at the sky. CRACK! he fires it. Mallefille produces
the noise with a wooden clapper in the wings. A dove with an
oliver branch in its beak falls with a THUD to the stage.

ALFRED/NOAH

A dove!

(stuffs it in his game-bag)

What luck! There will be good hunting
today.

Marie lays her hand on Chopin's arm. He flinches from her touch
and quickly launches into his "Raindrop Prelude"

on the PIANO. Backstage Eugene scrolls the backdrop downward: the sun sinks and rain descends.

GEORGE/NOETTE

Look, it has begun to rain. Stupid,
stupid rain.

The Duchess looks confused, recognizing her words.

FRANZ/GOD

Yes, I have sent the stupid rain to
fall upon the earth, and stupidity
shall engulf all its inhabitants. Hurry
to the Ark, Noah, and fill it with two
of each
of the creatures of land, sea, and air.

(Alfred exits)

GEORGE/NOETTE

Lord, we have no need for animals. Art
alone will save the world. Let's see,
we will need two of everything: two
poets, two painters, two musicians--

FRANZ/GOD

Impossible. They won't come. Your

conversation is not witty and you have no ideals.

GEORGE/NOETTE

True. But we'll promise them free food and lodging for forty days and forty nights.

The Duchess TITTERS and squirms uncomfortably in her seat. Behind them, the butler has loaded the fire with fresh wood from the carrier. Flames lick the exterior of the loaded logs.

GEORGE/NOETTE (cont'd)

Now, we shall also need two playwrights, two composers, and two makers of velvet flowers.

FRANZ/GOD

Now you go too far.

GEORGE/NOETTE

But it is an art, surely!

ALFRED/NOAH

(enters)

Noette, come quickly! The stupid rain is up to our waists! We are now half

stupid! Soon we shall be completely
stupid!

GEORGE/NOETTE

No matter. We will have geniuses
surrounding us on the Ark and so our
stupidity will be concealed.

Chopin STOPS playing abruptly and rises, addressing George
onstage. He is scandalized.

CHOPIN

I want no further part of this
production. Madame Sand, you insult our
hosts.

The Duchess sucks in her breath. We ZOOM past her shoulder to the
logs burning in the fireplace, then CUT TO the faces of the
children onstage, their eyes widening expectantly.

GEORGE

(flustered)

But--it's in the spirit of fun,
Monsieur Chopin.

CHOPIN

And you disgrace our position as guests. I, for one, was not brought up to repay generosity with impertinence.

ALFRED

(stepping angrily in front of George)

You want everything dusted with sugar, like your music, Chopin. You should know: ART DOES NOT APOLOGIZE--

BOOM!!! There is an enormous explosion from the fireplace. The room is filled with smoke and flying embers, and SHRIEKS.

EXT. CHATEAU - NEXT MORNING

The sky is radiantly clear, and the driveway is already drying up under the sun. Three carriages have loaded their passengers. Chopin and Eugene are seated in the first. Through the window, we see Chopin's white-gloved hand RAP his cane on the roof; at his signal, the driver starts the carriage off down the road, away from the chateau.

The second carriage, containing Marie, Franz, and Alfred, follows suit.

Maurice and Solange wave from the third carriage as it trails the others. Didier waves back regretfully from the steps of the chateau entrance.

INT. THIRD CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Mallefille yanks Maurice and Solange back inside. He puts his arm around George beside him. She submits vacantly to his touch. We can see the spirit drain out of her and her depression return as she gazes out the window.

INT. CHATEAU - DUKE AND DUCHESS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The Duke and Duchess are taking their breakfast in bed. The butler (his arm still in a sling, fresh burns on his face) is helping them to feed themselves, since they are hampered by various bandages about their hands and arms and heads.

DUCHESS

I shouldn't grieve if I never saw
another artist again in my whole life.

DUKE

At last you've come to your senses.

EXT. STREET - PARIS - EIGHT MONTHS LATER - DAY

The PEDESTRIANS are muffled in ankle-length greatcoats and fur hats against the chill March wind. We discover George shouldering her way through the crowd and into:

INT. NURSING HOME - MOTHER'S ROOM - LATER

We are in a small simply furnished room, where George's sick MOTHER is propped up in bed. George waits as the DOCTOR ends his visit.

DOCTOR

(pats Mother's hand)

Just a few more weeks until spring,
then you'll be able to sit outside.

He moves to the door. George accompanies him.

DOCTOR (cont'd)

(confidentially; to George)

She seems to have less pain today, but
the liver is badly swollen.

(louder)

Good day, Madame Dudevant.... Madame
Sand.

MOTHER

(calls after him)

It's "Your Excellency." My daughter's a baroness, you know.

He leaves. George turns back to her mother.

MOTHER (cont'd)

(contemptuously)

That doctor. He only comes around when you're here to see me.

GEORGE

That's because I owe him money.

She sits; begins to brush and fix her mother's hair.

MOTHER

Do it the way you did last time. Something that makes me look a little younger, please.

GEORGE

You always look young to me.

MOTHER

Perhaps I should chop it all off, the way you did. Except I'm not that crazy... Oh, Aurora, surely you can afford a dress by now.

GEORGE

I've got used to trousers. They're comfortable, and I can move around, for God's sake.

MOTHER

Can you feel that draught? It comes straight through the wall.

GEORGE

(fetches a shawl)

I've told you before, Mama, don't stay here. Come back with me to Nohant.

George wraps the shawl around her mother and resumes putting up her hair.

MOTHER

No, I want to stay here in Paris. Besides, you don't need my company. You've got that young man--what's he called? Mal-- Mal--...

GEORGE

(scowls)

Mallefille.

MOTHER

Mallefille! A very dashing fellow.

GEORGE

I wish he'd fall off the map.

MOTHER

Oh, Aurora. You're always looking for something better. If you'd stayed married you'd still have your money--

GEORGE

(overlaps)

--I'm doing fine--

MOTHER

--The only money I ever saw from that lot was what your grandmother paid me to stay away from you.

GEORGE

You didn't have to take it.

George sticks a flamboyant hair ornament in her mother's hair.

MOTHER

(admiring herself in mirror)

Ah! Now that's rather nice. I think I'll go dancing tonight. Get out of this dungeon.

GEORGE

(hugs her)

Can I be your partner?

MOTHER

(shrugs off George's arms)

Certainly not! I want a proper man.

INT. FRANZ & MARIE'S APARTMENT - NURSERY - DAY

Sophie the maid rocks a newborn baby in swaddling clothes to her bosom. Marie's other daughter, BLANDINE, now a year old, sways on uncertain legs beside the rocking chair. Through the wall come sounds of Franz and Marie ARGUING in the parlor.

PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Franz stands stoically, maintaining an expression of pious sympathy, while Marie paces and rails at him. She is haggard and thicker in the waist than when we last saw her.

MARIE

But you only just got back--and now
you're leaving again?
It's humiliating. I know you! Six weeks
means six months!

FRANZ

My concerts raise money for the
refugees. The floods this year were
devastating. Darling, it's my
country, these are my people who need
me.

MARIE

Suddenly you're the patron saint of
Hungary. Well, there's nothing I can
say. I couldn't stand between you and
mankind.

She has turned away from him, her swollen bosom rising and falling
with rage. Franz goes to her, turns her around, and wraps his arms
around her tenderly.

FRANZ

I'll return as soon as I can. Oh my
beautiful archangel, I'll miss you.

He lowers his head to plant adoring kisses on her bosom. Then, abruptly, he steps away, uttering an involuntary "UGH!" Two large wet patches have appeared on the front of her bodice.

MARIE

(quietly)

You've made my milk come out.

FRANZ

Hadn't you better go feed the baby?

MARIE

I gave up everything for you--I
disgraced myself--for our dream, Franz.
All I wanted was to kneel at your feet--
-

She sinks to her knees before him. His face fills with dread.

FRANZ

--don't--Marie--

MARIE

--and inspire you to write music--the
great music which would lead
people to God, to revolution, to glory--
-

MARIE (cont'd)

(bursts out in hoarse
anger)

WHERE IS THE MUSIC?

FRANZ

I can't get anything done here.

MARIE

Nor anywhere! You're impotent!
Musically, that is.

She begins to shake with raw, sarcastic laughter, clawing at the wet fabric over her bosom.

FRANZ

You're mad! Get up, damn you!

He tries to haul her to her feet, while she continues LAUGHING.

MARIE

You're nothing but a performing bear!
Ha, ha, ha!

RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Sophie--holding the new baby Cosima--and Franz' VALET are pressing their ears to the door, listening to Marie's SHOUTS with wide-eyed amusement. Suddenly there is a KNOCKING at the front door. The servants spring away from the parlor door; the valet goes to open:

FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

George nods pleasantly to the servants as she enters.

GEORGE

Are the Countess and Monsieur Liszt at
home?

She can hear their VOICES quarreling O. S.

VALET

I will see, Madame.

He crosses to the parlor, KNOCKS. The VOICES within stop abruptly. The valet exits into the parlor. We hear another door O. S. SLAM.

GEORGE

(to Sophie)

Is that the new baby? What a darling!

PARLOR - MINUTES LATER

Sophie shows George in. Marie is waiting to receive her, sitting stiffly upright on the divan and arranging a shawl over her wet bodice. She is hollow-eyed from her fight with Franz, who has left by the rear door.

MARIE

Hello, George.

GEORGE

Hello, Countess.

They kiss. George sits in an armchair.

GEORGE

I saw the baby just now--she's adorable. Was it a difficult labor?

MARIE

Very. What brings you to Paris?

GEORGE

My mother is ill...I've been so depressed, seeing friends again will do me good.

(lights a cigar; casually)

Have you seen anything of the charming
Chopin?

MARIE

No.

George EXHALES smoke with a long SIGH. She looks at Marie
beseechingly.

GEORGE

You might as well know, I'm still in
love with him. Marie, I've tried so
hard to put him out of my mind.

Marie considers her with an enigmatic smile.

MARIE

You want him very badly.

GEORGE

Just for a few heavenly minutes, I
thought I had him, too. In Bordeaux,
you remember? I wore that dress, and
our eyes met...

MARIE

(with sudden energy)

You won't get him with a dress! On the contrary! My dear, I know the man, and he is not a man. He is a woman. He is all emotion and refinement, he has very few defenses. You must win him as a man wins a woman! If anyone can do it, you can, George.

GEORGE

(gratefully)

This is enlightening, tell me more.

MARIE

(with fierce eloquence)

How does a man pursue a woman? He flings himself at her feet. He follows her everywhere. No matter which way she turns, he is there, pouring into her ear only what she most wants to hear. The force of his passion frightens her...but a woman will always bend toward a strong man, just as the vine stretches toward the wall.

GEORGE

Nicely put.

George is impressed. She rises to her feet and paces, thinking.

MARIE

A woman is always on the point of
abandoning herself, anyhow. It only
takes one firm push.

George slides onto the divan next to Marie.

GEORGE

You are sublime! A true friend.

As George's head bows over the countess' hand to kiss it gratefully, Marie permits herself a small devious smile.

SEQUENCE OF SHOTS W/ MUSIC:

EXT. PARK - DAY

Chopin is taking the spring air in an open carriage ride through the Bois de Boulogne. Horseback RIDERS canter past. Suddenly he looks over and there is George, astride a stallion, trotting alongside his carriage. She tips her hat to him. He nods cordially but not encouragingly. She gives him a rakish smile and gallops ahead.

INT. TAILOR'S SHOP - ANOTHER DAY

Chopin is greeted by a fashionable men's TAILOR in his establishment. The tailor brings out a nearly completed frock-coat for Chopin's inspection. The latter eagerly removes his own jacket to try on the garment, when a curtain partition slides aside and out comes George. She is wearing the same frock-coat. ANOTHER TAILOR follows her to the door, bowing and scraping. She smiles cavalierly at Chopin and tips her hat as before, on her way out. He is not amused.

MUSIC SEQUENCE ENDS

INT. MOVING CARRIAGE - ANOTHER NIGHT

The Countess Marie and Chopin are on their way to a party. Marie lets the JOUNCING of the carriage move her closer to Chopin, who squeezes discreetly against the wall to avoid actually touching her.

MARIE

You are so good to escort me tonight.
People shun me unless I am on the arm
of someone respectable.

CHOPIN

I do not understand your concern.
You'll find nothing but friends at
Eugene's party.

MARIE

Friends?

(pats his arm)

You are fatally sweet...I wonder if
George will be there.

CHOPIN

I shouldn't be surprised. She has the
most alarming way of turning up
everywhere I go. I am beginning to find
it obnoxious.

MARIE

She has a desperate purpose.

CHOPIN

What do you mean?

MARIE

Well, a little while ago, she was out
drinking and gambling with some
fellows--she leads a rough sort of
life, you know--and she boasted that...

(hesitates)

No, let's not talk about it. I fear I am about to commit a tremendous faux-pas.

A beat. Chopin, ever tactful, allows her to drop the story--but not the subject.

CHOPIN

Socially, she is too bizarre. Still, I find her somehow very

CHOPIN (cont'd)

compelling. I wonder if she may be different when one is alone with her.

MARIE

(hurriedly finishes story)

She has boasted publicly that you are to be her next lover. Alfred was there--he is still the great love of her life--and he put money on it you wouldn't be seduced.

Chopin is speechlessly appalled.

MARIE (cont'd)

Yes, they made you the object of a bet.
Well, you know she's eternally in need
of money....

The carriage STOPS, and the COACHMAN opens the door for them to
alight.

INT. EUGENE'S STUDIO - MINUTES LATER - NIGHT

A mixture of CELEBRITIES and BOHEMIANS from the Parisian art world
are packed into the studio for their revels. The ambience is rowdy
and free, compared to the studied pose of the salons. Marie waves
to friends in the crowd, but Chopin

is still so stunned by the story she told him about George that he
barely responds to the salutations around him.

MARIE

You have the most priceless expression
on your face.

(scans crowd)

There's Mallefille. Now we can be sure
George is here. He's still following
her around like a tail.

In consternation, Chopin turns quickly to the wall, which is
covered with Eugene's paintings.

CHOPIN'S POV

He sees Eugene's images of violence: the tiger devouring the dead horse; a still life of slaughtered game; Arab horsemen in combat; a lion hunt...

EUGENE (O. S.)

Chopin hates my painting.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Chopin turns quickly to find Eugene smiling fondly at him. He LAUGHS apologetically as he and Eugene exchange kisses on both cheeks.

CHOPIN

I am only a musician, dear friend.

A WAITRESS is passing with a tray full of shrimp. Marie takes one look at the food and reels back, looking sick; she slumps to the floor. Eugene and Chopin catch her reflexively.

CHOPIN

My God--!

MARIE

Ohhh....

EUGENE

Are you ill, Countess?

MARIE

No, no, I only wish to lie down for a
minute.

Eugene helps Marie inside a little side bedroom, then emerges and beckons to a woman FRIEND to go inside and revive the Countess. He then rejoins Chopin.

CHOPIN

What can be wrong with her?

EUGENE

(unconcerned)

She's probably pregnant again.

(scanning crowd)

There's George--!

CHOPIN AND EUGENE'S POV

At the far end of the room, George cranes above the melee of heads and waves toward them. Another head pops up: the jealous Mallefille, peering to see where she waved.

RESUME ON CHOPIN AND EUGENE

Chopin backs away and looks desperately around for someplace to hide.

CHOPIN

Forgive me, I don't want to speak to
that woman.

Eugene looks on, puzzled, as Chopin steps behind a screen (an area where Eugene's models usually undress).

BEHIND SCREEN

Chopin finds he is not alone in his sanctuary. Alfred is there, hugging a bottle of wine, and deep in his cups.

ALFRED

(pleasantly)

Ah, Chopinsky. Are you hiding from
George, too?

Chopin draws himself up, radiating antipathy.

CHOPIN

(coldly)

You would know the reason.

Chopin peers around the corner of the screen, to see if the coast is clear so he can now escape Alfred.

ALFRED

I don't want to spoil a perfectly good drunken stupor by imagining your reason.

Chopin recoils quickly behind the screen again: George is passing right by. Alfred unmindfully blathers on.

ALFRED (cont'd)

Since the latest chapter of her egregious memoir was published I can hardly show my face anywhere. And did you read her latest novel? It's not even literature--it's drainage. The only good books she ever wrote were when she was with me. Every morning while she was sleeping I'd cross out half her adjectives. Hercules could not have done it--he'd have rather cleaned out the bloody stable!

Alfred puts a comradely arm around Chopin's shoulder and leans in close to his face, breathing alcoholic fumes.

ALFRED (cont'd)

You know what's funny? She doesn't come. She makes a lot of pretty noise, but she can't come. Like her books: all lovesick posturing

ALFRED (cont'd)

and pretense, for quick money. Oh, what a whore she is. My only regret is that I didn't put twenty francs on the mantelpiece when I had her for the first time.

Chopin controls his horror sufficiently to bow and depart with grace.

CHOPIN

I promise you Madame Sand will not gain any money from you on my account, monsieur.

He exits. Alfred looks bewildered by Chopin's last words.

A LITTLE LATER

A small ORCHESTRA has struck up the MUSIC of a "galop" and the guests pair up to dance. George finds Eugene.

GEORGE

(gaily)

Have you seen angel fingers?

I've lost him.

EUGENE

(points toward door)

He is taking the Countess d'Agoult

home.

She glimpses Chopin and Marie disappearing out the door.

GEORGE

(disappointed)

Oh.

EUGENE

If you plan to invade Poland, George,

you should know that the Countess has

placed her troops at the border.

GEORGE

What are you talking about?

Their conversation is momentarily blotted out by the merry SHOUTS of the dancers whirling by. After they pass, we see George with an incredulous expression on her face.

GEORGE (cont'd)

What letter? What did it say?

We are PULLING BACK; the screen foreground fills completely with bouncing, spinning couples and we lose track of George and Eugene and the rest of their conversation.

EXT. COURTYARD - NURSING HOME - DAY

It is a cold spring day. Elderly INVALIDS in wheelchairs sit silently in sparse patches of sun, taking the air, while their ATTENDANTS chat together. George pushes her mother in a wheelchair past them.

MOTHER

I don't know why I bother to dress up. Nothing but old men here. You should bring that Mallefille fellow with you.

GEORGE

He's back at Nohant tutoring the children.

MOTHER

Ah, so you took my advice and hung onto him.

GEORGE

No, it's all over between us.

MOTHER

And what does he say to that?

GEORGE

He threatens to kill me and himself
if I leave him.

MOTHER

(laughs)

He's been reading too many of your books...
Let's stop here.

George stops the chair in the chill shadow of the infirmary wall.

GEORGE

Mama, it really is too cold for you here--

MOTHER

Nonsense, it's a lovely day.

George opens the basket of hair accessories and her mother picks up the hand mirror. Just then a PRIEST with a lugubrious face approaches them. George's mother frowns balefully at him and makes a dismissive

gesture, sending him on his way. standing behind her mother's wheelchair and pinning up the sick woman's hair.

MOTHER

Why should the last thing I see be a priest with a face like an dustbin? I'm not afraid to stand before my Maker. God can accuse me of many things, but I defy Him to say I haven't loved Him!

George tries an ornament in her mother's hair. The older woman holds the mirror with a hand which shakes from her fatal illness.

MOTHER (cont'd)

Yes, that's pretty. Now the ribbons...

(George holds up a ribbon)

No, too red.

(another)

Yes. In a bow.

(mops her face with a handkerchief)

It's so hot.

George glances anxiously at her mother: in fact it's cold out.

MOTHER (cont'd)

Will you be going back to Nohant?

GEORGE

Yes, mama.

MOTHER

I want you to bring me with you.

GEORGE

(surprised)

You always hated it there.

MOTHER

No I didn't. I felt excluded, that's all.

GEORGE

I never excluded you. I needed you.

MOTHER

You never needed anybody. Always running off alone in the woods where no one could find you, all the servants out calling: "Aurora!..."

George's mother is looking in the hand mirror, and suddenly her sight leaves her. She turns her head slowly in bewilderment.

MOTHER (cont'd)

(faintly)

Aurora...Where did you go?

George is untangling some ribbons and doesn't see her mother's change.

GEORGE

In the woods? I wasn't going anywhere.

I was just running.... Mama!

We CUT TO her mother's hand holding the mirror; it sinks to her lap, and is still. The mirror now reflects only the pellucid blue of the sky.

INT. CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Chopin's apartment is decorated impeccably, with the finest antiques, gray satin brocade lining the walls, muslin drapery shrouding the windows--yet it has the airless, subdued quality of a mausoleum. Sitting beside the piano, the composer wipes his brow with a cologne-drenched handkerchief, and takes a pill from silver case. His pupil, a young PRINCESS, hacks away at an Etude on the keyboard. Sweating and straining through a set of ARPEGGIOS she finishes on a CRASHING CHORD, an effort which lifts her clear off the piano bench.

She turns for his reaction, then spots the clock on the mantelpiece.

CHOPIN

You've learned a great many notes, Your Highness. Now it is a question of joining them together. Legato--

PRINCESS

(overlapping; sighs)

Legato--

CHOPIN

Simplicity is the hardest thing: it's the final thing.

He glances at the clock on the mantel; they both rise.

PRINCESS

Next week, then.

CHOPIN

(bows)

Good day, Your Highness.

The Princess gathers up her music, leaves a twenty-franc note behind the clock on the mantel, where other pupils have also left their fees. She exits. Chopin sits at the piano; his VALET enters.

VALET

Baroness Dudevant is here, Monsieur.

CHOPIN

(rises; bewildered)

Baroness Dudevant? I don't think I know--well, send her in.

The valet exits and returns with George.

GEORGE

My mother was so pleased when I married a baron. She was impressed by titles. It meant nothing to me. Our children were the only things of any worth he ever gave me.

There is no mischief in her manner. She is pale, deeply troubled by her mother's death, and wears a mourning dress.

CHOPIN

(sits at piano again; angrily)

You are incredible, Madame.

GEORGE

I need only a minute to talk with you,
and then I will leave.

CHOPIN

Very well. I will give you exactly one
minute.

He starts to PLAY his "Minute Waltz," so called because when properly played it lasts precisely sixty seconds. George crosses behind him, gazing with sadness at him for twenty of those precious seconds. At length she speaks.

GEORGE

I'm leaving Paris. I'm giving up the
chase. You can't have failed to notice
that I've been pursuing you. I'm in
love with you...

He plays a false note, but continues without breaking tempo. She comes closer, looking wistfully over his shoulder at his playing.

GEORGE (cont'd)

I don't know you at all, yet I know
this: you are great. You have made a
single instrument to speak
the language of God. And I wanted to
learn it...from your lips, you see...

(breaks off dejectedly)

Anyway, you don't want me...And it's
become too complicated, like everything
between two people.

The waltz ENDS. He stares down at the keyboard, confused.

GEORGE (cont'd)

And such a pity, when it could have
been so simple...

(voice breaks; near tears)

CHOPIN

I'm begging you, give this up.

In great agitation, he gets up and crosses to the mantel, takes a
handful of twenty-franc notes from behind the clock, and thrusts
them into her hand.

CHOPIN (cont'd)

I know you're in need--your children--
your mother's funeral--

--take it. Then you can call off the
bet.

GEORGE

(dumfounded)

What bet?

CHOPIN

I know you have sworn to seduce me. At
this rate you will succeed. Take the
money instead and leave me alone.

GEORGE

It's a disgusting lie! Who told you
this? Marie d'Agoult?

She advances toward him angrily, extending the money to him. He
backs away as she speaks.

CHOPIN

(stammers)

She is a good friend, I have no reason
to doubt her.

GEORGE

Once I wrote you a letter, and gave it
to her to deliver. I've found out she

signed her own name to it. Surely you realize she wants you for herself!

CHOPIN

(turns away, suddenly short of
breath)

Dear lady, please--

GEORGE

Don't worry, I won't come again.

She throws the money on the floor and starts to leave, then turns at the door.

GEORGE (cont'd)

She's right, you know. I'm not suited to you. I am not full of virtues and noble qualities; I love, that is all. But I love strongly, exclusively, steadfastly.

She leaves. A beat. Chopin turns slowly back and looks at the closed door.

SEQUENCE W/ MUSIC

INT./EXT. NOHANT ESTATE - DAY/NIGHT

Snow falls; winter passes in Nohant. We see SHOTS of George reading to her children; writing on into the night and falling asleep alone at dawn....Mallefille knocking on her locked door.

INT. CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - PARIS - DAY

Chopin stares out his window at the snow falling outside, as a PUPIL plays in the background. The MUSIC is lonely, restless.

EXT. STREET - ANOTHER DAY

It is summer. Chopin pauses in front of a bookstore. Copies of George Sand's new novel "Mauprat" are displayed in the window. He enters the store. MUSIC ENDS

EXT. FRANZ & MARIE'S APARTMENT - ANOTHER DAY

It is early summer. Chopin KNOCKS at the street door.

INT. FRANZ & MARIE'S APARTMENT - RECEPTION - MINUTES LATER - DAY

Sophie shows Chopin to the door of the parlor. Franz and Marie's two little daughters, now 1 and 2 1/2 years old, eye him curiously. We hear an infant's WAILS O. S.

PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Chopin enters, carrying his hat, and sees Marie seated on the divan with her new baby SQUALLING on her lap. Her bodice is undone and one bare breast swells out. Shocked and mortified, Chopin wheels around to face the wall.

CHOPIN

Oh! I beg your pardon.

There are deep shadows under Marie's eyes; she has a haunted, half-hysterical look. She makes no move to cover up; we have the feeling she wanted Chopin to see her naked bosom.

MARIE

He's crying because there's no more.

(coolly; to baby)

I'm empty. That's the last you'll get from me, little man.

MARIE (cont'd)

(calls)

Sophie!

Sophie enters and takes the baby, while Marie tucks her breast back inside her bodice.

CHOPIN

I will return another time.

MARIE

Don't go. You haven't visited me for the longest time.

We see she is fastening her bodice only halfway, with the wrong buttons in the wrong holes.

CHOPIN

Forgive me. My health has been hateful.

MARIE

Franz is away, of course. All the royal houses of Europe have invited him to play for them, it seems, even Russia. Like most peasants, he has a weakness for crowned heads. You may turn around. Please, sit.

He sits across from her, trying not to look at her skewed bodice. He sets his hat beside him.

CHOPIN

Do you hear anything from Madame Sand?
Will she be coming to Paris this year?

MARIE

(tenses up)

I wouldn't know, I am no longer her
friend. She has severed

MARIE (cont'd)

herself from Franz and me without any
explanation.

Her glance falls to the object he is holding in his lap. It is a
copy of "Mauprat" by George Sand.

MARIE (cont'd)

You have her latest book, I see.

CHOPIN

Yes, have you read it?

MARIE

I wouldn't touch such trash.

She rises and paces, frowning.

CHOPIN

Madame...Last summer you gave me a
letter.

She turns to him, hope melting away her sharp mood.

MARIE

(warmly)

Yes. I took a chance you would forgive
me speaking the truth of my heart.

CHOPIN

In fact I was appalled. But I could not
reject it entirely. Something in it
touched me, a phrase, like a tune one
can't forget. Shall I remind you what
you wrote?

MARIE

(nervous)

Do.

Chopin opens the book and reads from a page near the end.

CHOPIN

"I am not full of virtues and noble
qualities; I love, that is all. But I
love strongly,

exclusively, steadfastly."

(closes book)

Imagine my surprise when I found it
again, here.

A beat: Marie, caught off-guard, gropes for a response.

MARIE

I see I must confess. When I wrote you
that letter, my tender feelings for you
so overpowered me that I could not find
words of clarity and persuasion--I was
desperate, I looked around me for help,
I saw George's book, I stole what I
needed--

CHOPIN

(carefully)

But a year ago the book had not been
published, or even written I suspect.

She is stuck for an answer. Chopin waits a beat, then picks up his
hat.

CHOPIN (cont'd)

(politely)

I think I have found the truth, for which I thank you, and I certainly owe Madame Sand an apology. Perhaps now she and I can become friends.

Marie stands over him, preventing him from rising.

MARIE

(hisses)

Don't be content with just a little truth, stay and hear all of it! Because George will never be content with just your friendship. She wants your manhood, too! Your virtue, your genius, your soul--! She'll take, and never replenish.

She suddenly descends to her knees before him, snatching his hand up in hers. Panicking, Chopin tries to wrest his hand away. She won't let go; she seems not even to see him--there is a fanatical glaze over her eyes. He COUGHS; one spasm leads to another until, by the end of Marie's mad speech, he is practically choking.

MARIE (cont'd)

Listen to me, because that woman is a graveyard! But I--I can help you, I can inspire you!

COUGHING, Chopin pushes her away and rises.

CHOPIN

I've heard enough, Countess.

He goes to leave. She runs over and plants herself in front of the door.

MARIE

(hisses)

What else do you want?! This? Here it
is!

She tears at her bodice, and the one breast leaps out again.
Chopin pushes past her and flees out the door.

MARIE (cont'd)

(shouts after him)

IT'S THE SAME AS YOU'LL GET FROM HER!!

INT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - ANOTHER DAY

George SLAPS a couple of manuscripts on Buloz' desk.

GEORGE

That's the novel, and this is the last
chapter of the memoir.

Buloz flips through the latter sheaf of pages, while George crosses to the window and looks down at the street.

BULOZ

It's a bit on the thin side.

GEORGE'S POV - THROUGH WINDOW - STREET

Mallefille is pacing around on the cobblestones, every now and then peering up at Buloz' window.

GEORGE (O. S.)

So is my life. Do you happen to know of a good tutor for my children?

ANOTHER ANGLE - GEORGE AND BULOZ

BULOZ

I'll ask around. By the way, Monsieur Chopin came to see me last week. He asked if you would call on him when you are back in town.

He sees George blush, overcome with surprise and pleasure.

BULOZ (cont'd)

Do I hear a duet? Perhaps this--

(indicates memoir)

--is not the last chapter?

GEORGE

(grins)

Give me my money, you jackal.

He waves a bank credit at her mischievously; she snatches it out of his hand and rushes out the door.

INT. CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - ANOTHER DAY

Chopin is standing and rearranging some music at the piano. His valet enters.

VALET

(announces)

Madame Aurore Dudevant.

Chopin is nonplussed at the name; then George appears in the door behind the valet, who diplomatically retires. She is wearing a modest dress. She looks at him, and he at her.

GEORGE

Aurore is the name I was born with.

CHOPIN

What a lovely name...the dawn...

As they stand thus in deep gaze, MUSIC bursts over them...

ANGLE ON UNDERSIDE OF PIANO - GEORGE'S POV - LATER

The MUSIC continues over from the previous shot; but we are now underneath the PIANO looking up at the hammers driving up and down the shuddering strings. It is the same music--the Fantaisie-Impromptu in C Minor--as in the beginning, when it accompanied the child Aurore dashing through the woods: a brilliant rush of notes, skittering this way and that as if searching wildly for escape.

REVERSE ANGLE - ON GEORGE

She is lying under Chopin's piano, paralysed with awe. The MUSIC at last finds a glimpse of serenity, and ends.

ANGLE ON CHOPIN

His fingers leave the keyboard.

CHOPIN

I'm not happy with it.

George slides out from under the piano and leans on the lid, staring at him with a dazed expression.

GEORGE

Why?

CHOPIN

A perfect impromptu should seem spontaneous and free.

(with a wry smile)

No one should guess at the desperate calculation behind it. I've been struggling with it for so long--it's like being tangled in a net--terrible dreams at night--sometimes I think if I ever finish it, it will finish me--

(breaks off shyly)

Well, you must know. Don't you suffer tortures to find the perfect word which will make it all seem effortless?

While he is talking, George absentmindedly brings out a cigar from the case in her pocket. She is on the verge of lighting it when she sees him eyeing it anxiously. She replaces it in her pocket and wanders nervously about the room, examining every clue to his life.

GEORGE

Suffer for art? You must be joking. I suffer quite enough for life. I have no hope to be perfect. I just pump out pages for money.

CHOPIN

Oh, no, your books are admirable, I think. I've been reading them.

GEORGE

(pleased)

You have?

She finds some small framed portraits on his desk. She holds up one of a pretty young woman.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Your family?

CHOPIN

My fiancée. We are no longer engaged. Her family felt I wasn't a good risk for a husband...No one expects me to live very long.

GEORGE

Balls.

CHOPIN

What?

George returns to the piano to stand over him.

GEORGE

I don't believe you're ill at all. You
just need...more...strength.

She is gazing into his eyes. He, too, is transfixed.

GEORGE (cont'd)

(softly)

Take mine.

He laughs, embarrassed.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Really, I have too much of it.

She leans forward, as if pulled into him, and slowly brings her lips to touch his. He responds to the tender pressure of the kiss, then grows alarmed as a spasm of desire seizes George and she embraces him passionately, half lifting him off the piano bench,

her mouth travelling all over his face, her hands grasping at his body through his elegant clothes.

CHOPIN

No...no...

GEORGE

(overlapping)

Oh--please--I want you so--

He breaks free; his hand flies to his chest as he PANTS for breath. George, too, is PANTING, from interrupted passion.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Forgive me.

CHOPIN

(wrestling his white
handkerchief from his pocket;
stammers)

I--George--I am afraid--we
will...harm...the memory of this
beautiful afternoon.

GEORGE

All right, all right. My poor boy...

She takes the handkerchief from him and wipes his moist face.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Who has taught you to fear love? No
wonder you're choking to death.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Someone's got to show you how to
breathe!

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - A LITTLE LATER - DAY

George's arm is linked in Chopin's as they emerge for a walk
together.

GEORGE

You need light and air, you need to
move about! Don't stay indoors
wrestling with perfection--come
outside, into the sun! Perfection is
flowing all around you!

She playfully knocks his hat off so his face will be exposed to
the sun. As he dives after the hat, LAUGHING, she glances across
the street and suddenly turns pale.

GEORGE'S POV

Crazy with rage, Mallefille is charging across the street, raising his pistol to aim at them.

GEORGE (O. S.)

(screams)

No!

Just at that moment, a carriage passes between them.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Acting quickly, George runs alongside the carriage and hoists herself up on its steps, using it as a moving shield. All the while she screams at Chopin, who is still obviously retrieving his hat.

GEORGE

Run! Run! Chopin!

ANGLE ON CHOPIN

He dusts off his hat and straightens up, looking around for George. All of a sudden, a man's open palm STRIKES him smartly across the cheek.

ANGLE ON GEORGE

She steps off the carriage and sees:

CHOPIN AND MALLEFILLE

Chopin is completely stunned, holding his cheek.

MALLEFILLE

I won't kill you here, as you deserve.
I will kill you honorably, at dawn
tomorrow, with any weapon you prefer.

CHOPIN

(incredulously)

You wish...to fight me?

MALLEFILLE

You have stolen my lady's affections. I
wish the chance to avenge myself.

Chopin recovers his dignity and matches Mallefille's coldly
furious tone.

CHOPIN

I will give you the opportunity,
monsieur, but not the prize.

INT. MOVING CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Chopin is dictating instructions to his valet beside him. Across from him sit George and Eugene.

CHOPIN

...give the Prelude in A Flat to Pleyel, with the dedication that is written at the top, and there is a manuscript in my bureau, the first drawer from the door.

CHOPIN (cont'd)

Burn it without reading it. I want nothing published which is unfinished.

GEORGE

(bursts out)

This is ridiculous! Turn the carriage around, I beg you, go back.

CHOPIN

Run for my hole like a rabbit? I could never respect myself afterward. Nor could you, Aurore.

CHOPIN (cont'd)

(smiling playfully)

I am going to fight at dawn for the
right to see another "dawn."

(continues to valet)

Probst will want to publish the
polonaises but don't let him have
them...

With a GROAN of exasperation George appeals to Eugene beside her.

GEORGE

Eugene--?

EUGENE

(whispers)

He's in love.

EXT. INN - LATER - NIGHT

Chopin and his travelling party alight from the carriage, which
has stopped in front of a small inn in a country suburb of Paris.
They enter the inn.

INT. INN - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

Mallefille and his two SECONDS rise from the table where they've
been drinking when Chopin and the others enter.

CHOPIN

Good day, Monsieur. These are my
seconds...

Both sets of seconds shake hands; Mallefille casts reproving looks
at George. The INN KEEPER enters with a local DOCTOR.

INN KEEPER

The doctor has come, Messieurs.

The doctor bows, then stands by looking at Chopin apprehensively.

MALLEFILLE

Good.

(to Chopin)

The sun will come up soon. Shall we
repair to the field out back?

Chopin nods assent. He and Mallefille lead their party out the
door. The doctor brings up the rear with George.

DOCTOR

(about Chopin; to George)

That man is not well.

EXT. FIELD - PRE-DAWN

Eugene is showing Chopin how to fire the pistol. The latter seems upset the weapon is soiling his white gloves.

CHOPIN

Is there by any chance a cleaner one?

We PAN with George striding over to the Mallefille group.

GEORGE

(takes Mallefille aside)

Don't hurt him. Aim at the clouds.

MALLEFILLE

Your friend is not much more than a cloud himself.

GEORGE

I'll come back to you. I'll never see him again. Just stop these silly heroics.

MALLEFILLE

(with grim enjoyment)

You have placed me in an impossible position. All I have left is a show of strength. Besides, women like that sort

of thing. You could never love a man,
George, who wasn't manly.

MALLEFILLE (cont'd)

(looks toward Chopin)

I can see that poor devil knows it,
too. You can't blame us for trying to
win your heart.

GEORGE

ARE YOU INSANE?!

MALLEFILLE

(ruefully notes her outfit)

Pretty dress.

CENTER FIELD - ANGLE ON MALLEFILLE AND CHOPIN - LATER - DAWN

Mallefille and Chopin are positioned back to back, their pistols
raised. Chopin, cool until this moment, starts to tremble
drastically. The color drains from his face.

ANOTHER ANGLE

At the SIGNAL, the two men begin to pace apart. The revolver in Chopin's hand shakes; he is hyperventilating. Another five steps, and his legs fail him. His eyes roll up in his head.

ANOTHER ANGLE

George, standing with Eugene and the doctor, sees Chopin crumple to the ground. She dashes forward. Mallefille, oblivious to the composer's collapse, keeps measuring out his paces. George runs to Chopin and snatches the gun from his limp hand.

ANGLE ON MALLEFILLE

He takes his last step, stops, and wheels around, his revolver stretched out and aimed at:

MALLEFILLE

(stops, astounded)

GEORGE?

ANGLE ON GEORGE- MALLEFILLE'S POV

BANG! George, standing over Chopin's body, fires her pistol at Mallefille.

ANGLE ON MALLEFILLE

The shot plunges into the shoulder of his arm holding the gun. He drops his weapon, clutches the bloody wound, GASPING with pain, staring in disbelief at his adversary.

MALLEFILLE

GEORGE!

ANOTHER ANGLE

The doctor runs forward to help Mallefille. George grabs him by the coat as he passes, and drags him over to Chopin.

GEORGE

Where are you going? This man has
fainted!

DOCTOR

(points to Mallefille)

But--that man is wounded!

GEORGE

Too bad. Come, help us lift him.

The bewildered doctor helps Eugene and the valet to lift Chopin and carry him away, with George trotting alongside. Mallefille, outraged, is left alone in the field with his seconds.

MALLEFILLE

(shouts)

Come back! What about me?

INT. INN - MINUTES LATER - DAY

The innkeeper is glued to the window with his WIFE.

INNKEEPER

I knew it! It's the frail one.

He rushes to open the door as Eugene and the valet and the doctor BURST in with Chopin's prostrate body.

INNKEEPER

My God, is he dead?

GEORGE

(entering)

I hope the damp hasn't killed him.
Quick, show us your finest room,
please.

WIFE

I have one ready.

She escorts the gentlemen with their load upstairs. George follows.

INNKEEPER

(to himself)

The damp...?

He goes to the window again and peers out.

ANGLE THROUGH WINDOW - INNKEEPER'S POV

Mallefille, leaning on the shoulders of his seconds, hobbles toward the inn.

UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR & STAIRS - LATER

George, Eugene, the valet, and the doctor come out of Chopin's room, closing the door behind them. George and the doctor start first down the stairs.

DOCTOR

Don't let him move for a while after he wakes up, and give him milk only when he does.

GROUND FLOOR

They arrive at the foot of the stairs to find Mallefille, nursing a brandy and his shoulder, with his seconds.

GEORGE

Thank you, doctor...

(gestures contemptuously to
Mallefille)

And now I suppose you'd best have a
look at this rump.

The doctor goes to examine Mallefille's wound.

MALLEFILLE

(hoarsely; to George)

You've humiliated me.

GEORGE

Good. Then you will be too embarrassed
to speak of this to anyone. No one must
know what happened.

(to his seconds)

Gentlemen, do I have your word?

The seconds glance at each other, at Mallefille, then nod.

GEORGE (cont'd)

(to inn keeper)

And you, monsieur?

(he nods)

MALLEFILLE

After so many years together, how could
you--in cold blood--?

GEORGE

It was easy. You are a menace to the
future of art.

EXT. INN - LATER - DAY

Mallefille and his seconds are boarding their carriage in the
background. In the foreground, George bids goodbye to Eugene in
front of a second carriage.

GEORGE

Don't look so concerned. I will take
care of our angel now.

EUGENE

(amused)

Only, for his sake, try not to be so
exciting, George.

(climbs inside carriage)

Angels are only on loan to us from
above, you know.

GEORGE

(grins)

Go home, paint something dead.

Both carriages leave. George goes inside the inn again.

INT. INN - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - A LITTLE LATER - DAY

George enters quietly. Chopin is still asleep in a bed by the window, his pale features bathed in ethereal morning light. She pauses in front of a bureau, and grazes her fingers over the soft fabric of his hat; she lifts his immaculate white gloves to her face and presses them against her cheek. The mirror on the bureau reflects her expression of tender triumph. Then his voice sounds faintly from the bed.

CHOPIN

Aurore?

She goes quickly to his bedside and leans over him.

GEORGE

Yes...

He smiles happily but feebly at the sight of her face above him.

CHOPIN

I feel so weak...Have I been wounded?

GEORGE

Oh no, on the contrary, you wounded him. And in his shooting arm, too. He never even had time to fire. It was a brilliant fight.

Chopin receives this news ambivalently--not to believe in it would mean not to believe in her, after all, and when he looks into her eyes everything seems possible.

CHOPIN

And then...I fell?

(ashamed)

I suppose I swooned away like a woman.

GEORGE

Well, you were overcome--by--the violence of what you'd done. You are a sensitive man.

CHOPIN

It was very difficult. I remember the
gun was shaking so...

She leans down closer and gathers his hands in hers.

GEORGE

You see, you are stronger than you
knew. And here I thought you needed
me....

CHOPIN

But I do need you.

He presses his lips fervently to her hand, raises his face, stares
into her eyes again. She waits for him to kiss her. A beat.
Another beat. No, he seems content with the moment just as it is.
She hands him a glass of milk from his bedside.

GEORGE

Drink your milk.

He drinks, gazing at her.

CHOPIN

Where are the others?

GEORGE

They've all gone.

Suddenly nervous, he gets off the bed, crosses to the bureau to check the condition of his hat and gloves.

CHOPIN

Gone? But how will we get back to Paris?

GEORGE

Why don't we stay here for a few days?
It's peaceful...it's discreet.

He receives her meaning and turns, at a loss for words, with a look of dread.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Chopin...do you love me?

He looks at her piteously.

CHOPIN

God help me, I do. You are superb.

She runs to him, flings her arms around him. He staggers, as she kisses him wildly. He plants soft, tentative kisses on her hair,

and begins to shake. She is loosening her blouse with one hand, then fumbling open his shirt. She nips the pale skin of his chest. He gives a MOAN and pushes her away.

GEORGE

(clenching her fists)

What--is--wrong?

Her frustration verges on fury. She sweeps her arm out to the nightstand and sends a basin CLATTERING onto the floor. The violence of the noise upsets him; he sits on the bed, holding his temples.

CHOPIN

I am frightened.

George swiftly controls her exasperation and goes to sit beside him.

GEORGE

Of me?

CHOPIN

(haltingly)

Certain acts are...unsuitable--
unseemly---

GEORGE

Chopin, it's an act of love! It's
the divine mystery itself.

CHOPIN

(smiles ruefully)

You must think I am inexperienced. I
assure you, I was baptized in the
brothels when I first arrived in Paris.
But you see, darling, I am so ill, and
have been for so long, my body is such
a great disappointment to me, I've
already said goodbye to it. I'm...not
really in it anymore. I feel safer
floating around...in--in music. And if
I should come back inside this
miserable collection of bones I'm
afraid it would collapse altogether.
Forgive me, I am very ashamed.

George is very moved, and ashamed herself.

GEORGE

No, forgive me. I am a fraud, you know.
"Divine mystery"--ha! I've never
experienced it with any man. Always had
disastrous relationships. I can never
seem to stay in love.

CHOPIN

Why?

GEORGE

I don't know. I think...I want too
much.

(smiles)

Except when I hear you play, and when
I'm around you....Look. I simply want
to be with you. The rest doesn't
matter, really. Do you think we could
just...be
together? Like this?

CHOPIN

(uncertainly)

Yes...

She stands with a little sigh of victory.

GEORGE

I have at last heard yes! Then that's
enough, and I'm happy...

Well. Shall we go back to Paris?

She goes to the bureau to fetch his hat and gloves. When she turns back, Chopin is suddenly on his feet, holding her to him so tightly she GASPS with surprise. He is shaking again, but this time from the release of passion. He kisses her deeply, then slowly undresses her. The hat and gloves fall to the floor.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - SEQUENCE OF SHOTS W/ MUSIC - DAY

We spend a day with George and Chopin in the country. The dreamy, rapturous music we hear is the "Romanze" movement of Chopin's E Minor Concerto, written in his youth.

They walk through a meadow. George frisks ahead, whacking at the tall grass with a stick, swinging her arms lustily, elated by love and conquest. Chopin picks his way gingerly along, tilting his hat at shade his face from the sun.

She climbs up some steep rocks. He tries to follow, then good-naturedly gives up. He brushes the soil from his elegant clothes and takes another path.

She comes running pell-mell down a hill to meet him. She presents him with a lavish bouquet of wildflowers. She helps him across a stream.

She tosses his hat away into a cow pasture. She sits him down on a rock and opens the neck of his shirt, stands behind him and tilts his face up with her hands to receive the sun.

They are both astride a horse bareback; George encircles Chopin firmly with her arms and keeps him from sliding off when the horse breaks into a canter, heading back for the inn.

INT. INN - LATER - NIGHT

MUSIC CONTINUES. George and Chopin have dinner downstairs at the inn. While wolfing down a hearty meal herself, George heaps Chopin's plate and exhorts him to eat. He tries to oblige, gazing blissfully into her eyes; he is rosier than we have ever seen him, dazed by sunburn and the wine she keeps sloshing into his glass.

He gets up abruptly, takes her hand and raises her to her feet. He leads her up the stairs to their bedroom.

BEDROOM - LATER

They make love.

LATER

She watches over her beautiful prize as he sleeps....

INT. FRANZ & MARIE'S APARTMENT - RECEPTION - MONTHS LATER - DAY

Dusty from travel, wardrobe trunks and bundles of music are stacked against the wall. Marie's raised VOICE is heard indistinctly through the closed door to the salon. Sophie the maid is trying to listen, but all three of Franz and Marie's children are CRYING bitterly at her feet.

Sophie jumps away from the door as it opens abruptly and Marie sticks her head out.

MARIE

(savagely)

Sophie! Will you please take them for a walk, throw them in the Seine, I don't care!

Marie SLAMS the door shut again.

PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Franz winces at the door slam. Still wearing his travel coat, he is lounging wearily on the divan: it is hard to tell whether he has just arrived or is departing again. Clearly he wishes it were the latter, as he watches Marie pace around like a cage-crazed panther in front of him.

FRANZ

So, George has caught another butterfly. Well, after all, darling, why shouldn't he fall in love with her?

MARIE

He hasn't fallen in love with her --he has succumbed to her! The poor man was simply standing there, nobody warned him, and--

MARIE (cont'd)

and he was crushed under her wheels!
It's not too late. You must go over at once and talk to him...

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - LATER - DAY

Franz and Marie approach Chopin's building. Just when Marie raises her parasol to knock at the door, it opens, and a WORKMAN comes out, carrying a heavy trunk to a carriage parked in front. Franz

and Marie step aside. As they turn back to go in, a MESSENGER carrying hat boxes slips by them.

INT. CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - A MINUTE LATER - DAY

Chopin, dressed for travel, finishes packing manuscripts in a trunk and SHUTS it. The valet enters and shows Chopin the boxes. He lifts the lids of each to inspect the hats inside.

CHOPIN

Good, they arrived in time. Now I can
be off--

He looks up in surprise as Franz and Marie enter through the open door.

CHOPIN (cont'd)

(consternated)

Franz! I didn't know you were back...

(kisses Franz and bows

cautiously to Marie)

Countess...

MARIE

You're going out?

She notes his travelling costume, the boxes, the trunk, and the room, which is uncharacteristically chaotic. Franz wanders over to the piano.

CHOPIN

Yes, I'm just leaving.

Franz notices a newly published opus on the piano.

FRANZ

The Etudes! Were they just published? I didn't know. Let's have a listen.

Franz sits and begins to play an ETUDE from the first page of the album.

CHOPIN

(to Valet, who is still holding
hat boxes)

Take those downstairs, and this trunk.

The valet shoulders the trunk and exits. Chopin pulls on his white gloves.

MARIE

(calls over MUSIC)

Franz...Chopin is going out.

(to Chopin)

We'll just come along with you. That
will give us a chance to talk.

CHOPIN

Er...I am going to meet Madame Sand.

FRANZ

(referring to MUSIC as he
plays)

This is wonderful, old boy.

CHOPIN

You play it better than I.

MARIE

(to Chopin)

You are going on a trip?

(he looks at the floor)

FRANZ.

She glares at Franz, who STOPS playing.

MARIE (cont'd)

Chopin is going to meet Madame Sand, he
says.

(to Chopin)

Franz thinks you are making a mistake with her. He is in a position to caution you. He once had his own experience with George--

FRANZ

(sharply)

Marie, I told you nothing happened.

MARIE

So you love to claim.

(to Chopin)

You must listen to him, because one way or another Franz knows exactly who she is.

GEORGE

(appears in doorway)

I've always wanted to know.

Dressed for travel in a man's redingote, trousers, and boots, George has entered behind Marie, who freezes. Franz, over at the

piano, is more interested in something he has just noticed on the title page of the album of Etudes.

FRANZ

(looks stonily at Marie)

See here, darling, Chopin has dedicated the Etudes to you.

MARIE

To me?

FRANZ

(with thick sarcasm)

This is a tremendous honor. How did you deserve it, I wonder.

CHOPIN

(carefully)

Marie is an angel of inspiration.

A beat. Marie looks frantically from one face to another, from Franz' accusatory scowl, to Chopin's discreetly downcast eyes, to George's chilly smile of amusement.

GEORGE

(takes Chopin's arm)

How good to see you, Franz. You should come back to Paris more often. We all get into such trouble when you are away.

She turns Chopin toward the door.

MARIE

(calls after George hoarsely)

Where are you taking him?

George and Chopin exit. Marie turns back to Franz, who simply folds his arms and stares at her with building rage.

FRANZ

For a long time now, I have blamed myself for your suffering and unhappiness. When I think of the music I might have written--

(gestures to "Etudes")

--if not for the guilt which has murdered my vitality all these years--but Chopin has seen a happier side of you, it seems.

MARIE

(sputters)

You can't think that I--that he and I--
!

INT. CARRIAGE - SECONDS LATER - DAY

Chopin and George get into the carriage. Maurice and Solange are sitting inside, waiting.

CHOPIN

That was a nasty business in there. I'm not sure it was such a good idea of yours, dedicating the Etudes to her.

GEORGE

(in high spirits)

Why not? We're in love, we can afford to be generous.

INT. CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Marie races to the window, looking down at the street and the carriage laden with baggage.

MARIE

They're running away together. It's a catastrophe!

FRANZ

It sounds like fun to me.

MARIE

Oh, I see. Ever the wily peasant, you are. With Chopin out of Paris, your music no longer suffers the comparison.

In a single bound, he is off the piano stool and clutching her throat, his face contorted with rage.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS - DAY

We can hear Marie and Franz YELLING at each other from within the building. The carriage moves off.

INT. MOVING CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Chopin and George look at each other as the SHOUTING O. S. FADES.

GEORGE

(sighs)

It's unbelievable! We're off! We'll have sun and sky and sea as you've

never seen, darling, Majorca is the most enchanted place on earth and you will bake that silly cold right out of your lungs in no time. Think of it! Spain!

Solange catches Maurice's eye. They exchange wicked smiles.

SOLANGE

Pirates.

MAURICE

Pirates!

EXT. CHOPIN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Franz storms out of the building, donning his hat. He strides away alone, as Marie bursts out the door, screaming after him.

MARIE

Don't you understand? She'll kill him!

SHE'LL KILL HIM!!

EXT. MOVING CARRIAGE - OUTSIDE PARIS - LATER - DAY

We are MOVING alongside the carriage. A hand in an immaculate white glove appears in the window and slides it SHUT.

In the next instant, a woman's hand is seen, firmly sliding it back OPEN. We hear a COUGH from inside the carriage.

The vehicle turns away from the camera, which now PAUSES to observe the vehicle heading for the horizon, diminishing to a small lurching box in the center of the screen. The sound FADES until all we hear is: COUGH. COUGH. COUGH.

THE END