

Lovers of the Enlightenment: Emilie & Voltaire

A drama in two acts
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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English, Film, and Theatre

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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“Truth in the theatre is always on the move.... In everyday life, ‘if’ is a fiction, in the theatre ‘if’ is an experiment. In everyday life, ‘if’ is an evasion, in the theatre ‘if’ is the truth. When we are persuaded to believe in this truth, then the theatre and life are one” (Brook 140-141).

Preface:

Lovers of the Enlightenment follows a longstanding passion of mine to explore the lives of historical female figures through dramatic narratives. Some, like Bette Davis, have been well known. Others, like Mata Hari, have been largely misunderstood, in which case I have done extensive research and tried to present them in a balanced way, representing what I believe to be the truth about their motives and actions. Then there are those, like Harriet Bosse, the third wife of playwright August Strindberg, who were well known in their own lifetimes, before being relegated to a footnote in their more famous partners’ biographies.

Emilie du Châtelet was such a woman. Until recently, history remembered her only as the mistress of Voltaire, one of the most famous figures of the French Enlightenment. Within two generations of her death, her work was attributed to the students of her writings.

Biographers have now discovered that she was a well-educated member of an elite family. Although she did what was expected of a young woman of her class, marrying well and producing children before taking on lovers, she also kept up with her education, including advanced studies in mathematics. To this day, hers is the definitive French translation of Newton’s work, *Principia Mathematica*.

Although this passion of using historical female figures as subject material speaks to my desire to explore their lives and introduce them to modern audiences, it also presents me with certain playwriting challenges to explore.

The first issue is the very idea of creating a play surrounding the life of another person. Why write a play about Emilie? Are her biographies not sufficient as sources to present to a new generation? Emilie is now part of a dozen or so such works. Obviously, their writers chose to represent her in this way, presenting the ‘truth’ about her life, as their research exposed it. Without them, I myself would not have been introduced to her. As a creative writer, I wish to bring her to life, lifting her off the page and creating a multidimensional character from the facts that are known to us. I believe that the theatrical form is the perfect tool for this purpose. A novel would be able to explore her inner life, to be sure, but in a play, an actress is able to breathe life into this complex person and provide a visual expansion of the written version of her. A live theatre audience can share in the character’s discoveries as she develops over the course of the narrative. While a film audience might also participate in this way, I believe that live theatre provides a more immediate, visceral experience for both the performer and the audience. Brook, in the final chapter, *Immediate Theatre*, of his book, *The Empty Space*, captures what is important for me in writing for theatre, instead of film:

“The cinema flashes on to a screen images from the past.

As this is what the mind does to itself all through life, the cinema seems intimately real. Of course, it is nothing of the sort – it is a satisfying and enjoyable extension of the unreality of everyday perception. The theatre, on the other hand, always asserts

itself in the present. This is what can make it more real than the normal stream of consciousness” (99).

New discoveries can be made in each performance of the play, truly bringing the character to life. “The theatre is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, can never be made the same way twice” (Artaud 75). The audience and actors work with each other. “The audience assists the actor, and at the same time for the audience itself assistance comes back from the stage” (Brook 140).

In presenting the life of Emilie on the stage the question becomes, what is the truth? Is it important to present only the facts that have been uncovered about her life and work? How much liberty, or creative license should I allow myself in telling her story? Part of my fascination in using historical figures in my plays is fully exploring their lives, examining the choices they made in the light of the times and circumstances in which they lived. I do not wish to use them simply as inspiration for my work, but also explore who they really were. However, it is still a work of fiction, and has to work dramatically. It was important that I again studied the words of Bazin, as he talks of Bresson’s adaptation of a novel for his film, *The Country Priest*. In the same way that Bresson had to take the novel and make it work on screen, I have taken history and attempted to make it work on stage. Like Bresson, I tried to remain faithful to the characters, but as Bazin posits, “Literal translations are not the faithful ones... A character on the screen and the same character as evoked by the novelist are not identical” (127). Some of the dialogue of my play is taken from letters actually written by the real life historical figures. When using these texts, I needed to place the words in a context and create dialogues that could be woven naturally around the words they left behind. The characteristics of the

individuals, however, are largely my own invention. Although there was much I could glean from the words they wrote, there were many pieces to be filled in. It was my choice to have them behave as they do. For example, there is no record of Voltaire ever considering a duel, but who is to say what he communicated to Emilie behind closed doors? To paraphrase what Aristotle is said to have intoned, ‘History is what happened. Drama is what may have happened’ (Snider, 7). This has allowed me to alter the outcome of some circumstances in the lives of these known figures, to change their perceptions of some situations. For example, Emilie probably did not end her relationship with Saint Lambert just before she died, but it seemed to be a choice she could plausibly have made within the context of everything that transpired before that moment. In the end, what is important to me is that while I have remained faithful to the important aspects of her life, and what happened to her along the way, I have also attempted to make her an interesting presence in this drama.

An additional challenge that excited me in the writing of this play was creating a believable 18th century world, while making it accessible and engaging for a modern audience. Drawing on plays like Christopher Hampton’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, for inspiration, I attempted to capture the essence of court life, with its romantic intrigue and machinations. However, unlike that drama, the life of Emilie du Châtelet was also rich with her work; scientific discoveries, and philosophies of education, religion and life. It was important to present her intellect and make it stand out as being unusual for a woman of her time in history.

Other plays that deal with the world of ideas, while maintaining their human interest and character’s inner lives provided an interesting study. The play *Red*, by John

Logan, dramatizing the life and work of visual artist Mark Rothko, manages to capture the creation of art and the portrait of the artist, without compromising strong characterization or turning it into a lecture on his creative process and ideas. This was challenging in my portrayal of Emilie and Voltaire, whose passion rested, in large measure, in their exchange of ideas. My attempt was to bring out these ideas while maintaining a natural conversational style in the communication. In *Red*, the actual creation of the art provided active staging possibilities, while his ideas were integrated into dialogue that never seemed didactic or forced. Emilie's act of creation involved sitting at a desk and writing, an inherently less active physical pursuit. The resulting challenge was to keep a relatively static stage alive and interesting with the subtlety of the characters' interactions and dialogue. It had to be as natural as possible, while retaining its 18th century sense of restraint and courtly composure. The anonymous short story, *The Voluptuous Night*, in a collection of Victorian Tales, proved to be very useful in setting the tone of the dialogue in *Lovers of the Enlightenment*.

The intellectual ideas expressed by Emilie and Voltaire had to flow from the dialogue naturally without falling into academic discourse that would lose an audience. A play that is, in my opinion, only moderately successful in this regard is Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, dealing with the walk that history tells us occurred between the WWII physicists, Heisenberg and Bohr. The question of what they might have talked about is intriguing. Why did Heisenberg visit Bohr? What did he want to say to him? *Copenhagen* has a non-linear structure, redoing scenes with alternate outcomes and moving freely through time. This was an effective strategy when highlighting ideas over plot and did assist in creating some tension. The film version, directed by Howard Davies, was, for

me, more successful in creating a sense of urgency and interest than the play. Given the opportunity for close-ups and dramatic locations and shot set-ups, the movie was able to carry the weight of the dialogue. This seemed more difficult to maintain on stage, as the audience had a less intimate connection with the characters than the film could provide. Although the staging was effective in the production I viewed at Prairie Theatre Exchange, in Winnipeg in 2005, it was difficult to engage with the somewhat esoteric dialogue, which seemed very much in service of the ideas before the relationships. I took this lesson and applied it to *Emilie and Voltaire*, striving for a balance between the ideas and relationships. Both of them took on young lovers in addition to their primary relationship, with *Emilie* becoming pregnant with Saint Lambert. He was also the lover of *Emilie's* friend, who was the official mistress of the king. *Emily* also had a husband who believed he was the father of her child. All told, there are plenty of possible interactions within the various combinations and permutations of these relationships to infuse the play with human drama.

Emilie's academic and intellectual brilliance was part of her private and public lives. She published several books and pamphlets, and wrote many letters on various subjects to academics in other European countries, as well as in France. While I have attempted to give audiences a glimpse into this part of her world, I did not wish to overwhelm them with scientific and mathematical jargon and facts. They are suggested in numerous places throughout the text, but the play is primarily about her relationships. Her intellect plays a part in them, but is not the sole aspect of any one relationship, save the one she had with her tutor, Clairaut, which takes place off stage. I had never considered bringing him into the play. Perhaps doing so would have made the

brilliance of her mind more apparent, but I have not done so because I have less interest in her mathematical wizardry than her relationships, and therefore assume that the audience will be equally predisposed. I found myself much less interested in the scientific theory in the play, *Copenhagen* than in the relationships, and this coloured my handling of Emilie's scientific discourse. I have great admiration for her intellectual abilities, however, and want the audience to feel this as well. To achieve this, I found it was best to establish evidence of her intelligence early, then bring it back in small doses throughout the play, rather than have it dominate the dialogue.

The primacy of all of these intertwining relationships is the reason I chose to include seven characters in the play. The play would have lost much of its efficacy as a monologue or simple two-hander. All of these characters are necessary to show the complexity of the relationships Emilie is maintaining at the end of her life. All of them are significant to her, and therefore important to include. Although her extraordinary intellectual pursuits are important to bring into the drama, all her life she followed society's expectations for a woman of her class. She was presented at court, married well, produced children, secured positions for her husband and son, good marriages for her children and managed her husband's many properties. The only time she set all this aside was during her pregnancy, when she was afraid that her life was near its end, and she needed to finish her monumental life's work. Therefore, it is important for me to show her engaged in all of the facets of her life. She was a woman of her time, but speaks to the multifaceted lives of women throughout the ages, including our own century.

The drama that inspired me the most in the final stages of writing this play was Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, a historical fiction containing both compelling characters and

intellectual ideas. This was a beautiful juxtaposition between the modern characters and the historical figures they were researching in the same location. *Arcadia* has a linear structure within the two separate worlds presented, past and present. This served the play very well, allowing us to easily follow both worlds and their developments in tandem. The two worlds effectively intersected at the close of the play. It led me to muse that it would be interesting to explore the addition of a modern guide leading tourists through the rooms once occupied by Emilie and Voltaire. However, at this time, the play is not about modern characters discovering some truth about the lives and work of these intellectual titans. I want these characters to speak for themselves.

I keep the action of the play only in the present of the characters' lives, from the late spring of 1748 to Emilie's death on September 10, 1749 at the age of forty-two. In relaying this linear narrative, I was able to allow some structural elements of the drama to serve the story. For example, the play opens with a 'play within a play': Emilie and her lover are performing a love scene written and applauded by Voltaire, which mirrors the real love scene interrupted by Voltaire. This mirrors a much later scene, when Saint Lambert and Emilie are again reading parts written by Voltaire. This time the purpose of Voltaire's text is to foreshadow the imminent death of Emilie. Voltaire's story of the note found in the garden, which when torn in half contained a much different message, is mirrored by the note that Saint Lambert writes to Catherine. Emilie reads the half of the four-line poem that seems innocent until the complete poem is known, while the torn poem in the story is extremely libelous until read in its entirety. Mirroring is also utilized in some of the dialogue. Emilie must convince Saint Lambert that Voltaire is worth making a friend of, and keeping as a mentor. She must then convince Voltaire that Saint

Lambert desires this relationship. Mirroring actions occur as well. In the carriage scene, Emilie rubs Voltaire's neck. Later in her study, Voltaire does the same for her. It is meant to show a mutually caring relationship, no matter what is going on, and how much they argue.

I have used some of Voltaire's texts to inform the motivations and desires of the characters, sometimes using mirroring and foreshadowing or irony in their placement. For example, in the first scene, in the 'play within a play', Saint Lambert plays a character that declares his love for Emilie's character in much the same way that Emilie later declares hers for Saint Lambert. She waits for him to return it, just as his character waits for hers. Of course, Saint Lambert is not capable of loving Emilie that completely. Their on-stage love scene, however, does foreshadow the 'lust' scene following the public one in court.

Much of what we know of these historical figures is through the letters that they wrote. The art of letter writing was very much alive at this time in history, as it was the only way to communicate at a distance. As such, it was important to me to include the act of writing letters in the play. This structural component served the story of the play as well. For example, having Voltaire and Emilie write letters to each other on stage, each in their own spaces, allowed for a heated conversation to take place with each of them speaking their minds to the other without any knowledge of how their words were being received. The effect is to maintain the integrity of the art of letter writing while providing conflict to the scene. This technique is mirrored in Act Two, between Emilie and Saint Lambert.

An inspiration for using letters as a structural device came from A. R. Gurney's *Love Letters*, a play told entirely through letters. Letters are frequently employed in the structure of *Lovers of the Enlightenment*, acting as a means of communication between characters who were not in the same geographical location. At times, this highlighted the difficulty the characters' experienced in maintaining relationships when physically apart. At other times letters also provided a sort of shorthand to move the plot forward, as one character could inform another of some point that would lead the audience into the next scene.

Possibly the largest challenge in the writing of this play was the historical story itself. I attempted to create conflict and tension, character arcs and an interesting plot, all while remaining as true as possible to the historical facts that are known to us. Playwright Vern Thiessen has grappled with this in two of his plays, *Einstein's Gift* and *Lenin's Embalmers*. I felt that the later play was less successful than the former. In *Einstein's Gift* he told the story of the lesser-known Dr. Fritz Haber, but through the perspective of the well-known Albert Einstein. It was quite moving and effective. For *Lenin's Embalmers*, Stalin provided his perspective from beyond the grave. I found much of the play to be too clever for its own good. It was a dark comedy, which did make parts of it engaging, but did not allow for the characters to be filled out as much as they might have been. The two embalmers were in a very difficult position. If they failed, they would be sent to the gulag, or worse, but they were almost unfailingly glib, in order to maintain the comedy. By the time I studied this play, and saw a production of it, I had already worked with Thiessen in a playwrights' colony. I learned about the structure that he liked to use. I found it to be so much in evidence that it distracted from the narrative of the play. I could

see what he was doing with repetitions and set-ups. It became predictable for me. While I have incorporated some reoccurring techniques, like the letter writing, I have attempted to stay away from formulas in terms of the overall structure of the scene order. I did use his technique of building tension in a scene by having characters speak in short staccato rhythms, especially in the last scene in Act 1 that builds to the news of Emilie's pregnancy. However, in terms of overall scene structure, I am more inclined towards remembering what Tompson Highway said about playwriting. He encouraged me to think about the rhythm of a play resembling that of a symphony. He said that if you want to understand playwriting, you need to understand music. The opening of his play, *The Rez Sisters* is a perfect example of what he means by this statement. The play opens with a very lengthy monologue followed by a short burst of rapid dialogue. His goal is to form the play into different movements; with each section creating its own rhythm that is in juxtaposition to the next section. To find variety in the scenes in this way keeps the action alive for the audience.

This is not a play about issues, but that doesn't mean that the drama doesn't contain them. As British playwright, Clare McIntyre wrote in her essay, *Plays by Women*, "I didn't want to write about issues, I wanted them to inform my narrative" (57). For example, the issue of women fighting to get the recognition and opportunities they deserve is inherently part of Emilie's struggle, but she does not overtly fight for it. In her youth she did dress up as a man to gain access to the coffee houses where intellectuals discussed the scientific discoveries and mathematical principles of the day. The café owners knew she was a woman, but did not want to make a scene, so left her alone. She did not do it to push for the right of women to frequent cafes open only to men, but to be

included in the discussions that were important to her. She protests slightly when the King suggests that women should not waste time in academic pursuits, but she saves her polemic for the safety of her friend's company. She understood the dictates of her life and society, and knew how far she could push, and when it was best to hold back. Although in real life she did write on the subject of female rights and education, she did not speak out about these issues in public forums. Modern audiences might want to see her push further, but I am presenting a world as it was, not as we would wish it to be.

Language is the most important structural element in this play. I spent a great deal of time reworking each line for the right rhythm and cadence. One aspect of this was avoiding the use of contractions. This changes the rhythm of the speech and makes all of the dialogue slightly more formal. It was more difficult to find the voice for each character than it would have been in writing a play with modern characters. I tried to keep the sentence structure and choice of words within my stylized sense of the eighteenth century, without having all the characters make the same word and structural choices.

This play came to me first as a character, then as her relationships with other characters. I heard them speak before all else. Dialogue was first and foremost. I saw these characters in dialogue with each other in close-ups, like a film. As the lens of a camera does influence my vision of many of the scenes, I do relate to the ideas put forward by Susan Sontag, in her essay on theatre and film. In 1966, she wrote that, "the staging of many plays is inspired by movies. . . . mainly to tighten up the theatrical experience, to approximate the cinema's absolute control of the flow and location of the audience's attention" (117). While she is speaking of cinematic devices in staging, I

believe her ideas can also reference the writing of drama, in the narrow focus of many of my two-person scenes. They can take place in small spaces, without grand sets, suggestive of close-ups on film. This also speaks to the way many of my scenes are written. Like a film script, I often begin a scene in the middle of the action. Characters often find themselves on-stage, rather than going through the actions that would give every character in the scene an entrance. That is not to say, however, that this play would lend itself very naturally to a film version. Like many dramas for the stage, this play is extremely dialogue heavy, and on film other visual ways would be found to tell much of the story without pages of dialogue taking up each scene.

My basic philosophy of playwriting is simple, and stems from my years of studying design. In the Bauhaus School of Design, from Germany in the first third of the twentieth century, architect theorists believed that form follows function. In design terms, this means that an object or structure might be very beautiful, or esthetically pleasing, but that on its own is not good design. To be considered well designed, something must be useable for its intended purpose. It might also be beautiful, but its functionality had to come first. This led to designs that were simple in line, uncomplicated and without unnecessary flourishes. How this translates into playwriting for me is that the form of my play must work with its intended purpose. The purpose of this play is biographical: to tell the life story of Emilie du Châtelet. It is not complicated. There is no larger purpose that is meant to change the world or dramatically shift people's perceptions of it. I did want to present her in such a way as to allow an audience to understand her, and the people around her, to gain insight into the choices she made. I also wanted to make her world understandable to a modern audience, while retaining the integrity of the period in which

the story is set. A straightforward narrative structure was the 'Bauhaus' choice to make. This is not to say that other choices would not have worked, but they are not the choices that I made at this time. For example, someone's life story could be told from the narrated perspective of another character. It could be told by the character herself after death as a voice-over narration, creating a dreamscape of memories. Documentary style film clips might play from a screen above the heads of the actors during some of the scenes, depicting the environment in which they are speaking; the riots in the streets of Paris in Act Two that Voltaire references, for example. Emilie's story might be told as snippets of ideas and moments in her history through interpretive dance, with Emilie played by an entire troupe of women, each exploring some facet of her life and work. Anything is possible, but for me, at this moment, my idea was to present her story without adornment.

This Bauhaus approach could be carried into the set design for this play. Although locations are given, the story is told through dialogue, with the relationships between the characters of paramount importance. This could be done as easily on a bare stage as on one with sets flying in and out to depict the opulence of the palaces and châteaux inhabited by the characters. As Peter Brook has suggested, in *The Open Door*, "Emptiness in the theatre allows the imagination to fill the gaps. Paradoxically, the less one gives the imagination, the happier it is, because it is a muscle that enjoys playing games" (32).

My Bauhaus philosophy also extends to stage directions: those pesky instructions from the dramatist to the actor, telling her how a passage should be said, or what she is to feel. I believe that the best defense of my conscious lack of stage directions is what Peter Brook had to say on the subject:

Some writers attempt to nail down their meaning and intentions in stage directions and explanations, yet we cannot help being struck by the fact that the best dramatists explain themselves the least. They recognize that further indications will most probably be useless. They recognize that the only way to find the true path to the speaking of a word is through a process that parallels the original creative one (15).

I do recognize that he was using this to illustrate how often trying to perform classical text resulted in 'Deadly Theatre', but it speaks equally well to the creative process necessary to make the playwrights words come alive. Indeed, a performance of my play could result in deadly theatre, as could any text, but in creative hands, it need not be so. If actors and a director explore my text and try to get at the root of the relationships in the play, it could as well result in 'Immediate Theatre', alive and breathing in the moment.

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LOVERS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT:

Emilie & Voltaire

a drama in two acts

By Talia Pura

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CHARACTERS

EMILIE DU CHÂTELET, 42

VOLTAIRE, 54. Emilie's lover from 1734 to 1747.

MARQUIS DU CHÂTELET, 53. Emilie's husband.

JEAN-FRANCOIS SAINT-LAMBERT, 32. Emilie's lover, Catherine's ex-lover.

CATHERINE DE BOUFFLERS, 38. King Stanislas' official mistress, Saint-Lambert's former mistress. Emilie's friend.

KING STANISLAS, 71. The former king of Poland, now in Lunéville, as Duke of Lorraine; father of the Queen of France (wife of Louis XV).

MARIE-LOUISE MIGNOT. MME DENIS, 28. Voltaire's niece and recently his mistress.

MAIDS, LADIES-IN-WAITING, COURTESANS, BUTLERS – optional

The roles of the Marquis and King Stanislas can be doubled, as can Catherine and Marie-Louise.

TIME: Late spring, 1748 - September 10, 1749

ACT I

Prologue - with music.

The court at Lunéville.

(EMILIE enters, crosses the stage and approaches a spot on the set, near center, that contains a set piece that is perfect for hiding a note in. It could be a piece of furniture, a fountain or a statue, or simply a plant. She makes sure she is alone, goes to the spot, and retrieves a note. She reads it, smiles and takes another note from her pocket or sleeve, which she puts in its place. She exits. CATHERINE enters on the arm of King STANISLAS. As they stroll and chat, she places a note in another location. STANISLAS does not see her do it. St-Lambert enters, bows to them, they exit. He collects notes from both locations, placing one for EMILIE, leaving CATHERINE's spot empty. EMILIE enters on the arm of VOLTAIRE. Without his knowledge, she picks up the note that ST.-LAMBERT has left for her. STANISLAS and CATHERINE cross the stage again. If the stage is large enough, they could have stayed on stage throughout, walking in another part of the garden.)

Scene 1

(EMILIE and ST.-LAMBERT perform a love scene, written by VOLTAIRE, for the court of King STANISLAS at Lunéville. Their gestures are grand and stylized. They perform on a slightly raised area of the stage. Although clearly playing roles, they enjoy finding opportunities to be very close together, and kiss at the end with ST.-LAMBERT sweeping EMILIE into an elaborate dip.)

ST.-LAMBERT (as Orosmane)

I love you, dear Zaire, and from your soul await
A love like mine, as sincere, as intense, as great.
In truth, my heart burns with the gift of Cupid's touch.
I think I would despair were I not lov'd as much.

EMILIE (as Zaire)

You, sir, despair? What bliss to know that from the start
You saw the tenderness for you which fills my heart;

ST.-LAMBERT: (as Orosmane)

The passions you ignite, here, no one could smother.
I want to worship, adore, love like no other.
May the gods, I beg! reveal it is their design
That your affection for me be as near to mine.

EMILIE (as Zaire)

And if your happiness could in the smallest way
Be caused by the love you inspire, I humbly say
That the dear and precious names of spouse and lover
Are sacred to us both. Like a dove does hover
In the air, so in my heart floats the certainty
I adore you, my hero! Oh! Felicity!

(ST. LAMBERT holds EMILIE in a dip, with a long kiss, as King STANISLAS, VOLTAIRE and CATHERINE applaud, helping the audience to realize they have seen a 'play within a play'. ST.-LAMBERT and EMILIE stand, holding hands, and take a bow.)

STANISLAS

(Standing from his chair.)

Wonderful. Monsieur Voltaire, your skill as the master of words is matched only by the rendering of them by the delightful Emilie Du Châtelet.

EMILIE

(Stepping off the 'stage' to curtsy in front of him.)

Thank you, Your Majesty.

VOLTAIRE

Your Majesty has an excellent taste for passionate verse.

ST.-LAMBERT

(Still on the 'stage'.)

My Lord. I too have written something for you –

(No one pays attention.)

STANISLAS

What else have you written, Voltaire? Have you a new play or story from which to read?

(To the women.)

I would desire to hear something else written by our noble visitor.

VOLTAIRE

If it would please your Majesty, I have a new story concerning a man named Zadig.

EMILIE

Oh yes, do read that one. It is a wonderful story.

(VOLTAIRE takes his place on the 'stage'. ST.-LAMBERT relinquishes it to him.)

VOLTAIRE

Zadig is on a quest for happiness. His enemy, Arimazes, whose nickname in Babylon was Green Eyes, determined to ruin Zadig, because he was called, Zadig the Happy. Opportunities for making mischief are found a hundred times a day, but the chance of doing a good turn comes but once a year.

STANISLAS

That is generally true.

VOLTAIRE

Green Eyes found Zadig walking in his garden with a lady and two friends. The conversation turned to the war, recently won by the king of Babylon, where upon Zadig took his notebook and wrote, very quickly, a verse of four lines in praise of the king. He handed it to the lady. His friends begged him to allow them to see it as well, but modesty, or rather self-respect, forbade. He knows, of course, that impromptu verse has no value except for those in whose honour they have been written.

CATHERINE

(Aside, to Saint-Lambert.)

I could say as much of some verses penned with a great deal of thought and planning.

ST.-LAMBERT

They came from my heart, though you need not have accepted them if they caused offence.

CATHERINE

No need for such sensitivity when you know I jest.

VOLTAIRE

And so, Zadig tore the page in half and threw the two pieces into a rose bush, where it was useless to look for them. Just then a shower of rain drove the party into the house. Green Eyes stayed behind and searched until he found one half of the page. Without the full sheet, the poem became a quatrain, which greatly libeled the King. It read:

By most abandoned riot
Confirmed upon the throne,
In times of public quiet
He is the foe alone.

STANISLAS

Most libelous, to be sure, but interesting verse, nonetheless.

VOLTAIRE

Your ear is finely tuned for a quick turn of phrase.

ST.-LAMBERT

The phrase has turned as quickly as the ear can comprehend its meaning.

(EMILIE is the only one who appreciates this wit. No one else seems to notice it at all.)

EMILIE (To VOLTAIRE)

(Covering her reaction to ST.-LAMBERT)

Please, do go on.

VOLTAIRE

Green Eyes was happy for the first time in his life. Exalting in his malevolent triumph, the miscreant sent the lampoon to the King himself. I will spare you all the cruel details. Suffice it to say, Zadig and his friends were about to face execution when the parrot of the King chanced to find the other half of the verse and the King, on reading the completed verse, pardoned Zadig and his friends.

STANISLAS

And what was the complete verse?

VOLTAIRE

It read as follows:

By most abandoned riot, the land has been distressed;
Confirmed upon the throne, the king has now no peer.
In times of public quiet Love only makes unrest;
He is the foe alone whom now we need to fear.

STANISLAS

Ah, quite different in meaning, I dare say.

EMILIE

One should always seek the full story to learn the truth.

ST.-LAMBERT

That is a most affecting verse.

VOLTAIRE

(Stepping off the 'stage'.)

Admirable perspicacity in one so young.

ST.-LAMBERT

Thank you, Sir. You are most kind to note it.

VOLTAIRE

A discerning palette for language is certainly essential in a poet.

ST.-LAMBERT

I am ever in debt for your tutelage.

CATHERINE

And so, Zadig and his lady lived a long and peaceful life.

VOLTAIRE

One might think so, but no, not at all. This is only the first of many, many trials and tribulations suffered by this good man.

CATHERINE

Why must the good suffer?

VOLTAIRE

The good always suffer at the hands of the corrupt.

EMILIE

Whether the corrupt seek to cause harm, or are merely neglectful, the result is the same.

STANISLAS

And what have you been musing over lately, my dear?

VOLTAIRE

It is doubtful that the words of the fair Emilie would please your court today, your Majesty.

STANISLAS

And why might that be?

EMILIE (To VOLTAIRE.)

Indeed. Perhaps you might explain why you would be so disdainful.

VOLTAIRE

Brilliant though she may be in interpreting the experiments of Newton, her last publication saw her putting pen to praise of Leibnitz.

EMILIE

I did not praise him, but merely sought to explain him.

VOLTAIRE

Time unwisely spent.

EMILIE

Leibniz has much to commend him in the study of the origin of matter.

VOLTAIRE

We might as well give ink to Descartes as to pay homage to the words of Leibnitz.

EMILIE

You misconstrue my intent entirely, Dear Heart. I pay him no homage. ... I merely examine his studies in the light of other calculations.

VOLTAIRE

It is simply a waste of time to study anything that contradicts or disagrees with Newton.

EMILIE

I do not believe that Leibnitz contradicts Newton, but rather that he complements him.

VOLTAIRE

To fritter away one's time with speculative metaphysics –

EMILIE

To quote your published letter! I had not expected a critique so harshly phrased from one who claims to love me.

VOLTAIRE

The critique was never personal.

EMILIE (Dismissing him.)

The technical developments in celestial mechanics that I have witnessed and documented require a thorough integration of the mathematical style of Leibnitz. Indeed, Newton's physical system of universal gravitation requires his theoretical mechanics.

(Switching to a humorous tone.)

Are you suggesting that there is simply no excuse for reading Leibnitz, as he is German, and therefore guilty of being humourless and didactic? Humourless he may be, but all scientific inquiry has something of worth to be disseminated. It does not matter if its origin is French, German or British.

VOLTAIRE

The fact of his origins may inform his style, but it is his content with which I take exception.

(Looking around at the others present, VOLTAIRE realizes that this is not the time or place for an argument, and cuts himself off abruptly.)

Of course, it must be said that my Emilie does master the most intricate of the propositions that Leibnitz propounded and is able to elucidate them with greater clarity and brilliance than he himself was ever capable of exhibiting.

EMILIE (With continued good-humour.)

Thank you.

VOLTAIRE (aside to EMILIE)

The critique never strayed from the content of the dissertation.

EMILIE

Even so.

VOLTAIRE

No personal slight was ever intended.

EMILIE

Separating the person from the idea is never so simple as that.

(Allowing others to hear the rest of the conversation.)

I believe your visions are prompted by philosophical, rather than scientific considerations. You sing the praises of the connection between liberalism and universal gravitation against what you perceive as the conspiracy of absolutism and Fontenelle's Cartesianism. On this we largely agree, but the mathematics of Leibnitz was useful in its proof. I can accept the correctness of universal gravitation without needing to see the defeat of the theory of living force. We must recognize the primacy of the mind. All necessary truths evolve from the principle of contradiction; the logical principle that it is impossible to affirm and deny a thing at the same time.

CATHERINE

I find I can quite easily deny and affirm a thing at the same time.

EMILIE

That is perhaps the case in the realms of love and polite society. Mathematics, however, derives all from this metaphysical starting point. And mathematics is for me the basis of all science.

CATHERINE

That may well be. I know that your book is brilliant. Everyone says so, although truth be told, I did not attempt to read it.

EMILIE

At any rate, that book is published. It is finished, and I have returned to preparing my translation and commentary of Newton's *Principia* for publication.

VOLTAIRE

That is as it should be. I have received a letter from Monsieur Clairaut.

EMILIE (To explain to the others.)

My tutor in Mathematics, from Paris. Why is he writing to you?

VOLTAIRE

To complain that you have not written to him. He is most anxious to see your revisions. He cannot understand why you are neglecting them.

EMILIE

I can assure you that I am not. I am spending a great deal of time on my work, but perhaps have neglected to inform him of its progress.

VOLTAIRE

I shall inform Monsieur Clairaut that he can expect to hear from you directly.

EMILIE

No need for that. I shall immediately write to him myself.

STANISLAS

I cannot help but wonder why a woman as lovely as yourself would want to shut herself away at a writing desk for such long spaces of time. It must be so tedious.

EMILIE

Not in the least. Science is endlessly fascinating. I have no need to be thought of as beautiful. No scientist who is born a man need be troubled by whether he is handsome or not. It is only his mind, and his writings that are of any consequence.

VOLTAIRE

Not so, my dear. I flatter myself to be in possession of both beauty and brains, with a great deal of wit on the side, just as you yourself possess all three in abundance. It is always worthy of note in both sexes.

(All the others enjoy this notion and add their agreement.)

CATHERINE

With all due respect to beauty, brains and wit for us all, it is enough philosophizing on science for this evening, is it not? Emilie, you have been blessed with an attribute the rest of us quite lack. Your voice. You must sing for us again, do you not agree, my darling?

STANISLAS

Indeed, my love. Madame, your aria was most exquisite. Truly, you are a nightingale.

EMILIE

Your Majesty flatters me greatly.

STANISLAS

All well deserved, to be sure, but I would not trouble you to strain your voice yet again this evening simply for our continued pleasure.

EMILIE

Your pleasure is my privilege.

CATHERINE

(Aside to Saint-Lambert.)

Music always puts me in the mood for pleasure. Does it not affect you similarly, my love?

ST.-LAMBERT

Music is the language of love.

CATHERINE

You did not respond to my note.

ST.-LAMBERT

I lacked the opportunity.

CATHERINE

You could entertain me with your own pleasurable notes of love, in my chamber.

STANISLAS

The hour is late. I would have you sing for us again tomorrow evening, when my ears will once again be tuned to receive and appreciate the beauty of your voice.

EMILIE

It would delight me to do so.

STANISLAS

You must excuse me, one and all. I will take my leave.

VOLTAIRE

Of course, your Majesty.

EMILIE

Sleep well, your Majesty.

STANISLAS (Aside to Catherine.)

I will see you in my apartment in the morning.

CATHERINE

Of course, my darling.

(STANISLAS kisses her hand and exits.)

ST.-LAMBERT

(To all.)

The hour IS late, and I am uncommonly tired. I would wish you a good night.

CATHERINE

Are you also an old man?

ST.-LAMBERT

Just a very tired one. Please do not be angry with one who is weaker than yourself.

CATHERINE

Do not trouble yourself on my account.

(She turns to leave.)

VOLTAIRE

Well, if I am to lose my audience, I too shall take my leave. Good night my dear.

(Kisses EMILIE's cheek and exits)

EMILIE

Sleep well, Dear Heart.

(All exit the stage in different directions.)

Scene 2

(EMILIE walks into her apartment. ST.-LAMBERT enters and they rush into each other's arms. They move to a chaise, in a dark corner of her apartment. They continue kissing as they speak and move.)

EMILIE

Darling.

ST.-LAMBERT

I thought we should never be alone!

EMILIE

At last.

ST.-LAMBERT

All night you tantalized me. That kiss in our scene, your glances in my direction. And your song-

EMILIE

I sang only for you.

ST.-LAMBERT

You drove me insane with desire.

EMILIE

And now you shall have me.

ST.-LAMBERT

Your skin is so smooth; alabaster could not be finer. Let me touch you. Teach my fingers how to please you.

EMILIE

You fingers have already learned their lessons well. Your touch drives all other thoughts from my mind. I can think of nothing but you. For you I am neglecting my writings, my research.

ST.-LAMBERT

You could pay me no greater honour. My Newtonian genius. Of course you must write, but at this hour?

EMILIE

It is so quiet at night.

ST.-LAMBERT

But tonight, you will love me. I would have you study me. I will be your sun and your stars and your heaven.

EMILIE

Yes, tonight.

(They kiss and help each other remove clothing through the rest of the scene.)

ST.-LAMBERT

You are so beautiful. I want to possess all of you. It is difficult to keep you a secret. I want the world to know you are mine.

EMILIE

No. No one must know. Especially not Voltaire.

ST.-LAMBERT

What should he care?

EMILIE

He would care.

ST.-LAMBERT

But you have said -

EMILIE

That we are seen as a pair. We have a public image to maintain and protect.

ST.-LAMBERT

It is over between you, is it not?

EMILIE

It is complicated.

ST.-LAMBERT

You have told me he holds no place in your heart, or your bed.

EMILIE

That is true.

ST.-LAMBERT

Then why maintain your loyalty?

EMILIE

I am not interested in being the subject of gossip at court.

ST.-LAMBERT

But Paris is far away.

EMILIE

The news would travel very fast. The Marquise du Châtelet, not content with Voltaire, takes a younger man to her bed.

ST.-LAMBERT

The Great Marquise du Châtelet. I still cannot believe that you would love me.

EMILIE

I fear that I do, Jean-Francois Saint-Lambert. Ohh, saying your name leaves my knees weak.

ST.-LAMBERT

Then we must lie down.

EMILIE

I do not want to be wrong about your love for me.

ST.-LAMBERT

Emilie, my love for you is pure, it is complete.

EMILIE

You must love me to excess. I cannot be happy unless you do.

ST.-LAMBERT

You know that I do.

EMILIE

And I alone must fill your heart and your thoughts.

ST.-LAMBERT

No one but you.

EMILIE

Make love to me. Enough is never enough.

(VOLTAIRE enters. He looks for EMILIE, but doesn't see her. They do not see him, involved as they are with each other.)

VOLTAIRE

Emilie, I need to inquire as to whether you -

(All freeze.)

VOLTAIRE (Cont'd)

What is this? Under my very nose! How dare you, sir?

EMILIE (she covers herself quickly.)

Voltaire, I can explain.

ST.-LAMBERT (Calmly dressing himself.)

The lady need explain nothing to you, sir. You have entered her private chambers without her bidding. How she chooses to conduct herself is her affair and it is quite inappropriate for you to censor my conduct.

VOLTAIRE

No gentleman would -

ST.-LAMBERT

If the gentleman is unhappy, we need only remove ourselves from this apartment and step outside the chateau to conclude the argument.

VOLTAIRE

Are you challenging me to a duel?

EMILIE

Now really -

ST.-LAMBERT

You may have your choice of weapon.

VOLTAIRE

You would seek to duel with me?

ST.-LAMBERT

I would. My honour is at stake, and the honour of my lady.

VOLTAIRE

Your lady!

ST.-LAMBERT

Yes, sir –

VOLTAIRE

If she allows herself to be called your lady, there is no place for me here. I will not stay for discourse such as this.

(He exits.)

EMILIE

Voltaire.

ST.-LAMBERT

Let him go.

EMILIE

Now what is to be done?

ST.-LAMBERT

The first step in creating your new image has been taken. Voltaire knows. Now, where were we before being so rudely interrupted?

EMILIE

The mood has passed.

ST.-LAMBERT

Perhaps it can be reignited.

(He caresses her breast.)

EMILIE (swooning)

Ohh, but a duel, really -

ST.-LAMBERT

Shh.

(He kisses her, caresses her. They fall back into the chase,)

Scene 3

(EMILIE, alone in her apartment, writes a letter to VOLTAIRE, which she reads aloud.)

EMILIE

Good Evening, Voltaire. Honestly, you are most infuriating. You may have seen me in a most compromising position, but you have brought this upon yourself, most certainly. I would never have sought the love of another man if you were in my bed still. Can you not know the hurt that your rejection of me has occasioned?

(EMILIE ponders this for a moment, then crumbles the paper on which she has written.)

Scene 4

(VOLTAIRE is in his bed. EMILIE enters, stands for a moment, and then approaches the bed.)

EMILIE

Dear Heart. You have taken to your bed.

VOLTAIRE

(Turns away.)

What do you care for my health?

EMILIE

You know that I live and die by your every breath.

VOLTAIRE

That mendacity does not become you.

EMILIE

But it is true. I care deeply.

VOLTAIRE

You say that now? In spite of what I just saw?

EMILIE

What do you imagine that you just saw?

VOLTAIRE

What has imagination to do with this? I clearly saw you in an embrace with that young person who fancies himself a poet.

EMILIE

Oh, but have you not told me many times how your eyesight is failing? Perhaps you should consider that you are mistaken. The light in the room was very low.

VOLTAIRE

A blind man could not have missed what you so flagrantly displayed in your chamber.

EMILIE

Let us suppose that your suspicions are correct -

VOLTAIRE

Indubitably they are correct.

EMILIE

Then I must assume that you are agitated by what you saw.

VOLTAIRE

Naturally.

EMILIE

And you will fight a duel to win me back?

VOLTAIRE

That is not what I said.

EMILIE

But you now realize that it should be you in my bed, and not another?

VOLTAIRE

I do not wish to discuss it.

EMILIE

But clearly, you are jealous.

VOLTAIRE

I am not jealous. I only wish to save you from being ridiculous.

EMILIE

Ridiculous? I - Dear Heart. You are ill. You have suffered more than almost any other mortal man, from a body that is so frail.

VOLTAIRE

What a pity that it should take such an occasion for your compassion to gain expression, but yes, of course it is true. I have always had a most delicate constitution.

EMILIE

Yes, you have.

VOLTAIRE

At this very moment I have a stomach tormented by a demon and a slight stiffness in my left leg.

EMILIE

My poor darling. Perhaps I can offer some relief.
(She reaches for him.)

VOLTAIRE

(He turns away.)
That you should take such advantage of my ill health as to -

EMILIE

Why must this game continue? You have been absent from my bed for much too long. I cannot continue this -

VOLTAIRE

I am impotent.

EMILIE

What?

VOLTAIRE

It is true.... I did not wish to speak of it, but there it is, the flaccid truth. I can no longer perform the role of your lover. I have not attended your bed as my presence there would not please you.

EMILIE

I do not believe it. Of course there have been a few incidents in the past, but nothing that should indicate a permanent condition.

VOLTAIRE

I do not wish to recall those singular occasions, nor do I care to offer a repeat performance, or lack thereof. I now wish only to save you from further disappointments of a similar nature.

EMILIE

Very well then, I have an explanation at last, though not one I would have expected to hear.... In that case, these endeavors with Saint-Lambert should not disturb you.

VOLTAIRE

Of course they disturb me. To flout my deficiencies in this manner. How should that make me feel? Are we not still partners in this journey of life?

EMILIE

Partners talk to each other and work out their difficulties. They do not simply withdraw their affections without explanation. I stood your neglect as long as I was able to do so.... Perhaps there is another way of seeing this conundrum. I would desire now to be a kind friend, rather than ignoring all this and coldheartedly insisting on making an invalid fulfill the requirements of a lover -

VOLTAIRE

I would not describe myself as an invalid -

EMILIE

Henceforward, I will take great care not to make impossible demands on your delicate disposition. I will, instead, assuage my quite extensive need for passion in another manner.

VOLTAIRE

But with Saint-Lambert? A young man devoted to me. My protégé.

EMILIE

Exactly. Who better than Jean-Francois Saint-Lambert, who admires us both? Surely he is mutually satisfactory.

VOLTAIRE

You do present a compelling argument. ... What am I saying? You cannot expect me to endure a slight so confounding.

(He flings off his bedclothes.)

Do I not excel in swordplay?

EMILIE

When have you ever -

VOLTAIRE

(Leaps out of bed.)

Can I not defend myself equally with the pen and the sword?

EMILIE

The pen has been the mightiest weapon in your arsenal.

VOLTAIRE

This young upstart will not get the upper hand. If it is a duel he wants, then a duel he shall receive.

EMILIE

But your leg -

VOLTAIRE

I have never allowed man nor beast to better me –

EMILIE

Oh dear –

VOLTAIRE

And do not intend to begin now.

Scene 5

(In the garden, at Lunéville. EMILIE is alone, sitting and reading. ST.-LAMBERT enters behind her and goes to her, playfully putting his hands over her eyes.)

ST.-LAMBERT

Darling.

(EMILIE turns to him.)

You found my last note.

EMILIE

I have been waiting for you.

(Gives him a passionate kiss. She sees her husband approaching in the distance.)

Oh, stop, quickly, you must hide.

(ST.-LAMBERT ducks behind a nearby shrub or statue.)

MARQUIS

Ah, there you are, Emilie, my lovely wife.

EMILIE

My Monsieur le Marquis. I thought you had returned to the field.

MARQUIS

I would not do so without taking my leave.

EMILIE

How good of you to seek me out.

MARQUIS

You will not neglect your duties in my absence.

EMILIE

Of course not. Everything shall fall out as we planned it.

MARQUIS

My commission depends on you.

EMILIE

Yes, I know, but at this moment, there is precious little -

MARQUIS

And if your time at your desk is spent only on science, our land holdings may suffer again.

EMILIE

I assure you they shall not.

MARQUIS

What are your plans for the near future?

EMILIE

The court will move to the summer palace in a few days.

MARQUIS

Good, you will have access to King Stanislas. Many opportunities to push my case to the fore should present themselves.

EMILIE

Be certain that I shall do everything within my power.

MARQUIS

You will not return to Cirey until the fall?

EMILIE

At the earliest. Please reside there whenever you wish.

MARQUIS

I shall return there within the space of several weeks. I trust that the repairs and renovations ordered by Voltaire have been completed.

EMILIE

Oh yes, he has spent a great deal of capital on your estate. The new wing is stunning. You will be very pleased, I am sure. Only, if you will be accompanied by that objectionable bejeweled girl I met on your last visit to Cirey, please keep her within the guest wing. I do not wish to have her use my salon.

MARQUIS

The very idea.

EMILIE

Forgive me. She seemed the type who would take liberties in my absence.

MARQUIS

She most assuredly will not.

EMILIE

Thank you. I shall look forward to seeing you again, at your pleasure.

(She holds out her hand for him to kiss.)

MARQUIS

Farewell.

(He kisses her hand, gives a slight bow and exits. ST.-LAMBERT reemerges.)

ST.-LAMBERT

That was close.

EMILIE

A little too close.

ST.-LAMBERT

I thought he was leaving yesterday.

EMILIE

Never mind, he is gone now.

ST.-LAMBERT

Once he is back in the field, you can acknowledge our love to the court.

EMILIE

You must be patient, Dear One. The time will present itself soon enough. There are still circumstances to sort out, timings to arrange.

(Off his look.)

Do not despair, it will be soon.

ST.-LAMBERT

And what of Voltaire? Will he accept my offer of a duel?

EMILIE

Please, you cannot be serious. Do you truly want to become renowned as the man who slaughtered the greatest poet in Europe?

ST.-LAMBERT

He might win.

EMILIE

Do not jest at the expense of one so weak.

ST.-LAMBERT

But my honour, your honour demands that -

EMILIE

My honour demands no such thing. There is nothing to do with such a character but to blush at having loved him in the past.

ST.-LAMBERT

You will avoid him?

EMILIE

No. I will blush.

ST.-LAMBERT

You will not forswear his company?

EMILIE

No, how can I? You heard all my husband just said. The situation is very complex. You cannot expect the Marquis to see scandal visited on his name by my rejection of Voltaire. For the present, the name of Voltaire must be the only one linked to my own besides that of my husband.

ST.-LAMBERT

But you have told me -

EMILIE

That I love you most ardently, and you must be patient. You must allow me the time to settle it all properly. Once I have the blessings of the king - but even then we must exert some caution. In the meantime, could you not at least try to make Voltaire your friend?

(ST.-LAMBERT turns away.)

EMILIE (Cont'd)

For the sake of love, please, do this for me. It will cost you very little. He is yet my friend. No more than that, but I do value his friendship still.

(Still no response from ST.-LAMBERT.)

EMILIE (Cont'd)

He has offered you his assistance in your writing, has he not? The greatest mind in all of Europe would be your mentor.

ST.-LAMBERT

Very well, for your sake, I will seek to make him my friend as well.

EMILIE

That would make me very happy.

(They embrace.)

ST.-LAMBERT

Your happiness is all the world to me. Though I was looking forward to a proper duel. I have never actually fought one. I could win for you, you know.

EMILIE

Stop it.

(She hits him playfully.)

Oh course you could win, Darling.

(They kiss.)

After Voltaire, I made resolutions that I would never fall in love again, but that is finally over now. I had no idea I could love anyone so much.... You are the only one who has made me feel that my heart is still capable of loving.

ST.-LAMBERT

What would you have of me?

EMILIE

To be my sole occupation, now, and ever more.

Scene 6

(EMILIE enters King STANISLAS's study. She curtsies at the door, half way in to the room and again in front of him. Her gown has the addition of a train that sweeps the floor, as is needed when attending an audience of royalty. STANISLAS is sitting at his writing desk.)

EMILIE

Your Majesty.

STANISLAS

My dear Madame la Marquise.

EMILIE

Thank you for allowing me an audience.

STANISLAS

It is always a pleasure to see you. But I have told you already that I can do no more for your husband. The military command that he covets is promised to another. You must be content with his civilian post for the moment. He has acquitted himself well in many situations. I am sure that in the not too distant future -

EMILIE

Your Majesty, it is not about the affairs of my husband, but of my own personal life that I would speak of today.

STANISLAS

Oh? What is it you desire, my dear?
(He rises from his desk.)

EMILIE

I would merely ask if the name of someone who is very much in love with me could be added to those permitted to join the court when it moves to Commercy in a few days.

STANISLAS

You wish to have him near you?

EMILIE

I do.

STANISLAS

And you have considered all that you need to do to remain discreet in this affair?

EMILIE

I have, your Majesty.

STANISLAS

Then, you have my blessings. I will enjoy seeing you thus engaged. You are always too serious. But what of Voltaire?

EMILIE

Our friendship will continue as before.

STANISLAS

The young man in question is free of his post for the season?

EMILIE

His regiment does not expect him for some time.

STANISLAS

Very well then. I shall expect to see him in my court for the summer.

EMILIE

Thank you, your Majesty.

STANISLAS

(Laughs a low, private laugh.)

It is quite delightful really.

EMILIE

Your Majesty?

STANISLAS

Do you know why Father Joseph first invited you and Voltaire to visit my court?

EMILIE

To share in your hospitality. To discourse with you on our writings concerning science and philosophy.

STANISLAS

No, no. While he expected that Voltaire's writings would provide some amusement, your writings were not thought of as being of any consequence to me.

EMILIE

Your Majesty, I -

STANISLAS

Do not be offended, I am sure that spending your hours thus amuses you, but Father Joseph assumed your writings would be too technically advanced for me to understand. I must say, though, I have enjoyed hearing you relieve me of my guilt for not leading a religious life. Even better that this is precisely what the good father would wish you *not* to do. I am afraid that Father Joseph had quite forgotten about that part of your work altogether. ... No, there was a more compelling reason for him to want you at court.

EMILIE

I cannot begin to fathom ...

STANISLAS

He does not like Catherine, or her influence on me.

EMILIE

Madame de Boufflers is a lovely woman.

STANISLAS

I agree, of course, but he was hoping that I would like you better.

EMILIE

Me? But your Majesty –

STANISLAS

Do not be alarmed, my dear. I have no designs upon you. If Monsieur de Voltaire is too old for your taste, you will certainly not find my advanced years to your liking.

EMILIE

I am very fond of your Majesty.

STANISLAS

And I of you. We shall continue to be friends. And I wish you much happiness in love.

EMILIE

Thank you for your gracious acceptance of my choices, your Majesty.

(EMILIE curtsies, backs out of the room: kicking the train of her gown out of the way as she steps, curtsies half way out, and again at the door, as is the respectful way to leave the presence of royalty.)

Scene 7

(VOLTAIRE alone in his apartment, writes to his niece. He reads it aloud.)

VOLTAIRE

My dear child, I hope I will return to Paris very soon. The cause of Madame du Châtelet's need to stay an interminable length of time in Lunéville has at last been revealed to me. You need no longer fear for her possible wrath or retaliation at our liaison. I think of you constantly, which I am pleased to report provides me with a most satisfying erection. I know that we need not fear a repeat of that unfortunate evening when last we were together. My member is yours to enjoy at your leisure. I trust that you received my little gift by now. One can never have too many exquisite snuffboxes. ... My darling, Marie-Louise, I am counting the days. I am indeed in exile. All the favours of the king of Poland cannot equal the pleasures of your countenance. ... Goodbye my dear, keep well and love him a little who will love you dearly all his life.

Voltaire

(VOLTAIRE places the letter down on his writing desk and notices that a button is missing from his sleeve. He exits to the interior of his

apartment. EMILIE enters from the opposite side of the stage. She no longer wears the train on her gown.)

EMILIE

Voltaire, have you considered which play to read for the court this evening?

(She looks around his apartment for him.)

Voltaire?

(She realizes that he is not here. Glancing down at his desk, she spots his letter to Marie-Louise. She picks it up and begins to read it, gasping as she realizes its full content. Slowly, she puts it down where she found it, and turns to leave VOLTAIRE's apartment. As she reaches the door, VOLTAIRE re-enters, buttoning his sleeve.)

VOLTAIRE

Ah, Emilie, you are ready for a rehearsal?

EMILIE (Turns to him.)

I am always ready to act a part.... You are feeling better, I assume?

VOLTAIRE

Somewhat. However, one can never tell when one will again be seized by ill health.

EMILIE

One can, I suppose, be seized at a moment's notice. I trust you have set aside all thoughts of a duel?

VOLTAIRE

Certainly not. I am ready whenever the young scoundrel wishes to choose a time and a place.

EMILIE

I believe that he has withdrawn his challenge.

VOLTAIRE

Withdrawn it? Well, I will then be forced to grant a modicum of good sense to the lad. At least he recognizes a superior force when he encounters one.

EMILIE

Indeed, it would appear that you have sufficiently frightened him and dissuaded him from risking his future wellbeing at your hand.

VOLTAIRE

Then we can put that unpleasantness behind us and assume his presence will no longer mar our landscape.

EMILIE

You can assume no such thing.

VOLTAIRE

What do you mean? Surely you have forsworn his company!

EMILIE

I have not. I am in love with Jean-Francois and he most assuredly is in love with me.

VOLTAIRE

In love? You are in love with him? Well, you are flattering yourself in believing that he loves you for yourself alone.

EMILIE

Why should he not? He finds me most attractive and alluring.

VOLTAIRE

I am sure that he finds your position at court most attractive and more than a little alluring.

EMILIE

Why do you automatically accuse everyone of having base motives? Why can you not be happy for me?

VOLTAIRE

I am thinking only of your happiness.

EMILIE

But you cannot, or will not be everything to me. Why then, will you not let me love another? I am not yet so old that I am willing to allow my womanhood to wither and shrivel away into dust. I have a fire that yet needs tending.

VOLTAIRE

There is more to love than a physical act.

EMILIE

Of course there is, but you well remember, I am sure, how important passion has always been to me. Why then should you scorn me, when all that I have done is match what you have done already?

VOLTAIRE

You do not know what you are saying.

EMILIE

You maintain that you are without passion, without any physical desires for intimacy?

VOLTAIRE

Some things are simply denied to one of my advancing years.

EMILIE

That mendacity does not become you.

VOLTAIRE

What mendacity? Emilie, I believe that this conversation has already been conducted and concluded.

EMILIE

I know that you have found passion in the arms of Marie-Louise.

VOLTAIRE

What an absurd accusation.

(He tries to unobtrusively look at his desk to see if the letter is still there and could have been read.)

EMILIE

I know that it is true.

(Interrupts his attempt to speak.)

Do not insult me by denying it. It is so much more shocking than my own affair. I have merely taken on a young poet as a lover, a rather natural outcome of my passionate nature. But Marie-Louise Denis is your own niece! How often was she not in our home as a child? That she should now be your mistress is quite beyond belief. Did we not act as her parents after her own had died?

VOLTAIRE

She is no longer a child.

EMILIE

And how old was she when you made that distinction? How long has she been the object of your longing? When did the uncle add lust to his kindly gaze?

VOLTAIRE

That is preposterous. There is nothing of impropriety in my relationship with her. She is already a widow. Our former familiar relationship with her is now completely beside the point.

EMILIE

So she is now just like any other young woman to you?

VOLTAIRE

Exactly.

EMILIE

And so you need her youth to flatter your sense of yourself.

VOLTAIRE

That is not the reason –

EMILIE

To say nothing of your desire for her giving the lie to your damned claims of impotence!

VOLTAIRE

What cannot be possible with one woman can sometimes –

EMILIE

Enough! How dare you? Do you think I wish to hear that? You left my bed without explanation. It made me most unhappy for a very long time. Then you present the preposterous excuse of impotence, which is now so obviously a lie. Enough. I do not wish to speak of that now.... I have finally found a passion to replace what you have refused me. It is unconscionable for you to attempt to deny me the same pleasures that you have found for yourself.

VOLTAIRE

Very well. Then we part ways with each other.

EMILIE

No.

VOLTAIRE

No? That is the only honourable conclusion –

EMILIE

No. Think on it. You do not want to set the gossips twittering in Louis' court any more than I should wish it. No, let us remain, to the outside world, as we have been these last fifteen years. Without the need to pretend that our young lovers do not exist, why should we not continue on as before? If we are mutually satisfied, I can see no reason for us not to remain, in the eyes of those around us, the very best of friends, our souls as closely intertwined as ever they have been.

VOLTAIRE

I would prefer that our discussions continue. No one has a mind as sharp as yours.

EMILIE

I do not know how much time I will have to offer discussions. I will be very busy with my work. But this, at least, is settled then. You will hear from others very shortly, no doubt, that I have made entreaties to King Stanislas to have Jean-Francois join the move to his summer palace.

VOLTAIRE

I must see this person near you every day? Marie-Louise remains in Paris.

EMILIE

Please, you will be gracious at this development.

VOLTAIRE

The proximity will not be pleasant.

EMILIE

Perhaps our proximity to each other will also be less than pleasant, but we are good actors, you and I. As for Saint-Lambert, you have enjoyed his attentions in the past. Why should that change? Why not allow him to remain your Protégé?

(VOLTAIRE turns away)

EMILIE (Cont'd.)

I know that he values your opinion of his work.

VOLTAIRE

He does?

EMILIE

A very great deal.

VOLTAIRE

He has a long way to go.

EMILIE

I am aware of his shortcomings.

VOLTAIRE

His prose is often clumsy.

EMILIE

Perhaps so.

VOLTAIRE

His plot lines leave much to be desired.

EMILIE

Yes. I know –

VOLTAIRE

But he does listen well to criticism. The boy has talent as raw as an onion, but like the onion there may be layers waiting to be uncovered.

EMILIE (Exasperated.)
Thank you. I shall see you at dinner.
(EMILIE exits)

Scene 8

(EMILIE rushes in to find ST.-LAMBERT in the garden.)

EMILIE
My Love, I have done it.

ST.-LAMBERT
You mean that you -

EMILIE
Yes, King Stanislas knows. Voltaire has also accepted our union. Now I truly am yours.

ST.-LAMBERT
That is wonderful. Now the world can know of our love. Now we can go to Paris together.

EMILIE
Paris! No, my silly darling, no one is in Paris for the summer.

ST.-LAMBERT
Versailles, then. I meant Versailles of course.

EMILIE
That would not do. I do not wish to be gossiped about in the court there. Besides, what do I care for the court of King Louis? Endless rounds of parties and vacuous social appointments. The whims of the King determining what can be thought and said. No, we will stay here, in the summer court of King Stanislas.

ST.-LAMBERT
But the men of the Academy. I had hopes for introductions.

EMILIE
And you shall have them, all in good time. They do not meet in the months of summer, in any case.

ST.-LAMBERT
Ah, Paris in the fall, then.

EMILIE

You have only been my official lover for ten minutes. You must display a little patience, or you will have me believe that you love me only for the influence I can exert on your behalf.

ST.-LAMBERT

I only want you to be proud of me.

EMILIE

I am sure to be very proud of you.

ST.-LAMBERT

Come here, into my arms where you belong. Summer here in the country will be lovely.

EMILIE

Are you quite certain?

ST.-LAMBERT

Absolutely. Nothing could be finer.

(They kiss, as VOLTAIRE enters.)

VOLTAIRE

Ah, the young lovers now take to the open air.

ST.-LAMBERT

Sir. I need to beg your pardon.

VOLTAIRE

(grasping his hands in a double grip)

No apology is necessary, unless it is mine to you. We must not talk of duels. We must speak only of love. You, a young man in the spring of his days, need not concern himself with an old poet, no longer favoured by the gods and graces. Ah, our astronomical Emilie, with an old black apron and her hands dirty with ink again, has left her compass and her calculations, to reclaim all her charms.

EMILIE

Really, Voltaire ...

VOLTAIRE

Take her. Take her quickly to her *toilette*, and sing to her on your *musette* those beautiful airs that love repeats and that Newton knew not.

ST.-LAMBERT

I thank you most humbly for your blessings.

VOLTAIRE

Ah, you shall have much more than my blessings. Tell me, my son, what are you writing at the moment?

ST.-LAMBERT

It is a poem, sir, quite a lengthy one, I must say. Though I hasten to admit that the fourth stanza has never been to my liking.

VOLTAIRE

Well, we should take a look at it then, should we not?

ST.-LAMBERT

Yes, sir, of course. Thank you, sir.

EMILIE

But, I thought we wanted to walk in the garden.

VOLTAIRE

Do not worry, my dear. You may return to your studies in the assurance that your lover and his other talents are in good hands.

EMILIE

Yes. Wonderful. But at this moment –

VOLTAIRE

Come along my young poet. We shall prove that the sweet music of love is ever possible to capture in verse.

ST.-LAMBERT

I have always believed it to be so.

VOLTAIRE

And you shall prove to the world that you are the one to do it.

ST.-LAMBERT

Do you believe that I can?

VOLTAIRE

Without a doubt, dear boy, without a doubt.

(VOLTAIRE leads a flattered ST.-LAMBERT off stage. EMILIE is left exasperated. CATHERINE enters.)

CATHERINE

There you are. I have searched half the palace for you.

EMILIE

I assure you that I have not been in hiding.

CATHERINE

I did not suggest that you were - at least, not in this moment.

EMILIE

I beg your pardon?

CATHERINE

Do not be coy. I have heard all about you and my lovely Jean-Francois.

EMILIE

Already?

CATHERINE

The smaller the court, the faster the tongues will wag.

EMILIE

And you are not angry?

CATHERINE

Angry? Why should I be angry?

EMILIE

I am aware of your past with Jean-Francois ...

CATHERINE

He is free to love as he chooses.

EMILIE

You know how strongly I value our friendship and the great esteem in which I hold you.

CATHERINE

And I return those words to you.

EMILIE

I would not want you to feel slighted by his attention to me.

CATHERINE

He has tried before to induce jealousy in me.

EMILIE

But I am sure that his feelings for me are quite sincere.

CATHERINE

Of course they are.

EMILIE

Jean-Francois caught me quite off my guard. My feelings for him were as much of a surprise to me as they no doubt are to you.

CATHERINE

Oh, they do not surprise me at all. He is handsome, and what woman could be blind to his - other attributes? And Saint-Lambert has great respect for your intellect. Of course you would be an excellent match.

EMILIE

Then you will not be sorry to see us together?

CATHERINE

I am delighted for you. And you can well imagine the delight of the king to have him removed from my sight.

EMILIE (A shared joke.)

I am happy to be of service to his majesty.

CATHERINE

I can almost hear the odes that our poet is bound to write to you.

EMILIE

No such poetry could make me love him more.

CATHERINE

Of course not. What was I thinking? You have already had all the odes in the world from a much greater hand.

EMILIE

Oh yes. But what of that?

... You are beautiful
so half the world will be your enemy.

You are brilliant
and you will be feared.

You are trusting
and you will be betrayed.

That was written for me, by Voltaire before we first met. I was so flattered that I had to meet him. I did not know at the time it would be he himself that would betray me. But no matter now. ... I do not love Jean-Francois for his writings, but for himself alone.

CATHERINE

But your connections could do much for his future.

EMILIE

Perhaps, but at the moment I have enough to occupy myself in that regard. Looking out for the interests of my husband and a commission for my son have kept me quite busy enough.

CATHERINE

My dear friend, I must do something to show you my pleasure at your newfound happiness.

EMILIE

Your blessing is favour enough.

CATHERINE

Take this.

(Presses something in her hand.)

EMILIE

What is it?

CATHERINE

It is a key.

EMILIE

I can see that, but what does it open?

CATHERINE

Can you not guess? It opens a special cottage, deep in the gardens, where I have sometimes gone - to be alone. I am sure Jean-Francois and you will find it much to your liking on afternoons when you do not wish to be disturbed.

EMILIE

Oh, how delicious.

CATHERINE

You will find it near the East gate, not far from the fountain that is surrounded by rose gardens...

(CATHERINE and EMILIE exit during this explanation)

Scene 9

(In the garden, at Lunéville. ST.-LAMBERT and EMILIE encounter each other by chance.)

ST.-LAMBERT

Emilie.

EMILIE

My love, you must have been busy. I have scarcely seen you all week.

ST.-LAMBERT

I knew that you were engaged with your writing.

EMILIE

Even so, I had expected to be interrupted with some frequency.

ST.-LAMBERT

I have written you a play.

EMILIE

Have you?

ST.-LAMBERT

I hope that you like it.

EMILIE

Darling! I am sure that I shall adore it.

(ST.-LAMBERT hands the script to her.)

EMILIE (Cont'd)

Oh, you have it here. Tell me what it is about.

ST.-LAMBERT

Well, it is a story taking place in the New World.

EMILIE

How exciting.

ST.-LAMBERT

It is about two Iroquois Indians.

EMILIE

Really?

ST.-LAMBERT

They share a wife between them.

EMILIE

(Beat.)

How did you come to research the marital customs of the Iroquois Indians?

ST.-LAMBERT

It is a fanciful conceit, of course. How could I research it?

EMILIE

Of course.

(She begins to read.)

ST.-LAMBERT

It is a most contemporary subject.

EMILIE

Many people seem to find it so, although no one has suggested they are engaged in polygamous marriages.

ST.-LAMBERT

Voltaire himself has set many plays in exotic lands.

EMILIE (Still reading.)

He has.

ST.-LAMBERT

They have been most favourably received.

EMILIE

For the most part, they have.

ST.-LAMBERT

Please, you must do me the honour of reading it with me.

EMILIE (Slightly alarmed.)

What, at court this evening?

ST.-LAMBERT

Well, why not? But, I meant right now, as a rehearsal. I am certain that together we will breathe life into my words.

EMILIE

Very well.

ST.-LAMBERT

I will read the part of one of the brothers, and you will be the shared wife.

(He takes the script from her and turns the pages.)

Here, in this later scene the other husband is absent.

(He clears his throat and begins reading with great enthusiasm.)

Ahh, there you are my love.

(He thrusts the script at EMILIE and points out her line.)

EMILIE

Greetings.

(ST.-LAMBERT continues to hold the script, reading his lines and thrusting the script at her for her responses.)

ST.-LAMBERT

I have been looking for you.

EMILIE

And now you have found me.

ST.-LAMBERT

Indeed I have.

EMILIE

Yes.

ST.-LAMBERT

Is it not a lovely day?

EMILIE

Aside from this morning's rain, yes, it is lovely.

ST.-LAMBERT

You alone can bring sunshine to my day.

You alone will always brighten my way.

I cannot wait until this day is done.

Though I do love it, I would shun the sun,

As it is all that stands between thee and me.

Once the night falls, to you I will run

Tonight will be ours, although we are three.

EMILIE

Oh my sweet husband, it is you that I love

And feel your love on me, descending as a dove.

Take me. Take me now, as I cannot wait for the night.

Though you might share me, it is still your right.

ST.-LAMBERT

I too, cannot wait for the night.
I would take you now.
Our love will take flight.

(He swoops an unsuspecting EMILIE into a wild embrace and dip,
followed by a long kiss.

EMILIE

(Coming up for air.)

Oh, my, well, well, that is certainly quite the scene. Quite a lot of passion is expressed.

ST.-LAMBERT

Oh, but there is more. It goes on in this vein for some time before the enmity between the brothers erupts in a violent confrontation. It is really quite wonderful. Very exciting. Indeed, I am certain that this play would show quite wonderfully on a stage.

EMILIE

Hmmm...

ST.-LAMBERT

Voltaire has been most encouraging of it.

EMILIE

Has he?

ST.-LAMBERT

Perhaps you can interest someone at the Comédie Française to produce it.

EMILIE

The Comédie Française is most discriminating –

ST.-LAMBERT

You do not think my play worthy of their interest?

EMILIE

Oh, Darling, of course it will be wonderful.

ST.-LAMBERT

It needs further work? Why would Voltaire have praised it so highly if it was not yet ready?

EMILIE

Who can say? Come, shall we take a little walk? I have been reading all morning. My eyes are very tired just now.

ST.-LAMBERT

Yes, of course. Oh, I have just the remedy for all that ails you. I know where we could walk.

EMILIE

Where?

ST.-LAMBERT

Close your tired eyes. I will make it a surprise and lead you there. It is very near.

EMILIE

A surprise?

ST.-LAMBERT

It is a little cottage near the rose gardens. I alone hold the key. I used to go there - when I wanted to be alone. Now I want to share it with you. I too, cannot wait for the night.

(EMILIE has stopped. She opens her eyes and turns to him.)

Scene 10

(VOLTAIRE sits alone in his apartment and writes a letter to EMILIE, which he reads aloud. EMILIE sits alone in her apartment and writes to VOLTAIRE. She reads her letter aloud.)

VOLTAIRE

Dear Emilie, I have been watching your burgeoning courtship with Saint-Lambert and must say that I feel myself beginning to take some paternal interest in it.

EMILIE

Dear Voltaire, I have just been walking with Jean-Francois. He tells me that he has spent a great deal of time with you of late.

VOLTAIRE

I have been advising him not to overtax you by claiming all of your time. He must remember the importance of your work.

EMILIE

Indeed, I believe that you have seen him more than I have.

VOLTAIRE

I have been coaching him most rigorously on his writing.

EMILIE

While I am grateful for the attention you bestow on him, I should like to think that he could manage his own affairs without constant interference on your part. I had not thought you would take over his every waking moment. I have hardly seen him at all. Then when at last we meet, he wants me to read his play, his terrible piece speaking of things he has no knowledge of at all, a most disagreeable play.

VOLTAIRE

I believe that he is nearly ready to show you his love offering. The dear boy may be a tad too ambitious in his subject and its rendering. He flatters himself in thinking that he is presenting you with a masterpiece. You will, no doubt, treat him gently in its reading.

EMILIE

You know as well as I do that his writing is far from mature. It was very mean spirited of you to suggest to him that I might have some influence in its production in Paris.

VOLTAIRE

With my continued assistance, he may yet prove his talent.

EMILIE

Your theatrical contacts are much greater than my own. If anyone could secure a production it would be you, but clearly, you did not intend to do so. Instead, you invite me to cast aspersions on his work, though you know as well as I that it is completely lacking in merit.

VOLTAIRE

I am experiencing much delight in my tutelage of his person.

EMILIE

I find your meddling in this affair quite irksome. This is not what I had in mind when I asked you to mentor his writing. Gentle encouragement at irregular intervals would have been sufficient. Trying to draw unrealistic promises from my lips is not welcome. I know what you are trying to do in making him less appealing to me because of his lack of skill in writing. Well, it will not work. It is not for his talents as a poet that I adore him. There are more important endowments than these in which he is very well versed.

(she signs off and folds it with an angry flourish. VOLTAIRE signs and folds his letter with delight and begins another one.)

VOLTAIRE

My dear Saint-Lambert, I understand that Emilie will accompany Catherine on her journey away from court for a short while. I will look forward to helping you pass

the time in her absence. I would also be delighted to read the next draft of your fine play. Shall we dine together this evening?

Scene 11

(The salon of a health retreat away from the court. EMILIE enters as CATHERINE is refolding a letter, which she tucks under her skirt.)

EMILIE

Did you enjoy taking the waters this afternoon?

CATHERINE

Not very much. I find it quite tiresome here. I really did not need to get away from court so soon after that hunting trip.

EMILIE

The king thought only of your health. You have been looking tired.

CATHERINE

What he took for weariness was merely boredom. It was sweet of you to accompany me. I know that you really did not want to leave your lover, even for a short while.

EMILIE

The practice will no doubt serve me well. I shall have to accustom myself to loving him at a distance, as business will soon take me to Paris.

CATHERINE

Perhaps he can go with you.

EMILIE

It is much too soon for that. I do not need to provide fodder for the gossips there. I feel that he is my own little secret. Bringing him to Paris would spoil something, I fear.

CATHERINE

I do not think that he will be content to be your country lover forever.

EMILIE

He is not just my country lover. He is my one true love, but I think that we can better enjoy our love away from the distractions of the city.

CATHERINE

Was that successful for you and Voltaire in Cirey?

EMILIE

Yes, I suppose that it was. For more than ten years I was happy because of the love of a man who had completely seduced my soul; and those years I spent tête-à-tête with him without a single moment of distaste or hint of melancholy. But finally, as all things in life, the passion did end. It began to fade during his visit to the Prussian court in Berlin. Oh, how unhappy I would be whenever he journeyed there. I was never invited. King Fredrick wanted Voltaire all to himself. While I always believed Voltaire to love me better than any man, he was so easily flattered by the attention to his ego. Frederick considers him to be a great wit. As that matches Voltaire's own opinion of himself, they get on rather well. ... No love between a man and a woman remains forever on the same plateau. When we first fall in love, we scale the heights of the highest mountain, and when we are fortunate, as I have been, we remain at that peak for many years. The fires of passion burn brightest at the summit. But the fuel is consumed more rapidly there, and after a time the flames rise less high. The heat becomes less intense.

CATHERINE

Yours did burn longer than most.

EMILIE

Most often, I think, it is the man who first tires of love.

CATHERINE

Perhaps, but I have often been the first to yawn.

EMILIE

I am sure that you have. But with your great beauty, those striking green eyes, another moth is drawn to your flame ere the yawn has faded from your lips.

CATHERINE

It is fortunate that I have been blessed in that regard, as no man has proved sufficiently interesting to hold my attention as long as yours was held by Voltaire. What a pity that the passion had to wane.

EMILIE

It was, but, without the transition from lovers into friends, I would not have been free to fall in love with Jean-Francois.

CATHERINE

Ah, Jean-Francois. He is the one who has put me in a bad humor today.

EMILIE

What? How could he? He is miles away.

CATHERINE

But he wrote to me. I just received his letter.

EMILIE

What? Why did he write to you?

CATHERINE

Oh, it was nothing. Impetuous boy.

EMILIE

What do you mean?

(CATHERINE has taken out the letter, but not unfolded it. Now she rips it into several pieces that fall into her lap.)

CATHERINE

He has irritated me. But it is nothing of any consequence. I must get ready for tea. I will see you in an hour.

(CATHERINE picks up most of the pieces and exits. One piece drops to the floor as she rises. EMILIE looks at the one piece left, considers leaving, but stops instead, and picks it up. She reads it aloud.)

EMILIE

raindrops to shun. days lack the sun. the sun to shine. happiness is mine.

(EMILIE reaches into her bag and pulls out writing paper, ink and a quill.)

EMILIE (Cont'd.)

I had planned to write you a letter, but had thought it would be tender and full of love.

(She begins to write a letter, and reads it aloud as she writes.)

EMILIE (Cont'd.)

Jean-Francois, You cannot imagine how I have missed you since we have been apart. My only consolation was in imagining that your pain in the loss of my company would be as great as my own at losing yours. I now have found out that, as my anxiety over receiving no word from you increases by the minute, you have found the time to write to Catherine. She has dismissed it entirely and will not even hint at its contents. Darling, we have not been together so long as to allow me any degree of security in your assurances of love and fidelity. My heart is near to breaking at the thought that you find words, even if nothing but words of friendship or speaking of the weather, for Catherine, while leaving me bereft of any words at all. Please do not allow me to suffer thus for another minute. I must hear from you at once.

Your own, Emilie

(EMILIE ponders the letter for a moment, then crumbles the page on which she has written. She begins again on a fresh page, reading aloud as she writes.)

EMILIE (Cont'd.)

My Darling, Jean-Francois, I have heard that your weather has not been good. The days here have been bright and sunny. I have enjoyed each one immensely. It is so lovely here. I wish you could share in its beauty. I am counting the moments until we are together again.

Scene: 12

(VOLTAIRE and M-LOUISE, in her apartment in Paris. She begins behind a dressing screen, or off stage. VOLTAIRE is writing a note to EMILIE while he waits for M-LOUISE. He reads it aloud.)

VOLTAIRE

Emilie, my dear, what a pity that you did not accompany me to Paris for my premiere. It should prove to be a monumental occasion. Rehearsals caused me a great deal of distress, as usual, but I trust that my judgment has been sound. What can be more stressful than the opening of a new play? It is my hope that news of a successful outcome will reach your ears shortly.

Voltaire

(He signs and seals the letter while he calls for M-LOUISE.)

VOLTAIRE

Do hurry my dear Louise. I cannot afford to be late.

M-LOUISE

You will not be late. We have plenty of time.

VOLTAIRE

The curtain will rise in precisely 40 minutes.

M-LOUISE

Which gives us plenty of time.

VOLTAIRE

I hope that I have not made a mistake.

M-LOUISE

(Enters and continues to get ready to depart, putting on gloves, a hat and cape, checking herself in a mirror.)

I am certain you have not.

VOLTAIRE

There has never been a ghost on the stages of Paris before.

M-LOUISE

But you said that it was brilliant in London.

VOLTAIRE

Yes, but what worked for Hamlet may not work so well here.

M-LOUISE

But you have always admired what Shakespeare has done for the stage, have you not?

VOLTAIRE

The savage did have some imagination. If it worked for that drunkard, it should work for me.

M-LOUISE

Well, at least you took my advice and put your ghost in those wondrous, voluminous shrouds of black, instead of common clothes.

VOLTAIRE

I am afraid that black crepe will make him look ridiculous. I should have insisted on the costume of a warrior, all in white, with a bronze-coloured breastplate, a gold crown, a gold scepter and a white mask, like the statue in the Don Juan.

M-LOUISE

What, and have everyone think that you copied Molière?

VOLTAIRE

But this may look like deep mourning, for nothing but the sake of mourning.

M-LOUISE

Stop worrying. Black will help him stand out. He will be mysterious, you shall see.

VOLTAIRE

I can only hope you are right. Come along now. The coach is waiting.

Scene 13

(The salon at the health retreat. EMILIE rushes in holding a letter and sits by herself.)

EMILIE

At last - my love.

(she opens the envelope and finds two letters folded and addressed. One is addressed to her. She looks at the other and opens it, reading aloud.)

My dearest Catherine, How difficult it is to be away from your smile for even a day, and here it is, a whole five days and I have not heard from you. I miss you. I sent you a letter and so hoped to receive one in return. Why have you not responded to one who loves you madly? You know that I have never ceased to adore you. Please do plan your return as soon as possible. Until then, hold this verse close to your heart. I wrote it to you quickly for the last letter. Now I have taken the time to make the script beautiful.

Days without you are but raindrops to shun.
Without your kisses, my days lack the sun.
No one but you can will the sun to shine.
Come back to me and happiness is mine.
Your own,
Jean-Francois

(EMILIE puts down the letter and speaks aloud to herself.)

EMILIE (Cont'd)

You took my trust and yet you wrote to Catherine so that I would see it. Why? You have deceived me. I will not let myself believe that you love her. If I did, I would have to believe that you are a monster of deception and duplicity. You probably thought that you needed to write to Catherine like that to flatter her and keep your friendship. Well, be brave enough to lose that friendship. Lovers do not go around telling other people that they love them madly, that they adore them. At least, my lovers do not. ... I may not be able to say all this to your face when we meet, but I will certainly say it in a letter - at once. I still want you - but I am not going to become the person you are trying to make me become. It will be up to you to change my views. For now, my feelings are frozen. That has one advantage. I missed you desperately before. I miss you less now.

(EMILIE holds the letter addressed to her.)

How can you imagine that anything you say to me could have any significance once I read your words to Catherine?

(EMILIE tears the letter into small pieces without even opening it.)

Scene 14

(VOLTAIRE and M-LOUISE return to her apartment. VOLTAIRE sinks into a chair, while M-LOUISE bustles about removing her hat, gloves and cape that she has worn to the theatre.)

VOLTAIRE
My life is over. My career in ruins.

M-LOUISE
It was not as awful as that.

VOLTAIRE
It was hideous.

M-LOUISE
It could have been worse.

VOLTAIRE
They *laughed* at the ghost!

M-LOUISE
Well, he was quite amusing.

VOLTAIRE
It was not a comedy. The ghost was revealing the true murderer.

M-LOUISE
Perhaps if you had cast a more athletic actor, he would not have staggered about so.

VOLTAIRE
He was weighted down with your abominable, voluminous black shrouds.

M-LOUISE
My black shrouds? Well, they did look striking. It is not my fault that he could not manage to get through the crowds on the stage.

VOLTAIRE
If I did not have so many enemies paying those young fops to hoot and yell insults, I would not have had to hire such a large crowd to cheer.

M-LOUISE
Is that why they crowded the stage so? Well, at least the official guard did his duty.

VOLTAIRE

I hardly see that buffoon yelling, "Come on! Come on! Make way for the ghost," as adding to the solemnity of the character.

M-LOUISE

Oh, you are making too much of this.

VOLTAIRE

You really do not appreciate the reputation that I have to protect.

M-LOUISE

It will all blow over soon and you will write another brilliant play.

VOLTAIRE

You do not understand the fickle winds of fame.

M-LOUISE

You do get so dramatic. It is not as serious as all that!

VOLTAIRE

I feel my heart racing. This really is not good for my health.

M-LOUISE

Will be you ill again?

VOLTAIRE

You have no appreciation for my weak state of health. It has never been good.

M-LOUISE

Come to bed. I will make you feel better.

VOLTAIRE

Really, my dear, I am much too distraught.

M-LOUISE

There is more to life than constantly worrying about your public image. It has been battered before and recovered. Why should it not do so once again?

(Puts her arms around him.)

I have a little game we could play to take your mind off of your troubles.

VOLTAIRE

Is that all you can think of?

M-LOUISE

After all these passionate letters you have written to me, I believe you have also given it a place in your mind.

VOLTAIRE

Oh, turn around, and let me see that fabulous sweet bottom.

M-LOUISE (Giggles.)

That's better.

(She leads him off-stage.)

Scene 15

(EMILIE's apartment, at Lunéville. EMILIE sits at her dressing table, fussing with her hair, perfumes and other objects. Her hurt feelings are channeled into her actions.)

EMILIE

What would you have me believe?

ST.-LAMBERT

I cannot explain what she does to me.

EMILIE

She casts some spell?

ST.-LAMBERT

She demands this of me, whether I would give it freely or no.

EMILIE

Do you think me a stupid woman?

ST.-LAMBERT

Of course not. You are the most intelligent of all women on earth. I adore your intellect. I adore every part of you. Please understand, this nonsense with Catherine plays no part in my feelings for you. She is a, a hold-over from the past. She enjoys these little games, for they are nothing more than that, little amusements that keep her satisfied and my life here at court on a more even keel. I do not know what might happen if I were to let her go. She has so much influence.

EMILIE

She cannot make demands on you that you do not willing submit to. Yet, clearly, you have subjugated your own will to hers.

ST.-LAMBERT

But, I am telling you, it is not that simple.

EMILIE

It seems perfectly simple to me. If you love me, you give up close ties to all others.

ST.-LAMBERT

And what of your own ties to Voltaire?

EMILIE

That is entirely different in nature and intent.

ST.-LAMBERT

It does not seem so to me.

EMILIE

How could you dare compare -

(ST.-LAMBERT grabs EMILIE and pulls her close in an embrace and kisses her with great passion. At last the kiss ends, but they continue to hold each other.)

EMILIE (Cont'd)

Something goes out of a relationship when lovers are parted for too long. I did not think that could happen to us.

ST.-LAMBERT

Emotions are difficult to predict during an absence.

EMILIE

Either you love me, or you do not.

ST.-LAMBERT

Let us start anew.

EMILIE

No more words of love to Catherine de Boufflers?

ST.-LAMBERT

My life will contain only you.

EMILIE

God gave me the sort of soul that does not allow me to hide or moderate my passions. I cannot live in fear that you will sacrifice me in favour of another.

ST.-LAMBERT

There is no need to.

EMILIE

You cannot toy with my heart.

ST.-LAMBERT

(Takes her hand and places it over his heart)

This is where you may safely find solace and love.

EMILIE

I must hear you say it.

ST.-LAMBERT

I love you. I adore you.

EMILIE

And I adore you. I am not so young that I will allow myself to be foolish in love. But I see in you all that I want, all that I need.

ST.-LAMBERT

Darling.

EMILIE

I want to be together with you, always. I want to spend my life making you happy. There is much we must do together.

ST.-LAMBERT

There is not so much to do here in Lunéville.

EMILIE

But there are many other places to go. There are so many people that it is important for you to meet.

ST.-LAMBERT

Men of the Academy?

EMILIE

Exactly. And others at court.

ST.-LAMBERT

I could make you so very proud of me.

EMILIE

I must know that I can trust you.

ST.-LAMBERT

I will become the man that you can trust. I am so very sorry to have given you cause to doubt me. Please forgive my indiscretions. I will find another way of dealing with Catherine that does not compromise my love for you.

(They kiss as VOLTAIRE enters.)

VOLTAIRE

There you are.

EMILIE

I heard rumor of your imminent return. How was your play received?

VOLTAIRE

If you heard rumors of my return you no doubt heard rumors of its complete and utter ruination.

EMILIE

I must admit I did. How it must have hurt you.

VOLTAIRE

It was dreadful. You have no idea. I have suffered terribly. And of course, my ill health exacerbated the situation. I nearly died on the road, traveling here. Ask Longchamp, my servant will tell you. He spent days in reviving me.

EMILIE

I had heard as much.

ST.-LAMBERT

And now, you are restored to good health?

VOLTAIRE

I am. You are indeed a gentleman for so inquiring.

EMILIE

The country air will do you a world of good.

VOLTAIRE

I want to go to Cirey. I need to go home to Cirey.

EMILIE

Perhaps, at the end of the season. For Christmas.

ST.-LAMBERT

I will need to rejoin my regiment by that time. I would love to go, but I cannot neglect my work for so long.

EMILIE

But I shall miss you terribly.

ST.-LAMBERT

Darling, we have months to go until then.

VOLTAIRE

Quite right, we do have months before that. We will stay here long enough to read though my new play.

EMILIE

You are writing again.

ST.-LAMBERT

What is your new play?

VOLTAIRE

It will be called, *The Reasonable Wife*. Naturally you shall play the lead for our impromptu performances here at court.

EMILIE

Of course.

VOLTAIRE

I believe that you will relate most wonderfully to your final speech.
(Hands her the script.)

EMILIE (reads.)

And now I can say that I have made a very good officer of a young man. I have married my daughter off advantageously and now, peace and pleasure reign. And you, my dear, must not worry about me spending money, for to be rich is nothing. All is to be happy.

VOLTAIRE

And does your son enjoy his post?

EMILIE

He is doing well, thank you.

VOLTAIRE

Have you received word of your daughter recently?

EMILIE

Gabrielle-Pauline gave birth to a son last month and has just been appointed a lady-in-waiting to the queen of Naples.

VOLTAIRE

That is what she desired?

EMILIE

Very much so.

VOLTAIRE

And you are busy spending your wealth?

EMILIE

No one could ever accuse me of being parsimonious.

VOLTAIRE

Good. Then my play is not a fiction.

Scene 16

(VOLTAIRE, in the salon at Cirey, writes to his niece, Madame Denis.
He reads it aloud.)

VOLTAIRE

My dear Marie-Louise, we have been back in Cirey for ten days and the joy I felt in going home has been replaced by my need to see you again. I feel it is the only thing that will restore me to health. I am in a cruel state, and I am deprived of you. In truth, I feel that I have not much longer to live. Am I not to spend the last days of my life with you? I shall come to you, if my miserable condition permits. I will throw myself at your knees and kiss all your beauties. In the meantime I press a thousand kisses on your round breasts, on your ravishing bottom, on all your person, which has so often given me erections and plunged me in a flood of delight.

(EMILIE enters. She wanders about in the space, unable to focus on anything, touching objects on surfaces, sitting, only to stand again, unable to relax.)

EMILIE

This room has still not warmed to my liking.

VOLTAIRE

You have never liked a room to be overly warm.

EMILIE

That is not to say that I enjoy freezing to death.

You are not writing? VOLTAIRE

I do not wish to. EMILIE

You did not yesterday, either. VOLTAIRE

What do you care? EMILIE

But it means so much to you. VOLTAIRE

Not at this moment. EMILIE

No thought of Newton today? VOLTAIRE

Who knows if I will ever complete that work? EMILIE

What? VOLTAIRE

I am hungry. EMILIE

Have the cook fix whatever you like. VOLTAIRE

She has no provisions that please me. EMILIE

Food has always been my domain in which to offer complaint. VOLTAIRE

Why should anything be your sole department of complaint? EMILIE

Why are you so insufferable today? VOLTAIRE

EMILIE
For no concern of yours.

VOLTAIRE
You are my concern.

EMILIE
You have no control of this.

VOLTAIRE
What is it?

EMILIE
I am pregnant.

ACT TWO
Scene 1

(In the salon at Cirey. EMILIE is collapsed in a chair. It is now
VOLTAIRE who is pacing the room.)

VOLTAIRE
I would have thought that someone as modern as Saint-Lambert might have fancied
the new invention of the Chevalier de Condom.

(EMILIE ignores him.)

VOLTAIRE (Cont'd.)
How pregnant are you?

EMILIE
Two months.

VOLTAIRE
How could you have been so careless?

EMILIE
Do not scold me.

VOLTAIRE
In all our years, never once did I ever allow my seed to spill inside of you.

I know that. EMILIE

All those years I was so careful. VOLTAIRE

That is hardly the point now. EMILIE

Always in control, even at the very peak of passion. VOLTAIRE

A mistake was made. It is too late to undo it. EMILIE

Common sense, it seems, is not so common. VOLTAIRE

You are not helping. EMILIE

You are rather beyond my help. VOLTAIRE

What to do? EMILIE

I would suggest an elixir but that is so unreliable. VOLTAIRE

Not enough - EMILIE

And the belly continues to grow. VOLTAIRE

One drop too much - EMILIE

Bleeding to death is never pleasant. VOLTAIRE

Without doubt, I shall have another baby. EMILIE

VOLTAIRE

Oh, I can hear the tongues at court. They never thought you conventional before. Imagine their delight now. The Marquise du Châtelet, caught in the oldest trap, impregnated by a new lover.

EMILIE

Perhaps not.

VOLTAIRE

Most certainly. You do not expect me to take responsibility for this?

EMILIE

No.

VOLTAIRE

Then Saint-Lambert must. ... He will acknowledge his paternity, will he not?

EMILIE

Difficult to know, as he has not responded to the news.

VOLTAIRE

You wrote to him?

EMILIE

Yes.

VOLTAIRE

Perhaps he did not receive the letter. Write again.

EMILIE

It should not require a fifth retelling of the tale.

VOLTAIRE

I see. ... Well, as the child will be unable to claim a father, it will have to be classified as one of your miscellaneous works.

EMILIE

Most humorous, ... but there is another way.

VOLTAIRE

I do not see -

EMILIE

I have a husband.

VOLTAIRE

In name, perhaps ...

EMILIE

He shall become a father again.

VOLTAIRE

You have not joined with him in years.

EMILIE

It is not too late to start again. I believe he will be flattered.

VOLTAIRE

It will not be pleasant.

EMILIE

That is the least of my concerns. His regiment is due to leave Nancy within days. He was planning to come home for a time. ... I shall delay my trip to Paris and be here when he arrives. I shall ask him to come alone, and ensure that he has a very warm homecoming.

VOLTAIRE

And he will go along with it?

EMILIE

I still understand the art of seduction.

VOLTAIRE

That was not my meaning. Will he accept responsibility for the results of your successful seduction of his person?

EMILIE

Yes, I believe he will. The timing will not be so far off for one who rarely has bothered to pay attention to the calendar. He certainly considers himself most virile.

VOLTAIRE

Very well. I shall retire to my own apartments early and arise late every day for as long as you need me to do so.

EMILIE

If memory serves me, producing children was never an arduous process in the past. Perhaps once will suffice to convince him of his prowess.

Scene 2

(In the salon, at Cirey. The MARQUIS enters and wearily pulls off his riding gloves and coat. He does not see EMILIE until she speaks. She has arranged herself attractively on a chaise.)

EMILIE

My Marquis du Châtelet. Welcome home.

MARQUIS

What? Oh, you are here. I thought you had gone to Paris.

EMILIE

I wished to welcome you home first. Is this New Year to your liking?

MARQUIS

Nothing has set about to spoil it as yet.

EMILIE

And I pray that nothing shall.

(She rises to take his coat from him, laying it aside.)

MARQUIS

Although this trip has come close to doing so.

EMILIE

Marquis?

MARQUIS

Endless riding always puts me in a bad humour.

EMILIE

Ah, of course, I know how you dislike traveling.

MARQUIS

So as not to infect the whole household with my ill moods, I shall retire to my apartments and remain there until my departure.

EMILIE

Ah, but I should be so very disappointed not to see you while you are here.

MARQUIS

Since when have you cared whether you -

(Notices her dress for the first time.)

You are dressed for a fancy ball, are you not?

EMILIE

No, of course not, I have been in this evening.

MARQUIS

Then what is the occasion?

EMILIE

No occasion is needed, other than the successful return of my husband from battle.

MARQUIS

I would hardly call that bit of duty a battle.

EMILIE

Nevertheless, we shall drink to your safe return.

MARQUIS

You have time to sit with me?

EMILIE

My studies can wait.

(EMILIE leads him to sit with her in front of a tray prepared with drinks and food.)

MARQUIS

That is surprising to hear.

EMILIE

It has been too long since we talked.

MARQUIS

Is there a problem with the estate?

EMILIE (Pouring him a drink.)

No, all is well.

MARQUIS

The forges are running?

EMILIE (Handing him a drink)

Splendidly.

MARQUIS

The revenues continue in sufficient quantities?

EMILIE (Pouring her own drink.)
Absolutely. There is no need to adjust our expenditures.

MARQUIS

The children are well?

EMILIE (Holding up her glass for a toast.)
Yes, of course, all is well.

MARQUIS

And what of Claude-Florent?

EMILIE
I shall go to Paris next month to speak with Richelieu about securing a suitable marriage for him.

MARQUIS

I shall expect a match equal to that which you arranged for our daughter.

EMILIE

I am sure that you shall be satisfied.

MARQUIS

Gabrielle-Pauline is still happy in Italy?

EMILIE

She is quite settled.

MARQUIS

To think that she has made you a grandmother.

EMILIE

Are you sitting comfortably?

MARQUIS

Comfortably enough.

EMILIE

Your shoulders must be sore after your long journey.

(EMILIE rises to stand behind his seat.)

MARQUIS

As always, they are.

EMILIE (rubbing his shoulders.)

Is that better?

MARQUIS

Oh! Why yes, very nice.

EMILIE

And your lower back, I believe, has caused you some discomfort in the past.

MARQUIS

Do not trouble yourself.

EMILIE

No trouble too great to ensure your wellbeing.

(EMILIE helps him to a prone position on the chaise and bends over him.)

MARQUIS

What is that perfume you are wearing?

EMILIE

Do you like it?

MARQUIS

One would be forgiven for thinking that you are trying to seduce me, Marquise du Châtelet.

EMILIE

And would that be so very objectionable, my Marquis du Châtelet?

MARQUIS

A little to the left.

EMILIE

Just there?

MARQUIS

Oh, yes.

(He sighs.)

EMILIE

Perhaps you would be more comfortable in my chamber.

(He doesn't respond.)

Claude?

(She leans over him and sees that he has fallen asleep.)

(The lights fade and come back up to reveal the MARQUIS sleeping on the chasse, under a blanket. EMILIE enters and checks to see if he is awake. He is not. VOLTAIRE enters and sees EMILIE, but does not see the MARQUIS.)

VOLTAIRE

You are up early this morning. Were you successful last night?

EMILIE (Motions for him to be quiet.)

He fell asleep.

VOLTAIRE

All that waiting came to nothing?

(The Marquis wakes and sits up. VOLTAIRE now sees him.)

MARQUIS

Good morning, Voltaire.

VOLTAIRE

Ah, good morning. Welcome home. If you will excuse me, I was about to take breakfast in my chamber.
(He exits)

MARQUIS

I had a most interesting dream last night.

EMILIE

That was not a dream.
(EMILIE sits beside him.)

MARQUIS

After all these years?

EMILIE

I have missed you.

(The MARQUIS pulls her towards himself and they kiss.)

Scene 3

(EMILIE sits alone in her study, writing to ST.-LAMBERT. ST.-LAMBERT sits alone at his own writing desk, writing to EMILIE.)

EMILIE

My dearest Jean-Francois. It was so good to receive your letter at last. How I longed to hear those words of love, and how welcome they were to my ears now. I have told you before that something goes out of a relationship when lovers are parted for too long. It seems to have happened to us for a second time. Perhaps I am at fault for leaving your presence at all, but how can we say that our souls are truly joined if we cannot bear each other's absence for even a short while?

ST.-LAMBERT

My darling Emilie. The light that glows from my candle now is but a faint shadow of the great beam of light that comes from your words of love to me.

EMILIE

Naturally, it was difficult for me to tell you the news of my condition on paper, when it is news that should always be given when in a physical embrace, but that could not be helped. I am trying to understand that it was also natural for you to take so long to absorb the news and realize that it did not spell the end of our relationship, but rather an interesting interlude. I have told you that I needed to remain and deal with it here, in Cirey, in my own way. As I have already told you, my husband believes it to be his child, which means your life may continue on as before, without any interruption in our plans for the future.

ST.-LAMBERT

I am sorry it took so many letters from your hand before I set quill to parchment and wrote back to you. I did not know how to deal with your news. It took me a long while to accept that your condition would not affect our future. I was pleased to hear that your husband will accept responsibility for the child. That should quiet the rumours that have already reached my ears. Only Catherine finds any humour in them.

EMILIE

Yes, it is true it will set the tongues wagging at court, but they have done so on my account in the past, and I have survived it. As long as I am secure in your love, I will survive again. What does it matter what the world has to say as long as one's heart is held safely in the hands of a lover that is true?

ST.-LAMBERT

The King has kept me quite busy and out of the public eye, of which I have been grateful.

EMILIE

My darling, I long for your embrace now.

ST.-LAMBERT

It is as well that we are apart at the moment, as I do not know how to manage a woman in such a delicate state. I imagine you are confined to your bed for much of the time.

EMILIE

I regret I did not complete the revisions on my Newtonian work long before I met you. If I had, then there would be nothing holding me from your arms now. That is not the history I have written, however, which is why I now find it so necessary to go back to Paris. My mentor awaits my return. Only he can check my notations for accuracy. The work simply must be completed before our child is delivered. I trust you will understand how important this is to me. If I had only known a pregnancy would occur I would have redoubled my efforts while you worked on your writing in Lunéville. But we cannot change the past. We can only look forward to the future.

ST.-LAMBERT

Who knows what the future may bring. I continue to work on my writings whenever time away from my regiment allows it. It is my fondest wish to achieve the highest stature I am capable of reaching as a poet.

EMILIE (Continuing with difficulty.)

The future belongs to us, and is bright with promise. Hold my love ever steadily in your heart until I may return, to claim you as my own forever.

Your Emilie.

ST.-LAMBERT

I trust your health will remain constant through your ordeal.

As ever, Jean-Francois.

EMILIE (She puts down the paper.)

Why have I made myself ridiculous in love, pining for a man who may lack the maturity to return my passion? I feel myself so much in need of reassurances. Surely he will see the great love I have to give him, and value it as greatly as I value the words of reassurance I seek from him.

Scene 4

(EMILIE and VOLTAIRE, alone in the snow after their carriage overturns on the way to Paris. EMILIE is brushing snow off of VOLTAIRE's coat.)

EMILIE

You are all right? I can scarcely believe how quickly our carriage lost its footing. One minute we were riding along so comfortably, and the next, lying face down in the snow.

VOLTAIRE

I believe I am quite sound. Although if just one more bag had dislodged itself and hurled against me, I am quite certain you would have hauled a corpse out of that carriage.

EMILIE

Thank goodness that was not the case.

VOLTAIRE

Damnably roads! Surely there is a tax base in this country sufficient enough to maintain such a major route into Paris.

EMILIE

There will never be enough for roads.

VOLTAIRE

Yes, I know, as long as you and I and others of our class pay no taxes, and the church administers the pensions of the clergy, there will never be enough, but why this road, at this time, in the middle of the coldest night of the year?

EMILIE

It is not so cold as that.

VOLTAIRE

I am ever cold.

EMILIE

Longchamp is riding as fast as he can. Help will be here soon.

VOLTAIRE

It will take hours, as you very well know.

EMILIE

There are blankets and skins to keep you warm. Come, lay yourself down, just here. You will be quite warm.

(She helps to make him comfortable.)

VOLTAIRE

I suppose it is useless to wish for sleep. I have an ache in my stomach only the devil could have caused.

EMILIE

Oh look, Dear Heart. Just look at the sky! It is such a clear night. What a wondrous sight.

VOLTAIRE

I am not in the habit of studying the sky in the dead of winter.

EMILIE

Look, over there. There is Orion.

VOLTAIRE

I care very little what the hunter seeks tonight.

EMILIE

And thus the Winter Hexagon. Begin at Rigel, at his feet to find Sirius, part of Canis Major. Travel up Sirius to Canis Minor. Only Procyon is visible there. If only we had packed a telescope.

VOLTAIRE

Stargazing was not on the agenda.

EMILIE

That is why it comes as such a gift. Ah, there it is.

VOLTAIRE

What?

EMILIE

Gemini. And there Auriga. Followed by Aldebaran, in Taurus. And full circle back to Orion. Full circle. Everything in its place.

VOLTAIRE

Everything but me, who should be safely in bed in my apartments in Paris by this hour.

EMILIE

To think that people believed planets were kept in place by some giant whirlpool, created by God.

VOLTAIRE

Or the flapping wings of angels.

EMILIE

Though God created the universe like a clock, everything in place, he is hardly a watchmaker, keeping everything in orbit. Things do tend to slip from time to time.

VOLTAIRE

Though Newton did suggest that God offered corrections on occasion.

EMILIE

Indeed. If God did not exist, we should have had to invent him.

VOLTAIRE

I wish that I had said that. Oh wait. I did. In fact I believe I published it.

EMILIE

Appropriation is the greatest form of flattery. Consider yourself flattered.

VOLTAIRE

Words once published become the property of he who wrote them.

EMILIE (Teasing.)

What matters only is that good things get written.

VOLTAIRE

You have your writings, and I have mine.

EMILIE

Your words are unharmed by their retelling. Perhaps you were not the first one to have said some of the things you have published, and perhaps you were. Who can say, when we have talked so much? Ohhh, but perhaps the old man wants to believe his memories are intact and true, to better play with them in his old age.

VOLTAIRE

Do not cast aspersions on my advancing age. It weighs heavily enough on me already.

EMILIE

Dear Heart, say not so. You are hardly more than a young man who would think himself lucky to be but half your age.

VOLTAIRE

That statement held no logic whatsoever.

EMILIE

Not one you would care to appropriate then?

VOLTAIRE

I have no need to appropriate anyone's words.

EMILIE

Dear Heart, I jest.

VOLTAIRE

Jesting requires a warm climate to have a pleasing effect.

EMILIE

Come, you are warm enough under all those skins, are you not?

VOLTAIRE

I suppose I am, but it does nothing for the pain in my stomach or the strain in my neck.

EMILIE

Oh dear, now your neck as well? Let me ease that pain.

(She sits beside him and rubs his neck. Both fall silent for a moment.)

Does the vastness of this sky not fill you with wonder?

VOLTAIRE

Indeed. The proof of God's hand is difficult to set aside in the face of such splendor.

EMILIE

However, though Newton suggested God's role in the universe, it is his science that marks the salient points in his discourse. Newton understood the workings of our universe better than any man before him.

VOLTAIRE

But perhaps there is now a woman who understands it as well.

EMILIE

Perhaps I do. But seeing the vastness of this night sky is most overwhelming, is it not? So many stars, as far as the eye can see. If my paper for the Academy on the nature of light is correct, there are millions of stars more than what we see, blazing away, invisible to our sight.

VOLTAIRE

No doubt your paper will be accepted.

EMILIE

I hope so. ... I do appreciate how the ancients supposed the stars to guide their lives. The vast eloquence of the heavens -

VOLTAIRE

But what excuse have we now, in these enlightened times?

EMILIE

Astrology is still popular with many people. Indeed, Newton found it had its place.

VOLTAIRE

But have we not grown past this one idea of his, though it does little to mar his greatness? Astrology is to astronomy what superstition is to religion. The mad daughter of a wise mother.

EMILIE

Ahh, but it is that very statement that caused your views on religion to so often be misunderstood. Imagine, calling you an atheist. Nothing could be further from the truth.

VOLTAIRE

It is the superstitious, fanatical religion of my persecutors that has always caused the greatest calamities and bloodiest wars. What can you say to a man who tells you he prefers obeying God rather than men, and that as a result he's certain he'll go to heaven if he cuts your throat? But, to speak this aloud in France is heresy.

EMILIE

It has been helpful to have a country home in which to hide.

VOLTAIRE

It is always dangerous to be right in matters on which the established authorities are wrong. How is it that in England over 30 religious sects can live in utter harmony, with their philosophers speaking freely on whatever subject they choose to explore, while in France I am persecuted relentlessly for merely explaining this fact?

EMILIE

I know the frustration this has caused you, Dear Heart. One has to wonder how long we will have to wait for such freedoms.

VOLTAIRE

I believe that a good deal of time must elapse before a certain degree of reason and intellectual courage can cross the straits of Dover. I wonder if either of us will remain alive long enough to witness it?

EMILIE (Rueful laugh.)

What a pity there is no God who can offer us the assurance of that.

VOLTAIRE

But do you not believe that there is a God who will find us after our deaths? Is there not still a life past this one known to us?

EMILIE

I do not believe that the God who set the universe on its original course is concerned with the continuance of our souls once we have completed our earthly sojourn.

VOLTAIRE

There is still some part of me that dreams of heaven.

EMILIE

Look up at these heavens. We have studied the universe, the movements of the stars and the moon. Where among the heavens is there a celestial plane that we can aspire to reach? It isn't possible.

VOLTAIRE

But surely, we cannot see all, on every dimension. So many people of all religious persuasions believe in the continuous nature of our lives beyond the grave.

EMILIE

If there is anything, I am certain it will be vastly different than anything we could imagine. I am sure there is no physical place called heaven, nor am I in need of one.

VOLTAIRE

Then, this life is enough for you?

EMILIE

Quite enough. I believe that knowing this life is all that is offered to us is a great cause for rejoicing. What utter freedom to know the good we do is not done solely out of duty or to pay our admission into the next life. I have lived as I chose to live.

VOLTAIRE

If this is to be the only life offered to me, I am glad to have seized everything it had to offer.

Scene 5

(VOLTAIRE and EMILIE in their home in Paris. EMILIE is now visibly pregnant. She is working at her writing table, with many books and papers scattered about her. VOLTAIRE is working on his own writing.)

EMILIE

I cannot make that adjustment in the language. What would you have me do, address the work of Newton in the manner of young Algarotti, popularizing it for ladies with not a hint of serious science? "Love decreases in inverse ratio to absence and to cubed distance; therefore, a lover who has not seen his mistress for eight days loves her sixty-four times less!" ... Oh dear, it has been considerably more than eight days since Jean-Francois has been in these arms.

VOLTAIRE

Surely he is not capable of such inconstancy as to suggest –

EMILIE

I do not know what to think. One letter is full of love and the next, cold and distant. And now, once again, I have gone for more than a week with no word at all.

VOLTAIRE

Sometimes we are less unhappy in being deceived by those we love, than in being undeceived by them. Never mind. You will get a letter today.

EMILIE

When did you become the eternal optimist?

VOLTAIRE

It serves no purpose to allow your spirits to flag.

EMILIE

Optimism is the madness of insisting that all is well when we are miserable. ... Never mind. Life is thickly sown with thorns, and there is no other remedy than to pass quickly through them. The longer we dwell on our misfortunes, the greater is their power to harm us. It cannot matter. I must finish this work.

VOLTAIRE

Why not plan to complete it once you have recovered from the birth of the child?

EMILIE

I have a cold fear. I do not think that I shall live past -

VOLTAIRE

Stop it. Do not tempt fate in this way. Do not speak of it.

EMILIE

Of what harm is it to speak in any way we chose? There is no plan for our lives, handed down from God. He does not meddle in the affairs of men. And if there is no God controlling our lives, there is no concept of fate. Therefore, how can speaking of a future fear help to bring it about? Have we not always said, there is only science? We can hardly ignore the scientific effects of giving birth upon the body of a woman. Many women much younger than I have died in the act.

VOLTAIRE

That is true, but you have done so safely three times already.

EMILIE

But so many years ago.

VOLTAIRE

Yes, but if you would only sleep more and give your body rest....

EMILIE

I have no time for sleep.

VOLTAIRE

Then you will bring about the conclusion which you most fear.

EMILIE

This work must be completed before my lying-in. There is no other way. I cannot chance it.

VOLTAIRE

Then we are back where we began.

EMILIE

Listen again to this passage. Perhaps there is a part that can be more clearly expressed without compromise to the integrity of the language.

VOLTAIRE

You know I cannot ascertain whether your calculations are correct.

EMILIE

I am not concerned with them. Clairaut will be here in the morning to check my calculations for determining the shape and density of the earth. Listen only to my argument on the nature of gravity.

VOLTAIRE

Very simply, Newton's apples and moons and everything else tumble down at a predictable rate.

EMILIE

Oh, but there is more. It is hidden in his theorems numbered 70 through 75. In them, he is proposing that gravity stretches up, shooting from the very center of the earth and going outward.

VOLTAIRE

I am sure that you will make it all quite clear, but now you really must sleep.

EMILIE

In a moment. I have written to Jean-Francoise. Tell me if you think it too confrontational.

(She reads it aloud while Voltaire rubs her shoulders.)

My darling love, Two weeks ago I received your letters so full of passion and love that I felt my heart overflow in return. Last week but a single letter arrived and contained not one word of love, followed by no letters at all. Why have you withdrawn from me? I fear that you have abandoned me in my state, when I need you most. You will make me die of grief. You will leave me for another who does not deserve you. All my doubts about your character, all my resolutions against love have not guarded me against the love you have inspired in me. If you can love me only weakly, if your heart cannot give itself without reservations, what will you do with mine? Love me fully and I will never be unhappy. I adore you, without end.

VOLTAIRE

He can hardly fail to respond to that.

EMILIE

It would not be the first time that he has.

VOLTAIRE

You have received some signs of love from him in the past.

EMILIE

Passion and disdain in equal measure.

VOLTAIRE

An absence of a week does not wholly signify that he has forgotten you. Your words are strong. Perhaps they frighten him.

EMILIE

I do not know what else to say but what is in my heart.

VOLTAIRE

Then it is clear. He is not worthy of the love you save for him.

EMILIE

What would you have me feel for the man whose child I carry? This is not a child born out of duty to a husband. This is a child created out of love.

VOLTAIRE

Carrying his child has not brought him closer to you.

EMILIE

You are too unkind.

VOLTAIRE

It is not me who has scorned your words of love.

EMILIE

Indeed, you have done as much in the past.

VOLTAIRE

Why reopen that wound at this juncture? We have an easy peace between us at this time. Would you not rather that it remained?

EMILIE

If you had but kept me in your heart, I would not be in this position now.

VOLTAIRE

Emilie.

EMILIE

How much pain has been caused by the shift in your affections?

VOLTAIRE

It is not in my power to undo the past. ... Has our great friendship not endured?

EMILIE

How could you ever imagine that friendship is enough for any woman? You took all the years of love between us and cast them off, as a mantel too worn out to wear a moment longer.

VOLTAIRE

I gave you all of myself for as long as I felt its value returned.

EMILIE

How can you say that?

VOLTAIRE

Your constant need for reassurances, incessant jealousies whenever I was away.

EMILIE

You did not simply go away. You were with another.

VOLTAIRE

I was merely at the court of Frederick.

EMILIE

Exactly. God only knows what offers were made to you by him and others.

VOLTAIRE

Nothing but the conjectures of a jealous mind.

EMILIE

You speak to me of jealousy?

VOLTAIRE

I was never jealous of you.

EMILIE

I gave you no cause in love, but I saw your looks when my scientific writings were praised more highly than your own.

VOLTAIRE

I gave no such looks.

EMILIE

That is when you would accept the offers to attend at King Frederick's court.

VOLTAIRE

Mere coincidence. Those were diplomatic missions.

EMILIE

With a great heaping dose of pleasure on the side. The timing was always all too perfect. You escaped my critical acclaim and sought refuge in the flattery of the Prussian court. Flattery leading to endless hours of carnal pleasure of every conceivable variety.

VOLTAIRE

You are basing this on mere conjecture. There was never anything but courtly courtesies.

EMILIE

Far beyond courtly courtesies. How could you love me and indulge in that?

VOLTAIRE

Why do you find insult in something now so ancient as to have been cast out of my memory forever?

EMILIE

Then let us bring it closer to the present. Yours is with a very young woman, with no intellect to challenge you.

VOLTAIRE

Which is refreshing.

EMILIE

Refreshing! I would never have believed you required a partner who would sit at your feet and worship your brilliance. It diminishes you greatly.

VOLTAIRE

She supports me in everything. That should not diminish me in the eyes of anyone. Even if that were so, are you not experiencing the same effect with Saint-Lambert? Surely, his intellect does not match your own.

EMILIE

He is working hard to bring up the standard of his writing. He is young, he –

VOLTAIRE

Some things cannot be taught.

EMILIE

You are his teacher. Why not find a way to teach them?

VOLTAIRE

What stake have I in making him into a great writer?

EMILIE

So you are jealous? You would hold him back.

VOLTAIRE

I need not fear where his reach might extend. He has not the wit to rise above his mediocrity.

EMILIE

So we are both in love with idiots? ... The difference is that I was alone and made to look for love, but you chose to give the love you bore me over to another. You stay with me for discourse and bring her your affections. To have chosen her over me is inexplicable! ... What happened to us? ... We were so happy then, studying together, performing plays far into the nights, making love at dawn. We lived in heaven. ... Why was that not enough for you?

VOLTAIRE

Life is always on the cusp of change. That is what keeps us alive.

EMILIE

Not all change makes one's life better.

VOLTAIRE

Learn then, remember what words of jealousy can cost you.

EMILIE

Do not reproach me for the past.

(Turning away from him.)

I must return to my work.

Scene 6

(CATHERINE visits EMILIE in Paris. CATHERINE is lounging with a drink in hand, while EMILIE is busy arranging her books and papers on her writing table. She is not happy to have her work interrupted.)

CATHERINE

Voltaire tells me you are working much too hard.

EMILIE

Voltaire's opinions bear no great weight for me at present. I am merely finishing what I began.

CATHERINE

Does that matter so much? What satisfaction does it offer you?

EMILIE

The satisfaction that I have left behind something of great value to the world, to science. Something that will cause people will speak of me after I am gone. Some things we do are more important than our pleasures.

CATHERINE

Do not be morbid, darling. Of course all of us will one day be gone, but of what use is life without pleasure? Why should we worry about what will be said of us after we are dust? Our loved ones will speak of us. ... Oh, listen to this, I have made up my epitaph:

Here within this peace profound
a most genteel woman rests
Who took her pleasure while on earth
as all her lovers can attest.

Is it not perfect? I am certain it would make tongues wag. My final joke. My family would be scandalized. ... Naturally, it would never do to embarrass them after I am gone, but, would it not be fun? Come now. Pleasure is important. ... You have had your share of lovers, as well as I.

EMILIE

How many does one need to get one's share?

CATHERINE

Too many to count.

EMILIE

I think of quality, not quantity.

CATHERINE

That too has been yours.

EMILIE

I do not wish to be remembered simply for the lovers I have had.

CATHERINE

I remember the Emilie of our youth, setting the fashions for a decade at least.

EMILIE

It is so easy to be scandalous when one is young.

CATHERINE

Indeed, who would have thought that all ladies of our class would follow your lead and expose their nipples so eagerly?

EMILIE

Who would have thought?

CATHERINE

More scandalous still was your ability to ride and fence more excellently than any of your suitors. Not to speak of your penchant for dressing as a man and attending the coffee houses.

EMILIE

That was merely to gain access to the discussions of the academics who frequented them.

CATHERINE

You were always studious, even while enjoying all that society had to offer.

EMILIE

I have always had a great appetite for all of life.

CATHERINE

As have I, with the exception of the academic portion.

EMILIE

(Finally turning her attention away from her books.)

I would not leave my father alone on that point. He had no choice but to relent and bring in tutors. Love of study is certainly more important for a woman than for a man. Men have infinitely more resources for happiness than women. They can attain glory through war, government and negotiation. My studies are now the only part of my life that can possibly be of any lasting value.

CATHERINE

No one could contradict the effects your writings have already had. No other woman has done so much for science.

EMILIE

I have often reflected on why, over the centuries, a first-rate tragedy, good poem, esteemed history, beautiful painting, or book on physics has never come from the hands of a woman. Give me a reason, if possible, why these creatures, whose understanding appears altogether so similar to that of men, seem, however, to be stopped by an invisible force.

CATHERINE

Most of us are never offered an education.

EMILIE

Exactly. If I were king, I would order the elimination of this abuse that cuts off half the human race. I would have women engage in all the rights of men, particularly those of the mind. This new education would do a great deal for the human race altogether. Women would be better valued and men would acquire a new subject of emulation.

CATHERINE

Not many women have the capacity to learn as you have.

EMILIE

I am convinced that many a woman is unaware of her talents directly because of her non-education. One would now think that women are born only to deceive, as they are left scarcely any other exercise. Do you not find that this is true?

CATHERINE

Deception can be in the eyes of the beholder alone, an unsought consequence of each human being seeking to live life to the fullest, without the intent to injure

another. It is the prerogative of all married women, once they have produced their husband's children, to take what lovers they can - not as men do, bedding all and any who will say yes, but one at a time, and discreetly. It is true I have broken that rule on occasion, but it was never meant to harm.

(Changing the subject.)

Have you made time for some cards while in Paris?

EMILIE

My writing has utterly consumed me.

CATHERINE

You do not miss the thrill of winning? Your ability to calculate which cards remain and their probability of being played is uncanny. I have truly never seen anything like it.

EMILIE

Some minds are meant for calculations. It is of no consequence, the least useful part of what I love about mathematics. ... And, although I had some fabulous winnings, there were also some spectacular losses.

CATHERINE

I cannot believe it. You lost even once?

EMILIE

There was a very bad night, when all the cards were against me. Voltaire leaned in over my shoulder and suggested that I should expect no less, as I was playing with a table full of cheats.

CATHERINE

At the table of the Queen? Did anyone hear him?

EMILIE

I could not be sure. He said it in English, but someone may have heard him and understood.

CATHERINE

What did you do?

EMILIE

I claimed a headache and we left immediately, telling those around us very loudly where we were going to spend the night. Then we made a hasty retreat in the opposite direction. We stayed out of Paris for months to be sure that we would not be arrested.

CATHERINE

That could have ended very badly.

EMILIE

As time passed and nothing happened, I grew to believe that no one understood him after all.

CATHERINE

How fortunate.

EMILIE

The risk of the cards does make one feel fully alive, but the same can now be said for the work that I must complete.

CATHERINE

I hope it will be finished soon. All is prepared for your lying-in at Lunéville.

EMILIE

I cannot thank you enough for your help in arranging it.

CATHERINE

King Stanislas was only too happy to have you deliver there. When will you come?

EMILIE

In another week, perhaps two, depending on the progress I make.

CATHERINE

There is one who is waiting for you.

EMILIE

Sometimes I believe so, and then I am uncertain that he loves me at all.

CATHERINE

Do not doubt his love. He speaks of you fondly and often.

EMILIE (Allows this thought to sink in)

You see him often.

CATHERINE

Yes, we have again grown quite playful. But that does not preclude his loving you madly.

EMILIE

Playful? You are enjoying him sexually, while I am hard at my work? ... Now I understand why there were weeks when I did not hear from him at all.

CATHERINE

My dear Emilie. You will have a long and beautiful life with him. I am only enjoying him for the moment.

EMILIE

You are incorrigible. You simply never change. I have known you for a long time, but I do not believe our paths have crossed so intimately before. ... Finally, what does it matter what actions you take, or choices he makes? I love you both too much to concentrate my time on jealousy. ... Besides, why should I be planning my future? I do not believe that I will have a long life, but that with this birth, I will find my death.

CATHERINE

Do not say so. You are strong. You must have the will to live beyond your delivery.

EMILIE

Sometimes one can see one's destiny quite clearly.

CATHERINE

(Trying to cheer her.)

But you are so full of life.

(She caresses Emilie's belly.)

I always found this time in my life to be so stimulating. I was never so sexual as when I was with child.

EMILIE

What?

CATHERINE

What can be more freeing than knowing that you may indulge in whatever you chose without further fear of pregnancy?

EMILIE

Oh, I had not considered it in that light.

CATHERINE

Once you have delivered, you must not forget the other ways in which pregnancy can be diverted most safely. Perhaps I can be of some assistance in that regard.

(CATHERINE reaches for her and kisses her playfully. EMILIE kisses her back, long and deeply. They reach for each other.)

Scene 7

(At her home in Paris. EMILIE sits at her writing desk, and writes to ST.-LAMBERT. She reads it aloud.)

EMILIE

My darling Jean-Francois, Please do not reproach me for my Newton. I am punished enough. I have never made such a great sacrifice to reason as I have to stay here and finish my writing of this book. It is an awful job, for which one needs a head and a constitution of iron. My departure for Lunéville depends on the goodwill of Monsieur Clairaut, for I cannot leave until he has found the time to check all of my calculations. Nevertheless, I must come to you soon, for I cannot bear to be absent from your arms. I can no longer like anything that I cannot share with you, for I do not *love* Newton. I adore you. I love you with a passion and a madness that I believe you merit, and that makes me happy. The words of love in your last letter wrap round my heart still and hold me close to you. I shall see you very soon.

(VOLTAIRE enters.)

VOLTAIRE

My god this heat is oppressive.

EMILIE

It is only slightly warmer than last week.

VOLTAIRE

The whole city is going mad with it.

EMILIE

Ah, that explains your outburst at the theatre last night.

VOLTAIRE

How could I know that they were not paid to jeer? No respectful audience would have laughed so loudly. Besides, I am not speaking of last night. It is the streets. They are filled with people.

EMILIE

What people?

VOLTAIRE

Veterans. They are not enjoying their unemployment now that peace has been declared with Austria. The police are on edge.

EMILIE

Really?

VOLTAIRE

They have rounded up the leaders of a religious extremist faction. Have you heard nothing of this today?

EMILIE

Nothing. Only Newton exists in my world.

VOLTAIRE

I think it may be wise to accept the offer of King Stanislas and return to Lunéville now.

EMILIE

Soon, soon, I am very nearly done all I can do with Newton. There is one more conclusion Clairaut must check. Oh, that this one would be perfect. It cannot be as the last one, when I was so sure each line was absolutely accurate, only to discover one tiny error on page three of the thirty pages that point contained, which threw everything off. Days of tedious work all for nothing.

VOLTAIRE

But you corrected it easily enough.

EMILIE

Yes, but then spent days rewriting all that followed.

VOLTAIRE

To a glorious, exhilarating conclusion. Your enthusiasm was infectious.

EMILIE

Nothing in comparison to what it will be when the very last point is made and the work complete. Then, I shall celebrate.

VOLTAIRE

And we can leave this insufferable, dangerous heat.

Scene 8

(VOLTAIRE in the home of his niece, in Paris. They are lounging after intimacy.)

M-LOUISE

It does not make one bit of sense to me.

VOLTAIRE

My darling, please do not make this difficult.

M-LOUISE

How can you say you love me and leave with her again?

VOLTAIRE

You know I would choose to stay if I could.

M-LOUISE

But of course you can choose.

VOLTAIRE

She needs me at the moment.

M-LOUISE

And I do not?

VOLTAIRE

You are young, you are healthy. And you are not having a baby.

M-LOUISE

How do you know that?

VOLTAIRE

You are having a baby? Certainly not mine!

M-LOUISE

No, I am not having a baby. Only I need you just as much as she does.

VOLTAIRE

I shall be back to you as soon as she has completed her labour.

M-LOUISE

But that could be a month, at least. You are always leaving me.

VOLTAIRE

I will spend my life with you. You must not begrudge her this one month in a time of need.

M-LOUISE

It seems to me that she has always commanded your heart.

VOLTAIRE

You know that is not true. It has been years since I have thought of her as even a woman.

M-LOUISE

Then, she is not carrying your child?

VOLTAIRE
You know she is not.

M-LOUISE
But you will deliver her?

VOLTAIRE
Certainly not.

M-LOUISE
Then why –

VOLTAIRE
My dear child. I am neither the maker of babies, nor doctor, nor midwife, but I am a friend, and I will not leave her side, even for one I love so well.

M-LOUISE (Unhappily.)
Oh, all right.

VOLTAIRE
It is, of course, my wish to see you as soon as the ordeal is over.

M-LOUISE
Do not stay away too long. I may not be able to wait this time.

Scene 9

(EMILIE and VOLTAIRE in their salon in Cirey. VOLTAIRE is at his writing desk. EMILIE is pacing fretfully.)

EMILIE
He is not coming.

VOLTAIRE
He may yet arrive.

EMILIE
He should have been here two days ago, yesterday at the very latest.

VOLTAIRE
He was delayed.

EMILIE

He does not love me.

VOLTAIRE

Emilie, please, sit down.

EMILIE

He promised to meet us here.

VOLTAIRE

You must rest.

EMILIE

He toys with my heart.

VOLTAIRE

Such is the behaviour of the young.

EMILIE

He is not so young as to misinterpret what he has promised.

VOLTAIRE

I am here for you, my dear Emilie.

EMILIE (Finally stopping.)

You are, Dear Heart. At the end of it all, there is you.

VOLTAIRE

Not the end, merely a continuation of the middle of life. I am sure that I am much closer to the grave than you are. Always one foot in the coffin, the other performing gambades.

EMILIE (Crossing to his desk.)

You must promise me something.

VOLTAIRE

Oh dear, have I to make promises to you, too?

EMILIE

I am serious. I have put my affairs in order. I have brought with us several packages that you must be prepared to open and act upon in the event of my death.

VOLTAIRE

Emilie....

EMILIE

Promise me. I do not want to rely on Jean-Francois.

VOLTAIRE

Very well, if it is needed.

EMILIE

There is one for my husband, one with the papers of my marriage, another for that of my daughter. There are the certificates for my election to the Bologna Academy of Learning, numerous leases for the forges and lands of Cirey, and of course, one for you personally -

VOLTAIRE

Shh - enough, you must sit....

EMILIE

Over thirty packages in all.

VOLTAIRE

You will rest now. I do not wish to play midwife to you here in Cirey.

EMILIE

I have at least three weeks yet to wait.

VOLTAIRE

Your baby will believe he is being summoned, with so much talk.
(He rises and leads Emilie to a seat.)

EMILIE

We have always talked, you and I.

VOLTAIRE

We have, and our talk has produced much excellent work.

EMILIE

And many great honours. I have always been proud of you.

VOLTAIRE

And I of you.

EMILIE

In spite of getting yourself into no end of trouble, you have managed to produce work that will live forever, I am sure.

VOLTAIRE

You have been my muse on so many occasions.

EMILIE

You may have been my harshest critic, but also my most ardent supporter.

VOLTAIRE

We must stop now. You are speaking as if there was no future, no more work to produce. That is nonsense. There are many more honours to come.

EMILIE

For you.

VOLTAIRE

For us both....Our past is rich with memories that are dear to me.

EMILIE

As they are dear to me.

VOLTAIRE

You know that just before we met, my desire to enjoy free utterances led me to contemplate a voluntary exile.

EMILIE

You have never mentioned it.

VOLTAIRE

I had arranged to quit France and return to England, to enjoy the best right of humanity, which is to be dependent on law only, and not the caprice of man. Your friendship alone changed my determination and has rendered this country dearer to me than I had hoped for.

EMILIE

Then I helped France retain her greatest mind.

VOLTAIRE

A mind matched measure for measure by your own. Now, let us not regret the paths that have been freshly trodden.

EMILIE

And treat all paths as part of the tapestry of life?

VOLTAIRE

You will admit to me that you have fully enjoyed the carnal pleasures offered by your young lover.

EMILIE

It is true that I have.

VOLTAIRE

And so, neither of us has been denied the full expression of life and love.

EMILIE

The consequences of mine are, of course, much graver than your own.

VOLTAIRE

What is to be done with that? Nature has decreed it to be so.

EMILIE

There is no gain in the indulgence of bitterness on that point.

VOLTAIRE

You have accomplished so much more than society expects of your sex. You could have spent these months enjoying the rest that nature imposed on you.

EMILIE

You know that would not have been true to my nature.

VOLTAIRE

I know.

EMILIE

You know me better than anyone on earth.

VOLTAIRE

And carry that burden as a privilege.

EMILIE

I am afraid I have left my book imperfect.

VOLTAIRE

Who is to say that, when none other has even attempted its writing?

EMILIE

I could have done more.

VOLTAIRE

There is always more. Do not reproach yourself.

EMILIE

It will have to be enough.

VOLTAIRE

It will be. Now rest. By tomorrow night, you will dine with your lover at Lunéville.

EMILIE

(She pulls him down to join her.)

And when will you see yours? I am touched that you should give up your time with her to be with me.

VOLTAIRE

(He strokes her arm.)

You have been my world for too long to abandon you now.

EMILIE

(She strokes his face.)

I am grateful for your company.

VOLTAIRE

It is my pleasure to give it.

EMILIE

And Marie-Louise will wait for you?

VOLTAIRE (Shrugs.)

She has been too lazy to write.

(He leans towards her.)

EMILIE

How can we teach the young to love us more perfectly?

VOLTAIRE

They do not understand the simple two-bodied solution as we do. Like the earth and the moon -

EMILIE

Two bodies moving freely in space and pulled only by their mutual gravitational attraction. As we have always been to each other.

VOLTAIRE

But add in the sun. Each of us has also a sun. All are now in constant independent motion.

EMILIE

The forces change from moment to moment. It is impossible to calculate the cumulative effect of their interaction. Would that at least one body would stand still long enough to get a bearing on it, to use it to calculate the pull of the others.

VOLTAIRE

I fear that people are no easier to calculate than the sun and the moon and the earth.

(They kiss.)

(EMILIE stands and walks backwards until she touches the back of ST.-LAMBERT, who has entered from the opposite side of the stage. He has entered walking backwards. Both stop. She turns to face him.)

EMILIE

Darling! At last.

St.-LAMBERT (Turns to her.)

Darling! Oh, oh, I - I. You've change so much.

EMILIE

What did you think I should look like?

ST.LAMBERT

Of course, I knew you would have grown with child, but this is beyond my expectation.

EMILIE

You will make me cry if you find me ugly.

ST.-LAMBERT

Oh, no, no, I was only surprised for the moment. I have no experience –

EMILIE

Here.

(She places his hand on her belly.)

Do you feel that? That is our baby moving inside me.

(ST.-LAMBERT waits to feel the movement. When he does he snatches his hand away.)

ST.-LAMBERT

Oh my. That is the oddest sensation.

EMILIE

It is natural. It is part of us.

(She takes his hand and puts it back.)

ST.-LAMBERT

It is part of you, and therefore, it is beautiful.

(He keeps one hand on her belly and caresses her face with the other. He kisses her passionately.)

(VOLTAIRE has been standing where EMILIE left him and watching this exchange until this point. As they kiss, he slowly backs away from them and exits.)

Scene 10

(In court, in Lunéville. ST.-LAMBERT and EMILIE are again performing a 'play within the play'. CATHERINE and VOLTAIRE are observing.)

ST.-LAMBERT (as Catilina)

Aurelia, Cicero nears our fatal home;
By his order the senate must soon assemble:
Secretly I am called.

EMILIE (as Aurelia)

My husband, I tremble
At so sudden a call, upon hearing his name.

ST.-LAMBERT (as Catalina)

My wife trembles at this? No, bear not such blame!
What! You, woman, Roman and of Nero's lineage,
You would be without pride and be without courage?
Great hearts must have both.

EMILIE (as Aurelia)

And you think mine is timid:
Cruelty itself is to you but intrepid.
You dare reproach me for having trembled for you!
The councilor is here, adieu. Know you this is true;
Behold here a wife, to your laws submissive
Who cannot alter you, cannot with your heart vie,
Yet more Roman than you, can teach you how to die.

(All but VOLTAIRE applauds. VOLTAIRE takes a bow.)

CATHERINE

Bravo.

ST.-LAMBERT

Wonderful.

EMILIE

Absolutely brilliant. And you wrote this now, in only eight days, and eight nights,
from start to finish. You have spent your time most profitably.

VOLTAIRE

Indeed. The muse was with me. I wrote with a passion that only the truly wronged
can summon. I will call it, Catalina. It is a tragedy of epic proportions. I will not only

restore the glory of Rome, but also answer that terrible parody of my work penned by Crébillon. It will silence them all.

EMILIE

Of course it will, Dear Heart.
(She gasps.)

VOLTAIRE

I will again hold up my head at court.

ST.-LAMBERT

Emilie.

CATHERINE

What is it?

ST.-LAMBERT

You have gone pale.

EMILIE

Oh dear. That particular sensation.

ST.-LAMBERT

What sensation is that?

CATHERINE

Is it time?

EMILIE

(She feels the sharp pain of labour.)

Oh. Oh my. Yes.

VOLTAIRE

Oh god.

CATHERINE

I will summon the physicians.
(She exits.)

ST.-LAMBERT

Oh dear.

EMILIE

Help me.

ST.-LAMBERT

I am here.

EMILIE

Too soon. Oh - oh - no.

Scene 11

(EMILIE lies on her bed. The Marquis is with her. VOLTAIRE is also present. CATHERINE enters.)

CATHERINE

Look at you.

EMILIE

Catherine.

CATHERINE

You look so well.

EMILIE

I feel fabulous.

(She rises from her bed. Everyone rushes to restrain her.)

VOLTAIRE

What are you doing?

CATHERINE

You must lie down.

MARQUIS

It is all her maids can do to keep her in bed.

CATHERINE

It is much too soon to walk about.

MARQUIS

It has only been six days.

EMILIE

But, I feel wonderful. I could walk for miles.

MARQUIS

She was always like this. Impossible to pin down for the full six weeks.

EMILIE

How do you remember that?

MARQUIS

You are not 21 anymore.

EMILIE

You need not remind me.

MARQUIS

You did marvelously well, my dear.

VOLTAIRE

Indeed, a labour of a mere two hours. Who would have thought it possible?

EMILIE

It was mercifully quick.

VOLTAIRE

I believe that my fatigue is one hundred times greater than your own.

CATHERINE

How silly. What have you to be fatigued about?

VOLTAIRE

I certainly exceeded her labour with my own. She only had to bring one little girl into the world who does not say a word, but only howls; while I have been writing. I have had to make a Cicero, and a Caesar, and it is more difficult to make these men speak than to make children.

CATHERINE

Pay him no mind. I understand how difficult it is to bring a child into the world.

EMILIE

The labour of a great man is always greater than our own.

CATHERINE

They would have it seem so.

EMILIE

(To the MARQUIS.)

You are not too disappointed I did not have another son?

MARQUIS

The family name is safe with Claude-Florent.

EMILIE

Oh, Florent. Is he finished being angry with me?

MARQUIS

I had a word with him last week.

EMILIE

He wishes me well?

MARQUIS

After everything you have done for him, wishing you well is all that is left to him.

EMILIE

He did not tell you how unseemly he found my state?

MARQUIS

Your state is none of his concern.

(He rises and goes to VOLTAIRE.)

Monsieur Voltaire, I have not had the opportunity to properly thank you for your attentiveness during the last few months.

VOLTAIRE

It was a duty and a pleasure, of course.

(They continue to speak together in low tones.)

EMILIE

(She summons CATHERINE to her bedside. They speak out of hearing of the men.)

Have you not seen our mutual friend?

CATHERINE

Has he not been to visit you?

EMILIE

No, not yet. Did you take him to see the wee babe?

CATHERINE

Yes, of course, though he seemed not affected in the least.

EMILIE

But how can he be spending his days, to have neglected me so?

CATHERINE

I myself have felt his neglect. Newly arrived ladies-in-waiting have captured his attention and quite turned his head. Very pretty, very young, coquettish fresh offerings.

MARQUIS

And your manuscript, my dear? I had not thought to inquire after it with the events of the past week.

EMILIE

It has been safely dispatched to the library of King Louis. I have given birth to The Commentary on the Mathematical Principles of Newton, along with my sweet little Stanislas-Adélaïde.

MARQUIS

Wonderful.

VOLTAIRE

Two births in one week. So very prolific.

CATHERINE

Shall I order your maid to bring you something special to eat or drink?

EMILIE

Perhaps I would like some black syrup over ice.

CATHERINE

Over ice? One should hardly think of something cold after giving birth. You are not yet over your milk fever.

EMILIE

Nonsense. I did very well with just such a dish many times in the weeks before the birth, and in fact had some just yesterday. Why should it not do me well now?

MARQUIS

Would you not rather have something warm?

EMILIE

I would not. The air is quite warm enough. I do not wish to make myself warmer still.

MARQUIS

I have not gotten used to this idea of having something cooled by ice.

EMILIE

That is what I crave.

CATHERINE

Then I shall fetch it myself.

(Exits.)

EMILIE

Are you two not ready for your supper?

MARQUIS

Indeed, I am famished.

VOLTAIRE

I will join you in a moment.

MARQUIS

Sleep well, my dear. I will see you tomorrow.

EMILIE

Good night, my husband.

(The MARQUIS exits.)

VOLTAIRE

Ah, Emilie. All that foreboding came to not.

EMILIE (Teasing.)

Do not tinge your voice with disappointment.

VOLTAIRE

None whatever, I assure you. Now you will have to plan your next project. What could possibly exceed your work with Newton?

EMILIE

There are still some unanswered questions for me in the work of Newton, and perhaps I need to reexamine Leibniz and his discussion on the conservation of matter.

VOLTAIRE

What?

(Off her look.)

I see you have regained your sense of humour.

EMILIE (laughs.)

Oh, Dear Heart, that face! Oh, it is so good to laugh again, to feel free of care. ...

VOLTAIRE

Yes, well, let us bring ourselves back to the present. I do not like to mention it, but-

EMILIE

But what?

VOLTAIRE

Not what, but who.

EMILIE

Oh. Yes, that *who* indeed. The who that has been often on my lips and too readily on my mind even when my lips are silent.

VOLTAIRE

I do not recall seeing him by your side in this past week, since you have delivered.

EMILIE

You have not seen him because he has not been here.

VOLTAIRE

Impossible.

EMILIE

Quite possible. It seems he is not built to withstand the state of recovery from labour and delivery. He sent word that he wished me well.

VOLTAIRE

He saw no need to delivery that word in person?

EMILIE

It would seem not.

VOLTAIRE

And how does your heart deal with this development?

EMILIE

With less hurt than it has done in the past. ... I now recall how being with child could sometimes alter my perceptions of life. Pity those memories were too much in the distant past to guide me through my most recent confinement. I had forgotten how one is not always oneself during gestation.

VOLTAIRE

Indeed. Though we have always enjoyed tumultuous times, they did seem more frequent during the past few months.

EMILIE

Perhaps that was only because we lacked the remedy of times gone by.

VOLTAIRE

The remedy?

EMILIE

Was there ever an argument that could not be solved with an afternoon in bed followed by a picnic in the garden?

VOLTAIRE

That did seem the perfect solution more often than I could count.

(ST.-LAMBERT enters, looks around the room to locate EMILIE.)

ST.-LAMBERT

Emilie. My Darling.

VOLTAIRE

(Leaving her side reluctantly.)

I will see you tomorrow. Good night.

EMILIE

No, stay.

VOLTAIRE

You are quite sure?

ST.-LAMBERT

Darling. How I missed you.

(He approaches her bed. Voltaire is in the way and he can't quite reach her.)

EMILIE

There was no need to miss me. I have been here.

ST.-LAMBERT

Yes, well, I felt certain that you would want this week to recover and become yourself once again.

(VOLTAIRE has stepped aside and graciously given him access. He reaches down to kiss her, but she turns away.)

EMILIE

I see. You made a decision based on my desires without asking me what they were.

ST.-LAMBERT

But, surely you wanted some time for yourself.

EMILIE

Many friends have shared this week with me. Only you have been absent.

ST.-LAMBERT

But, your husband was here –

EMILIE

He arrived only this morning.

ST.-LAMBERT

I trust he will not remain long. Darling, I cannot wait until you are well enough to travel to Paris with me.

EMILIE

Really? I have just come from Paris. I do not know that I am anxious to return.

ST.-LAMBERT

The fall salon season will soon begin. It is what we have been waiting for.

EMILIE

I have made you a father.

ST.-LAMBERT

Yes, well, perhaps, in a manner of speaking.

EMILIE

I know you will not act in that capacity, but does it not make you at least a little bit proud to have helped produce such a beautiful child? Catherine did take you to see her, did she not?

ST.-LAMBERT

She did. I have never seen a newborn child at such close proximity before. I am not sure that beautiful is the adjective that sprang to mind.

EMILIE

So the experience did not move you?

ST.-LAMBERT

It was difficult to feel much of anything except a need to hand her back to her wet-nurse. She did seem in possession of a rather hefty set of lungs.

(ST.-LAMBERT laughs, as he has made such a clever joke.)

EMILIE

That is how babies tend to communicate.

ST.-LAMBERT

How fortunate that you and I can express ourselves more clearly. In fact, I have written a poem for you.

EMILIE

Have you?

ST.-LAMBERT

I have.

(ST.-LAMBERT clears his throat and tries to get closer to EMILIE to prevent VOLTAIRE from hearing it.)

(CATHERINE enters with a bowl of ice and 'black (barley) syrup'.)

CATHERINE

Ah, the lovebird has found his way back to the nest, I see.

(She gives ST.-LAMBERT a playful smack on his backside as she crosses to give EMILIE the drink.)

EMILIE

Thank you.

(She takes it from CATHERINE and sips it.)

Oh, this is delicious.

ST.-LAMBERT

You do have your appetite.

EMILIE

Of course.

(She drinks.)

Catherine. Jean-Francois was about to read the poem he has written for me.

CATHERINE

Were you? How lovely.

ST.-LAMBERT (Clears his throat again.)

Yes, well, of course, it is not perhaps anything deserving of a, a wider audience.

CATHERINE

Do not say so. How very silly. You have written me plenty of poems in the past, and indeed, I have heard that several of your poems have seen the light of day this past week.

ST.-LAMBERT

But this, this is a love poem, intended only for the ears –

EMILIE

Oh, do go on and read it.

VOLTAIRE

Yes, do. I am anxious to hear what you have created in my lengthy absence.

ST.-LAMBERT (Clears his throat nervously.)

Yes, well, here it is then.

(He reads carefully and ends with a flourish.)

How long have I longed for you
My Emilie
You are the world to me, only you
My Emilie
My sun, my moon and even my stars, too
My Emilie
The time has come to spread our wings
Fly to each other, never to flee
With you, I feel, my heart truly sings
Today, and for all eternity
My Emilie

EMILIE

Well, that must have taken most of the week to write. I understand now why you did not have time to see me.

ST.-LAMBERT

But Darling, I have told you –

EMILIE

Your absence has told me all that I ever needed to hear from you. You have found yourself otherwise engaged, as it suited you to spread your affections elsewhere. It was quite enough when I knew that I was sharing you with my dear friend, Catherine, but now I understand even that was not enough for you.

VOLTAIRE

What?

ST.-LAMBERT

I can explain –

EMILIE

Explain that all you ever wanted from me was introductions to the men of the Academy? That you saw me as your path to greatness?

ST.-LAMBERT

You were so much more to me than -

EMILIE

And what exactly did you plan to produce once you had secured that path? Certainly not the drivel you have tried to pass off as poetry just now?

ST.-LAMBERT

But Emilie, the love you have born me has –

VOLTAIRE

Has been sorely abused. Never has anyone been so unworthy of the love of a great lady as you. And that poetry, if one could even give it that lofty a name!

ST.-LAMBERT

But Sir, you have praised my work in the past.

VOLTAIRE

Only to honour one that I love. I can assure you that every moment spent listening to your words was sheer torture. Never have I endured such colossal lack of talent. You should not call yourself a poet, but a butcher of language.

ST.-LAMBERT

You do me wrong, Sir.

EMILIE

He does not, although his choice of words is stronger than I would have devised. Jean-Francois, your writing has not improved since first I read it. But that was not so important to me. I overlooked your literary shortcomings, as I was in love with you. I have loved you more deeply than you can imagine. I believed you were worthy of my love and would return it to me. I finally see that wishing it has not made it so. You gave only enough of yourself to leave me wanting more. I thought you could love me, in spite of what you displayed to the contrary. You may one day become the man you wish to be, but for now, I must release you.

ST.-LAMBERT

But, Emilie –

VOLTAIRE

Did you not hear the lady? I believe that you have overstayed your welcome, both in her affections and now in this room. Let me show you how to find the door.

(He stands between ST.-LAMBERT and EMILIE and waits for him to turn towards the door.)

(ST.-LAMBERT turns slowly and attempts to make a dignified exit.)

CATHERINE

Bravo. Well said.

(Goes to her.)

VOLTAIRE

Emilie. Oh, my Emilie.
(Goes to her side and takes her hand.)

EMILIE (laughs)

Oh, oh my, that did feel good. Oh, oh dear, what have I done?

VOLTAIRE

You have come back to yourself. At last.

EMILIE

How I longed to have him love me, but, he could not.

CATHERINE

He was never more than a plaything.

EMILIE

Oh, he was very much more than a plaything to me. ... But, no more. How could I have been so blind?

VOLTAIRE

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the heart. He stole yours for too long. I am sorry that I was so inattentive to your needs as to make you reach for one such as him.

EMILIE

Dear Heart, we are here. Our time is now. ... Fly to each other?
(laughs)

CATHERINE (Joins in.)

Never more to flee?

EMILIE

Oh, it is certainly time to flee. There was never a better time to flee. Oh, I feel reborn!
I am ready to live.

VOLTAIRE

So much to plan. We should go back to Cirey as soon as you are able to. We should again set up our experiments. We should clean up the theatre in the attic. We should travel. I want to show you England.

CATHERINE

Oh, how wonderful.

EMILIE

England. How very interesting that would be. There is plenty of time for that. But at this moment, there is nothing left to be desired but the company of my friend and my one true love.

(She reaches for both of them.)

We are, all of us, where we belong. The friendship between us, the mutual confidence, the delight of the heart, the enchantment of the soul, these things do not parish and can never be destroyed.

VOLTAIRE

We will move forward then, in harmony

EMILIE

Ever in harmony.... Oh, oh no, no!

(She holds her head in pain.)

VOLTAIRE

What is it, what is the matter?

EMILIE

Oh, it hurts!

CATHERINE

What can I do?

EMILIE

My head! Oh no, what is happening? I cannot bare it!

VOLTAIRE

(To CATHERINE.)

Call for a physician. Quickly.

(To EMILIE.)

Hold on. I am here. It will be all right.

(CATHERINE exits. EMILIE is moaning and swooning and holding her head.)

Scene 12

(EMILIE's room. The MARQUIS is present, as is CATHERINE.
VOLTAIRE is pacing.)

MARQUIS

I do not understand it. One minute she is the picture of health and the next she is violently ill?

CATHERINE

I told her that a cold drink was most unsuitable.

VOLTAIRE

I doubt that was the cause. That is not logical.

MARQUIS

What is logical about this at all? Tell me again what transpired.

VOLTAIRE

She was herself. She was laughing. All was well, then suddenly she clutched her head, exclaiming she had an extreme pain. The physicians were summoned. They gave her an opiate and it calmed her almost at once. She slept quite well all through the night, but has not properly awoken at all today.

CATHERINE

Wait, she is waking now. Emilie.

EMILIE

You are all here. What happened?

MARQUIS

You were quite ill.

EMILIE

I remember only the vilest of headaches.

VOLTAIRE

Has it passed?

EMILIE

More or less, I think it has.

VOLTAIRE

You gave us quite a scare.

EMILIE

I will be fine.

MARQUIS

I knew you were strong.

EMILIE

Why is it so difficult to breathe?

CATHERINE

Are you too warm?

VOLTAIRE

Give her some room.

EMILIE

I am so tired.

VOLTAIRE

Then you must rest. We are here with you.

(EMILIE closes her eyes and seems to fall asleep.)

VOLTAIRE

Perhaps the worst is over.

CATHERINE

She just needs to rest. Go, have your supper. I will sit with her.

MARQUIS

I suppose there is nothing else we can do.

VOLTAIRE

She seems to be resting comfortably.

MARQUIS

Call for us if there is any change.

CATHERINE

Of course.

(The MARQUIS and VOLTAIRE begin to exit. VOLTAIRE turns back.)

VOLTAIRE

I must remain here. Will you not take the Marquis to dine with the King?

CATHERINE

Well, if you will sit with her, perhaps I could. I will return later.

(The MARQUIS and CATHERINE exit. VOLTAIRE sits with EMILIE, stroking her hair. EMILIE opens her eyes.)

VOLTAIRE

You are awake. How do you feel?

EMILIE

I have had better days.
(She struggles to breathe.)

VOLTAIRE

What is it?

EMILIE

My chest feels so heavy.

VOLTAIRE

Your physicians have done all they can.

EMILIE

Difficult to catch enough air.

VOLTAIRE

You must rest. It will pass.

EMILIE

Yes. Where are...?

VOLTAIRE

They will return shortly.

EMILIE

Remember the packages. I told you -

VOLTAIRE

Shh. You will be all right.

EMILIE

Thank you for being here.... It means the world to me.

VOLTAIRE

I hardly felt the sacrifice.

I shall await you
quietly
In my meridian
in the fields of Cirey
Watching one star only
Watching my Emilie.

EMILIE

You shall make me weep.

VOLTAIRE

No, do not weep. Think only of the love I bear you, and smile.

EMILIE

Love? You would truly love me again?

VOLTAIRE

I do not believe that I ever stopped. I cannot imagine why I pushed you away. I love you. I will always love you. Never will I know your equal. There is no man or woman in this world to match your brilliance, your fire and intelligence, no one can rival you, my Emilie. There is no woman alive with whom I would rather live, would rather give myself to. You are everything to me. Please, please, regain your health and love me in return.

EMILIE

You know that I do.

(She inhales deeply, with a great deal of effort)

VOLTAIRE

Emilie. Be calm. You will be all right.

EMILIE

I don't know that I shall.

VOLTAIRE

You will. You must. I cannot imagine a world without you.

EMILIE

Dear Heart.

(She gasps for air.)

VOLTAIRE

No. Emilie, breathe, please breathe. Oh, Emilie.

EMILIE

Help me.

VOLTAIRE

I don't know what to do. I love you. Please, Emilie -

(EMILIE gasps for breath. Her body heaves with the effort, she groans, after which she goes quite still.)

VOLTAIRE

Emilie.

(He shakes her shoulders.)

No.

(He searches for a pulse, for a sign of life.)

No.

(Bursting into tears.)

No. Please! Emilie!

(Holds her gently.)

Emilie. Emilie.

THE END