



Film Oblige and UGC present

DUMAS

(Signé Dumas)

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Dialogues by Gilles Taurand

Based upon the play "Signé Dumas" by Cyril Gely and Eric Rouquette

Directed by
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Synopsis

Alexandre Dumas, at the height of his career, takes Auguste Maquet, his chief literary collaborator or 'ghost writer' ten years his junior, to meet a young unknown admirer, Charlotte Desrives.

The two men are at the summit of their artistic collaboration for they have just published "The Count of Monte Christo", "Queen Margot" and "The Three Musketeers". If it's Maquet who writes the majority of the texts, both the honours and fame go to Dumas.

When Maquet decides to seduce Charlotte by passing himself off as Dumas, his motivations are still unclear to this day. To seize his share of the fame of the works of which he considers himself to be the author? To slip into the skin of a character - Dumas - whom he both admires and envies? Or to simply give himself every chance of conquering her?

But Charlotte is endowed with great charm and Auguste falls in head over heels in love.

Aided and abetted by Céleste, Alexandre's mistress, Auguste has Charlotte come to Alexandre's apartment in Paris. But she seems far more focused on the revolution and her fiancé, Jean-Baptist, than Auguste.

Maquet's health declines and Dumas loses his chief collaborator.

Through a misunderstanding, all find themselves at the great reception which Dumas gives for the "house-warming party" of his Château de Monte Christo

The truth bursts out: Auguste is no more than an impostor and Alexandre Dumas succeeds in turning both the situation - and Charlotte - in his favour.

Now that she knows herself to be the spotlight, Charlotte plays on the rivalry between Alexandre and Auguste to get her father, Martin Desrives, released, a revolutionary held in prison by Louis Philippe.

The riots of 1848 lead to his liberation, but no sooner out of the prison's walls than he dies under a hail of bullets. Charlotte consoles herself in Jean-Baptist's arms.

Dumas and Maquet are now free to calmly return to their literary collaboration, but the riots soon turn to revolution and Auguste refuses, unlike Alexandre, to support of the Duchess of Orleans. The two men break off relations: Maquet threatens Dumas with a lawsuit and financial ruin. And Dumas discovers a calculating Maquet far less docile than he had imagined.

But the two men are too closely tied to be able to break up so easily: while the Château de Monte Christo, symbol of Dumas' success, is seized by bailiffs, Maquet returns to the table to pursue their joint literary work.

1. EXT. AT SEA, TROUVILLE, NORMANDY - EVENING

A few seagulls bob on the swell of the tide.

It is a peaceful scene at dusk.

Suddenly, a gunshot causes them to take flight...

The thundering laugh of Alexandre Dumas is heard and we see a small boat whose sail is down. With a smoking old shotgun in his hands, Dumas is seated near Auguste Maquet, who is clearly not in his element. The poor fellow is green at the gills.

He is twelve years younger than Alexandre but he seems ageless, neither young nor old. Four sturdy young oarsmen row them towards the beach at Trouville...

A second gunshot is heard...

MAQUET

(wearily)

Enough of this massacre...

DUMAS

What massacre? I'm plainly shooting to miss!

MAQUET

Frankly, I don't see the point...

DUMAS

(He sticks the barrel of the gun under Maquet's nose) -

Take a whiff of that... just the smell of gunpowder gives me an appetite...
(to the oarsmen) Come on, faster! Put your backs into it! (turning towards Maquet) Still not feeling well, Maquet?

MAQUET

(exploding)

I'm seasick, Alexandre!

Dumas takes a hipflask out of his pocket, unplugs it and hands it to Maquet.

DUMAS

A shot of that will do you good!

MAQUET

(skeptical)

You really think so?

Dumas sees the gleam in the oarsmen's eyes...

DUMAS

Ask them if they'd like some
calvados...

Auguste Maquet, feeling pressured, takes a sip. He immediately
feels the urge to puke and lurches over the side.

DUMAS

(with an expression of disgust)
What a waste...

The young men burst out laughing. Dumas hands the flask to one of
the oarsmen who hands it around...

DUMAS

(to the sailors)
Okay, boys, to Trouville!

MAQUET

(wipes his mouth with a silk handkerchief)
I feel a little lighter now...

DUMAS

... now just imagine a fricassee of
scallops with butter from
Nantes... a pair of roasted
woodcocks... some lamb cutlets...
We'll start off with a Pouilly and
we'll finish with a Graves...
How does that sound?

Maquet's gut heaves once more...

2. EXT. SHORE AND BEACH - EVENING

About ten meters from the beach, Maquet, very tense, is perched on
the shoulders of a sailor carrying him ashore.

Alexandre has taken off his boots and rolled up his pants. He is in
the water up to his thighs. He has the vitality of the devil.

DUMAS

Turn around! Look, for God's sake!
There's nothing more beautiful
than a sunset by the sea!

MAQUET

(turns)
Sublime...

Children are collecting basketfuls of mussels on the Black Rocks.
Some women push nets on long poles to catch shrimps.
Maquet is at last back on solid ground.
The sailors follow with the two men's bags.

With his eyes, Dumas devours all he can see, like Captain Cook landing on an unknown beach...

DUMAS

(practicing what he preaches)
Open your nostrils and breathe deeply! Oh, I feel that inspiration is returning...

MAQUET

Fourteen hours by coach to reach Rouen... then ten hours to reach Le Havre... plus another two by boat... at a modest count, that's at least twenty-six hours to rediscover your inspiration!

DUMAS

(laughing)
You won't change, Maquet. You have a clock for a brain!

3. EXT. MOTHER OZERAIS' INN - EVENING

The courtyard of the inn is obstructed with carts and livestock of all sorts: cows, bulls, pigs, ducks, turkeys...

While Maquet pays the sailors who leave the luggage at the entry of the inn, Dumas approaches a pretty little female farmer energetically brushing the rump of a cow...

DUMAS

Does the sweet thing have a name?

YOUNG FARMER

(with a Norman accent)
Buttercup... She's a real Normande. I'll let you have her for twenty gold francs if you're interested...

DUMAS

(amused, undressing her with his eyes)
I meant you, my pretty... not the cow.

YOUNG FARMER

(laughs)
I'm worth much more!

A young man in a sailor's smock steps in. He doesn't find it so funny.

YOUNG MAN

Marion! Don't talk to strangers! Go wash up, we're about to eat.

Marion sets down her brush and follows the young man inside the inn.

Maquet joins Dumas who eats her up with his eyes...

DUMAS

(dreamily)

If I were a sculptor, I would start with her behind.

4. INT. MOTHER OZERAIS' INN - DINING ROOM - EVENING

In the dining room of the inn, we find Dumas seated at a table facing Maquet, an enormous platter of between them.

Maquet, with his nose in his plate, conscientiously eats his soup.

Marion and the young man in the sailor's smock dine not far from them. The boisterous and smoky room is filled with horse dealers.

Mother Ozerais, the proprietor, enters.

MOTHER OZERAIS

Oh Monsieur Dumas... How long has it been?

DUMAS

(sucking on a crab's claw)

Ages!

MOTHER OZERAIS

(glances at the horse dealers)

My apologies for the company...

There's a livestock fair tomorrow.

DUMAS

You know Madame Ozerais that I am at heart a simple man.

MOTHER YOUNG

I know, I know... a great man of simplicity... *(with a mysterious air)* By the way, a little surprise awaits you upstairs...

DUMAS

Louisette?

MOTHER YOUNG

Oh no... Today is Louise's day off... Firmine is replacing her... *(she calls out to the kitchen)* Firmine!

Firmine comes out of the kitchen. She is almost a dwarf and she limps a little. Maquet can't help himself from smiling.

MOTHER OZERAIS

(to Firmine)

Open up a bottle of my reserve white wine. (to Dumas) With the compliments of the lady of the house! (turning towards Maquet) and you sir, I trust you are not going to just drink water!

MAQUET

I don't feel very well.

MOTHER YOUNG

Wine is a real pick-me-up.

Mother Ozeraiis leaves them to go from table to table. We guess that she is telling each table that the great Dumas, in the flesh, is in the room. Curious faces turn towards the two men.

DUMAS

What a busybody! (noisily, he sucks on a whelk) Don't you want to taste the whelks? They're a real treat.

MAQUET

No, thank you, Alexandre... (swallows a spoonful of soup) You didn't tell me you were a regular at this inn.

DUMAS

I spent several months here with Belle...

MAQUET

And Louisette?

DUMAS

Come on, Auguste... Louisette was a little extra...

MAQUET

Or a lot extra?

DUMAS

(laughs)

Oh, my friend... if you let yourself go once in a while, you could bring the house down with laughter! (he attacks a langoustine) Trouville was a happy moment... I wrote one hundred lines a day by

candlelight! Richard VII and his
vassals...

MAQUET

We'll try to do even better...

DUMAS

Exactly... We have to get going with
Bragelonne and deliver the first three
chapters in a month, at the latest.
Otherwise, we'll be in trouble.

MAQUET

I'm on chapter two... You remember?
When Gaston eats his salmon...

DUMAS

Oh yes... "One of the biggest salmons
that had ever swum up the
Loire to be caught between Paimboeuf
and Saint-Nazaire..."

He slurps down an oyster.

MAQUET

(revolted)

Precisely...

DUMAS

Eat, Auguste... Aren't you going to
finish your vegetable soup?

Firmine brings them their gift, a carafe of white wine.

MAQUET

(to Firmine)

Is my room ready?

FIRMINE

We have put you in number twelve, at
the end of the corridor, Monsieur
Paquet...

MAQUET

Maquet...

Firmine doesn't care and has already left the table.

Maquet sighs and meticulously folds his napkin before slipping it
into its ring. Mother Ozerai is talking with Marion. They are
obviously talking about Alexandre who senses it and can't help
smiling at the young farmer. Unable to restrain herself, Marion
leaps forward to join him.

MARION

(flustered)

Monsieur Dumas! If I had known when we first spoke...

DUMAS

What would you have done, mademoiselle?

MARION

I don't know... I read Monte-Cristo and I imagined you differently.

DUMAS

Really? And just how did you imagine me?

MARION

(timidly points at Maquet)

More like this gentleman...

Maquet smiles, flattered.

DUMAS

(abruptly)

And what did you like in Monte-Cristo?

MARION

Everything...

DUMAS

Everything! ... That's a big compliment and... *(glances at the young man watching them)* Does your charming fiancé also like Monte-Cristo?

MARION

Victor? He's my brother!

DUMAS

(raises his glass; loudly)

Well, I propose a toast... to Victor! *(he waves his glass in the direction of Victor who is obliged to do the same)* Come on, Maquet... *(He fills Maquet's empty glass with water)* We're all toasting!

MAQUET

(raising his glass)

To King Louis-Philippe!

MARION

(with pride)

I too am for the king because he is
for the people!

DUMAS

Don't say foolish things, my pretty...
the king is a swindler. He won't last
long, you can be sure of that!

MAQUET

(leaning over to Marion)

Monsieur Dumas is an unrepentant
republican...

VICTOR

(at his table)

Marion! Your chicken is getting cold!

MARION

(getting up, speaking to Dumas)

Are you staying long in Trouville?

DUMAS

When one makes such pretty
acquaintances, there's no desire to
leave!

Blushing furiously, skittish, Marion returns to her table.

DUMAS

Do you want to know what I think
Maquet? The cowgirl hasn't read a line
of Monte Cristo because she can't
read... and that's just fine with me.

MAQUET

Why is that?

DUMAS

(turning towards Maquet, hushed)

Girls are more eager in bed when they
are illiterate... It's a golden
rule... (Maquet gets up) You're
leaving me already?

MAQUET

(yawning)

It's been a long day, Alexandre... And
I want to get up early.

He heads for the stairs.

Dumas grabs a lobster's claw...

He catches Marion glancing at him as she bites hungrily into her chicken leg. They exchange a meaningful smile. Dumas raises his glass in the direction of her brother, who is again obliged to follow suit.

5. INT. STAIRCASE/HALLWAY, MOTHER OZERAIS' INN - NIGHT

Mother Ozerais, carrying a gas lamp, leads Dumas up the stairs.

MOTHER OZERAIS

Forty sous a room! Don't get your hopes up! Those are yesterday's prices! Prices are going up, Monsieur Dumas and your room's soared in value, just like you. You'll see...

They walk down a narrow corridor and stop at the "the surprise": a copper plaque screwed on a door. It reads:

Here slept the illustrious Alexandre Dumas.

The copper is a little dull. Mother Ozerais spits on the plaque and polishes it with an old handkerchief she pulls out of her apron pocket.

MOTHER YOUNG

Well? How does it feel to be the talk of the town?

DUMAS

(annoyed)

I don't remember sleeping in this room...

MOTHER OZERAIS

(laughing)

Of course not... It's the largest in the inn... As long as the wealthy believe it... and I can promise you they keep coming back... They all want to sleep in your bed... I charge 250 for it normally, but I'll give you a discount.

She unlocks the door.

DUMAS

(gloomily)

I feel like I am entering my tomb.

MOTHER OZERAIS

Well, that's a depressing thought! You'll see... the room faces the back, nice and quiet for you to write.

6. INT. DUMAS' ROOM - NIGHT

They enter. Mother Ozerai lights the lamps, pulls back the bedspread, checks that there is water in the pitcher and that the chamber pot is clean.

DUMAS

(looking over the room)

Impossible... I need to see the sea to write. Here, I'll suffocate.

MOTHER YOUNG

(awkward)

But Monsieur Dumas...

DUMAS

I'll return to Paris immediately!

MOTHER YOUNG

The inn is stuffed to the gills because of the livestock fair!

DUMAS

And my friend Maquet, does he have a view of the sea?

MOTHER YOUNG

Yes, but his room is miniscule... (she watches as Dumas darts into the corridor) Monsieur Dumas! Where are you going? You can't be serious about going back to Paris tonight!

7. INT. AUGUSTE MAQUET'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dumas bangs on the door.

DUMAS

Maquet! Wake up!

No answer. He knocks again.

DUMAS

Maquet! The inn's on fire!

A key turns in the lock. Maquet appears, with a pitcher of water in his hand, ready to fight the flames. He wears a nightshirt and nightcap. Dumas dashes inside.

It's a small room under the eaves.

A bed, a table cluttered with pages, a fan...

Dumas opens the window and the shutters. Immediately, a gust of wind disperses the pages on the table. Furious, Maquet scrambles to collect them. Mother Ozerai appears.

MAQUET

What do you want?

DUMAS

I am terribly sorry, Auguste... I need
to breathe the sea air...
We're going to change rooms.

MAQUET

Now?

DUMAS

Yes, now...

MOTHER OZERAIS

(dismayed, to Maquet who is distraught)
My poor man! I'll help you move.

8. EXT. MAQUET'S NEW ROOM - MORNING

Next morning.

Maquet is installed in his new room in front of his desk, cluttered
with dictionaries and pages filled with writing...

He writes.

There is a knock on the door.

MAQUET

Come in!

Maquet turns. A ravishing, young woman (CHARLOTTE) appears on the
threshold. She is about twenty and looks at Maquet with a mix of
shyness and fervor. She is incapable of uttering a word.

MAQUET

You want to make the bed?

CHARLOTTE

Sorry?

Maquet stands.

MAQUET

It's just that... I am in the middle
of writing.

CHARLOTTE

I'm really sorry.

MAQUET

It's not your fault. We all have our
jobs to do.

CHARLOTTE

Louisette said I could come up.

MAQUET

Louisette? Oh yes, Louisette...

The door is still open. The young woman looks at the plaque:

Here slept the illustrious Alexandre Dumas

CHARLOTTE

Did you sleep well at least?

MAQUET

No, to tell you the truth, I didn't sleep a wink.

CHARLOTTE

What are you working on at the moment?

MAQUET

The Viscount of Bragelonne...It's the sequel to the Three Musketeers... and I'm also adapting Monte Cristo for the theatre.

CHARLOTTE

So that's a writer...

MAQUET

Well yes, a writer is someone who writes... As simple as that.

Charlotte smiles. A breathtaking smile.

CHARLOTTE

I can come back later, if you want.

MAQUET

Now that you're here, go ahead... (he sits down again at his table and picks up his pen) There's no need to change the sheets...

Turning his back on her, he immerses himself in re-reading what he has just written. He seems nervous, troubled by the presence of this very attractive young woman.

CHARLOTTE

(speaking to his back)

Excuse me... I think there's a slight misunderstanding... (Maquet turns around) I am not the chambermaid and... I admire you greatly. (Maquet

stiffens) I know you must be used to this kind of outburst.

MAQUET

(springs up)

Wait, wait...

CHARLOTTE

(still on the doorstep)

You must always wonder what your female admirers have in mind... perhaps a leading role in one of your plays... but I'm not an actress... I have not come to speak about myself but about my father.

MAQUET

(Helplessly)

You have the wrong room, mademoiselle...

CHARLOTTE

(points to the plaque)

I can read... my father often spoke about you... He was still young then but for him you were the hero of the Three-Day Revolution in July 1830, the man who overthrew Charles X.

MAQUET

What is your father's name?

CHARLOTTE

Doctor Martin Desrives... Nine years ago he was locked up in Sainte Pélagie Prison. He was arrested with Blanqui and Barbès.

MAQUET

(tensing)

Their plan was to burn down the Palais de Justice, wasn't it?

CHARLOTTE

Unfortunately, they failed... May I come in? We could get along... *(she walks in and closes the door)*. It's a miracle that you are here. In the village, everyone is talking about you... At first, I didn't believe it... Alexandre Dumas in Trouville!

May I sit down? (she sits down) You
never received my father's letters?

Maquet stands near the young woman.
High angle shot on her delightful bust...

MAQUET

(collecting himself)

Let me explain...

THE YOUNG WOMAN

There's nothing to explain... the
censorship is worse and worse... You
must help him Monsieur Dumas... He is
very sick... They have put him in
isolation... I think it's
consumption... They won't even allow
me to see him... (She hides her face
in her hands). He could be dead.

MAQUET

Come, come mademoiselle... You would
know. These people are not savages
after all...

CHARLOTTE

Clearly, you do not know them.

A storm is raging in Maquet's head. How can he rewind the
conversation, admit to this young woman that he is not Alexandre
Dumas and that he has little sympathy for revolutionaries?

MAQUET

Let me think...

CHARLOTTE

Please don't think too long, monsieur
Dumas...

She clasps his hands, virtually on her knees in front of him, as if
beseeching the pope.

CHARLOTTE

I live in the last house on the road
to Blanquières... Will you come?

She looks at him with a grateful smile and rummages in her bag. She
takes out a copy of Monte-Cristo.

CHARLOTTE

Would you be so kind as to sign my
copy?

Maquet takes the volume and sits down at the table. He hesitates.
Then, as if he had just made a decision:

MAQUET

What is your name?

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte...

Maquet dips a pen in an inkwell and writes: *To Charlotte Desrives who knows me so well...*

Signed, with astonishing aplomb, *Alexandre Dumas*.

Charlotte gets up to take the book. She reads the dedication and kisses it ardently.

MAQUET

Be careful... It's not dry!

He's right. She has a little purple ink on her lips.

Maquet takes a silk handkerchief out of his pocket.

MAQUET

May I?

He goes to wipe her lips.

She stops him and goes over to the mirror, where she gazes at her pretty ink-stained lips with a strange smile.

9. INT. MOTHER OZERAIS' INN - MORNING

Maquet escorts Charlotte to the top of the stairs. From Dumas' room, groans of pleasure waft into the hallway...

CHARLOTTE

It's appalling... you'd think they were animals...

MAQUET

What do you expect? It's the livestock fair.

MAN'S VOICE

(from downstairs)

Where's my daughter? (he yells)
Marion!

Maquet panics.

Marion's father's footsteps can be heard coming up the stairs.

Maquet hustles Charlotte downstairs.

Marion's father is a man of impressive build with a thick, country accent.

MAQUET

Are you looking for Marion?

FATHER

Are you deaf? Where is she, for God's sake! If she's gone for a tumble, I'll kill her!

MAQUET

I saw her leave very early this morning... She said she was going shrimping.

FATHER

(stunned)

Shrimping? Are you sure? Was she alone?

MAQUET

Dramatically so...

FATHER

She's losing her marbles... With all the work we have on...

Dazed, Marion's father goes back downstairs.
Maquet rushes to Dumas' door. He knocks frantically.

MAQUET

(conspiratorial)

Mademoiselle Marion! You must leave at once! Your father is downstairs!

The door opens.
Marion is completely dishevelled and half naked.

MARION

Sweet Jesus, what time is it?

MAQUET

I told him you went shrimping.

She grabs her clothes and dashes down the corridor.
Dumas is in bed, beaming.

DUMAS

I was right... Illiterate. But as for the rest...

MAQUET

Shall we do some work?

DUMAS

Excellent idea! I feel in top form!

10. **EXT. BEACH, TROUVILLE - DAY**

In the strong wind, the waves crash against the shore.
The two men walking on the sand are forced to shout so they can
hear each other. Dumas has taken a page out of his pocket.

DUMAS

In chapter one of Bragelone, I think
the portrait of the first young woman
isn't vigorous enough.

MAQUET

(dismayed)

No, I'm sorry. We're not going over
old ground. We have to move forward...

DUMAS

I re-wrote the whole chapter...

MAQUET

When?

DUMAS

Last night, in my head, while making
love to that charming cowgirl...
Listen... "The one leaning on the
chair, that is to say the boisterous,
vivacious one, was a young woman of
nineteen or twenty years of age, with
dark skin and dark hair. Her lustrous
beauty was encapsulated in those
sparkling eyes beneath dramatically
arched eyebrows, and above all in
those teeth, which shone like pearls
behind her blood-red lips..."

MAQUET

(impressed)

You're right – it's much better.

DUMAS

You mean, it's admirable. And to
conclude "Each of her movements seemed
to be from the repertory of a mime
show. She didn't live, she bounced.

MAQUET

(savours the words)

"She didn't live, she bounced."
Sublime.

Dumas hands him the page but a gust of wind tears it from his
hands. Maquet rushes after it as it swoops towards the sea. Too
late. Maquet catches a wave head on. He turns to Dumas.

MAQUET

I'm sorry, Alexandre...

DUMAS

(magnanimous)

Auguste... One would think you have absolutely no confidence in my memory: "The one leaning on the chair, that is to say the boisterous, vivacious one..."

MAQUET

(exasperated)

Yes, yes. Shall we go back to the inn?

DUMAS

Not yet... Let's first mingle with the people.

11. EXT. LIVESTOCK FAIR, TROUVILLE - DAY

We pick them up in the square where the Livestock Fair is being held.

DUMAS

One hundred and twenty thousand francs... plus interest... plus an allowance... I counted and that makes at least one hundred fifty thousand...

MAQUET

(quivering)

What are you talking about?

DUMAS

My ex-wife... She's threatening to take me to court if I don't pay her all that before the end of March... To think that I only married her to get rid of her...

They are now in the midst of the peasants exhibiting their livestock. As he did with the sea breeze, breathing it in with his nostrils quivering, Dumas now strokes a horse and then the rump of a cow. He catches sight of Marion near an enclosure filled with cows and bulls. She is with her brother and father.

MARION

Papa... I would like to introduce you to Monsieur Alexandre Dumas, the famous writer (sees Maquet) and...

MAQUET

Maquet... Auguste Maquet... A writer too...

FATHER (TO MAQUET)

We've already met... You went bathing fully dressed?

MAQUET

It's very invigorating in the morning.

Dumas gazes dreamily at a bull.

DUMAS

Look at that pair of balls, Maquet! If only, eh?

Marion's father laughs.

DUMAS

(to the father, who can't believe his ears)
How much?

FATHER

Do you have a farm with cows in the area?

DUMAS

No, but I have land around my chateau...

FATHER

I won't deliver to Paris...

DUMAS

No matter... How much do you want?

MAQUET

(dismayed)
Is this a joke, Alexandre?

FATHER

(smacking his lips)
One hundred gold francs...

DUMAS

Today, I'm in no mood to haggle... I'll take him!

FATHER

(dumbfounded)
Well, that calls for a celebration! What would you say to a little calvados?

He takes Dumas by the arm and leads him to the nearest café.

DUMAS

You have a lovely daughter...

FATHER

Oh, she's a little strumpet... she needs to be reined in.

DUMAS

You're right. Tightly reined in... that's how girls should be treated, otherwise...

FATHER

(bursting out laughing)

Apparently, you are a connoisseur!

Maquet and Marion watch them enter the café. It begins to rain heavily...

MARION

(pointing to the café)

Don't you want to take shelter?

MAQUET

Well, given my present condition...

MARION

In any case... thank you for this morning...

MAQUET

(curtly)

Don't mention it...

He turns and heads back down the village main street.

12. EXT. CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - DAY

Spattered in mud, dripping wet in the pouring rain, buffeted by gusts of wind, Maquet finally comes to the last house in Trouville, on the road to Blanquières...

The shutters are hanging off and the walls are covered in mildew. He goes through the gates, through a small, overgrown garden, and knocks on the door.

Millie, Doctor Desrives' elderly housekeeper, opens the door.

MILLIE

Oh, you poor thing! You came all this way without an umbrella!

13. INT. DINING ROOM, CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - DAY

Maquet is seated by a roaring fire. The shutters are closed. Even in darkness, the dining room is a shambles: there are books everywhere, in the bookcase and on the floor, some stuffed animals, a microscope, an anatomical illustration by Leonardo de Vinci...

Charlotte is seated opposite him.

MAQUET

(looks around)

Do you close the shutter against the rain?

CHARLOTTE

No, the people... Here, they look at me like unwanted animal... After the gendarmes arrested my father, I suddenly became a pariah. Even though he had taken care of people and saved many lives...

MAQUET

Why do you stay in Trouville?

CHARLOTTE

I have no choice... Paris is much too expensive.

Milie enters with a shirt and thick-knit sweater.

MILIE

(handing him the clothes)

Go on! Take your clothes off and make no fuss! I used to be a nurse. I've seen everything there is to be seen!

CHARLOTTE

Milie! Do you know who you are talking to?

MILIE

Alexandre Dumas himself! But when he runs a blazing fever, his teeth will chatter like anyone else's...

CHARLOTTE

Change behind the screen...

Maquet reluctantly obeys. He takes the shirt and sweater and disappears behind the screen.

MAQUET (O.S.)

Do you have any friends here?

CHARLOTTE

There are plenty of my father's friends, many of whom, in fact you knew well...

MAQUET

Really?

CHARLOTTE

In 1830, when you were on the barricades... do you remember young Bard? He was eighteen then...

MAQUET

Oh yes, Bard...

CHARLOTTE

The painter...

MAQUET

Of course, the painter... Does he still paint?

CHARLOTTE

My father told me the whole story. At the Town Hall, you said to him, "Come with me to be shot!" And he followed you without a moment's hesitation... And do you remember Bixio? The man you broke into the armoury with...

MAQUET

Ah, Bixio! A fine fellow! It's true, we were running low on ammunition...

CHARLOTTE

(laughing)

And food! It seems that you continually demanded food!

Maquet comes out from behind the screen wearing the Doctor's shirt and sweater.

MAQUET

I've always had a healthy appetite...
(looks Charlotte straight in the eye)
Carpe diem has always been my motto,
Charlotte...

He returns to his seat by the fire.

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

So... you've thought it over?

MAQUET

Of course, I've thought it over... but
I need to think a little more.

CHARLOTTE

My father is at death's door.

MAQUET

Trust me...

CHARLOTTE

(getting up)

May I ask a favour of you, Monsieur
Dumas?

MAQUET

Alexandre...

CHARLOTTE

(whispering)

Alexandre...

MAQUET

Of course Charlotte... anything you
want...

She opens a drawer, takes out a sealed envelop.

CHARLOTTE

If I send this letter to the prison,
it will be opened. Could you
give it to him personally?

MAQUET

(taking the envelope)

Leave it to me.

14. INT. MAQUET'S ROOM, OZERAIS' INN - DAY

A paper knife delicately slides under the wax seal.

In his room, Maquet, with the air of a spy, reads Charlotte's
letter.

CHARLOTTE'S VOICE

My dear father,
I do not believe in luck but in fate.
And fate has placed Alexandre Dumas in
our path. I took advantage of his
visit to Trouville to tell him of your
situation. He has agreed to do all he
can to obtain your release. He will
come to visit you soon. Be careful and
brave. I haven't lost hope of winning

him over to our cause. You cannot imagine how happy I am. Monsieur Dumas is a good-looking man, with very gentle eyes. I never imagined that someone so famous could be so timid. I liked him immediately, as much as I like what he writes. I hope to hold you in my arms very soon. Charlotte.

Maquet puts the letter back in his pocket, deeply troubled by what he has just read. On his desk is his Bragelonne manuscript.

He dips his pen in the inkwell, re-reads a passage, hesitates, puts his pen down, gets up, and begins to pace around in the room. Outside, the wind and rain lash against the windows... Maquet leaves his room and walks down the corridor.

15. INT. DUMAS' ROOM, MOTHER OZERAIS' INN - DAY

Still wearing Doctor Desrives' grey sweater, Maquet knocks on Dumas' door.

O.S., "Come in."

Dumas is in bed.

DUMAS

At last! I looked everywhere for you!
Louisette! Come out from under there!

Flabbergasted, Maquet watches Louisette's head emerge from under the blankets. Her cheeks are flame-red, her hair tousled, and her breasts partially exposed.

LOUISETTE

I nearly suffocated... It's so hot
under there!

She leaps out of the bed, fixes her hair and re-buttons her bodice, oblivious to Maquet's presence.

And exits.

MAQUET

You're incorrigible.

DUMAS

You're going to lecture me? I thought we were supposed to be working harder than ever! Where did you get that ridiculous sweater?

MAQUET

I bought it at the market... Doing my bit for local traders.

DUMAS

You're not in Trouville to go shopping!

MAQUET

Alexandre... I took your advice. I breathed in the sea breeze and cattle dung.

DUMAS

And then what? Do you have any new ideas?

MAQUET

I'm blocked...

DUMAS

(frowns)

What do you mean, "blocked?"

MAQUET

You know very well, Alexandre... When you're blocked, you're blocked.

DUMAS

Bloody hell! That's all we need... Tell me where you're blocked, at least. *(gets out of bed)*. Would you like a little pick-me-up?

MAQUET

I want to go back to Paris...

DUMAS

(rummaging through his pages)

Come on... Let's take a look at chapter two together. Where are you exactly in chapter two?

MAQUET

Nowhere... May I ask you something?

DUMAS

(very sweetly)

Anything, dear friend.

MAQUET

Do you ever think about the revolutionary you once were?

DUMAS

(stunned)

I don't see the connection with
Bragelonne...

MAQUET

Do you remember the young Bard? And
Bixio, the one you broke into an
armoury with?

DUMAS

What's got into you Maquet? Are you
writing my memoirs?

MAQUET

Answer me honestly. Are you really a
republican? I mean... today... Has
your popularity brought you closer to
the people?

DUMAS

You're definitely not well... We're
supposed to be working, aren't we?

MAQUET

First answer my question...

DUMAS

(losing his temper)

Yes, I am a republican! And I get that
from my father! Is that good enough
for you?

MAQUET

What's your opinion of the socialists?

DUMAS

(alarmed)

Is it the sea air that's gone to your
head?

MAQUET

Barbès, Blanqui... would you be
willing to demand their liberation?

DUMAS

(getting up from his chair, defeated)

All right... I do believe we should
return to Paris. Pack your bags.

16. INT. MAQUET'S ROOM, MOTHER OZERAIS' INN - DAY

Maquet is seated at his desk, writing.

MAQUET'S VOICE

(writing)

Dear Alexandre Dumas,
My heart pounds as I write to you
today. You have surely heard of Doctor
Martin Desrives who has been
incarcerated for the last two years in
Sainte-Pélage prison. He is my
father...

17. EXT. AT SEA, TROUVILLE - DAY

The return...

Dumas and Maquet are in a boat headed for Le Havre.

This time, a steady breeze fills the sail.

Behind them, on another boat, the landlubberly bull thrashes
furiously. It is tied down but the sailors are still very nervous.

One week later...

18. EXT. CHATEAU DE MONTE-CRISTO - DAY

Celeste Scriwaneck is a beautiful woman in her late 30s, early 40s.

Alexandre Dumas' official mistress is also the master's private
secretary.

She stands at the entrance to the chateau.

Two gatehouses flank the ceremonial gates.

It's a cold but sunny day.

Celeste takes a big sack of mail from the post office employee.

POST OFFICE EMPLOYEE

Please tell Monsieur Dumas I finished
The Three Musketeers.

CELESTE

Did you like it?

POST OFFICE EMPLOYEE

It was wonderful. I was walking on air
for a week.

CELESTE

(moving away)

Then you should keep walking on air,
Monsieur Potard.

MONSIEUR POTARD

There's no chance of that,
mademoiselle... *(she turns around)* Do

you know how much I earn with a sick wife and seven children to feed?

CELESTE

We all feel for you, monsieur Potard...

On the way back to the castle with Celeste, we discover Dumas' "folly", Le Château de Monte-Cristo: English gardens, romantic weeping willows, expanses of green lawn.

The château is completely baroque, a jumble of styles from troubadour to the Arabian Nights...

Despite the chilly weather, gardeners bustle hither and thither...

Celeste meets Michel, the chief gardener, a long-time employee whose wife is the cook.

MICHEL

Mademoiselle Celeste! Rasconi gave me the list! Four hundred guests for the housewarming! That makes eight hundred feet that are going to wreak havoc with my flower beds! What's the point of gardening? I give up.

CELESTE

I wholeheartedly agree with you, monsieur Michel...

19. EXT. MENAGERIE, CHATEAU DE MONTE CRISTO - DAY

Dumas and Maquet are sitting in the menagerie, an incongruous place for a meeting with a couple of monkeys scurrying and squawking around them.

Pacing up and down in the large cage, Dumas seems very inspired. Exasperated by the monkeys, Maquet scribbles down some notes.

DUMAS

A storm! A boat off the Tuscan coast! One starless night, some exhausted and starving sailors reach an inhospitable island, the island of Monte Cristo... One of them will tell an incredible story of love and death, a kind of fable, the story of Edmond Dantès, the Count of Monte Cristo! (He stops) What do you think?

Silence.

DUMAS

I believe I asked you a question...

MAQUET

I think that we cannot work simultaneously on Bragelonne and a theatrical adaptation of Monte Cristo...

DUMAS

I should have expected it... the petty functionary is with us again... We have no choice, my friend! The Historical Theatre is waiting for a first draught!

MAQUET

And The Century is starting to serialize Bragelonne in a week!

DUMAS

You know very well that two minds are always better than one...

MAQUET

From time to time, it's nice to hear that...

DUMAS

I am firmly convinced of it!

Celeste opens the mesh gate and joins them with her sack of mail.
Maquet gets up to greet her.

CELESTE

He's locked you up now? You're a little bleary-eyed, Auguste...

MAQUET

I worked until four o'clock this morning...

DUMAS

His capacity for work impresses me...

Maquet looks at him unsure if it's a joke or not.
Celeste sits down and puts a pile of envelopes on the table.

CELESTE

I've gone through them once... Shall I begin with Madame Dumas' letter? She is more and more threatening... she is even talking of having you imprisoned.

DUMAS

Ida Ferrier! She stopped being Madame Dumas four years ago.

CELESTE

She has hired two new lawyers.

DUMAS

Let her hire twenty if she fancies! It will cost her a lot, and it will bring her nothing! In the waste basket!

CELESTE

As you like... (She crumples the letter and takes a few more) bills... reminders from the bailiff...

DUMAS

Waste basket...

CELESTE

(waves one under his nose)
Oh, a letter from Trouville...

DUMAS

(to Maquet)
Didn't you settle up at the inn?

CELESTE

No, my dear, it's a new admirer (she quickly reads the beginning) "Dear Alexandre Dumas, My heart pounds as I write to you today. You have surely heard of Doctor Martin Desrives who has been incarcerated for the last two years in Sainte-Pélage prison. He is my father and his health is deteriorating by the day. As I know of your strong republican -

DUMAS

Waste basket!

MAQUET

Martin Desrives, that name rings a bell.

DUMAS

Of course! He was part of the Blanqui and Barbès gang... all of them conspirators and dreamers! They were the ones who wanted to burn down the Palais de Justice...

MAQUET

Can't you do something for this poor man?

DUMAS

You're on the side of anarchists now?

MAQUET

It is possible to be a monarchist and still be sensitive to human poverty.

DUMAS

I am better acquainted with poverty than you, Maquet...

MAQUET

Really? I see no poverty on the horizon.

DUMAS

My dear Auguste, you confuse the issues...

CELESTE

(getting impatient)

Well... are you going to reply to this Charlotte?

MAQUET

Poverty in the basket!

Vexed, Dumas grabs the letter from Celeste and begins to read. He stands and paces back and forth in the menagerie.

CELESTE

It's very odd, Auguste... You were in Trouville ten days ago and you never met this woman?

She throws an apple to the monkeys, who squabble over it.

MAQUET

A twist of fate, Celeste.

CELESTE

That's right, blame destiny. Are you listening, Alexandre?

Engrossed in the letter, Dumas doesn't answer. He sits down again, with a pensive air.

DUMAS

It's hard to believe... this woman seems to know my work better than I do.

CELESTE

How old is she?

DUMAS

I've no idea, sweetheart... the handwriting is robust but also feminine... It's a beautiful letter... (He smiles) but a beautiful letter does not necessarily make her a beautiful woman...

CELESTE

Waste basket?

DUMAS

I am going to re-read it carefully.

Celeste can't hide her sigh. She gets up.

CELESTE

(taking the sack of mail)

Lunch is in a few minutes...

DUMAS

My darling love... What about the rest of the mail?

CELESTE

(moving off)

A madman accusing you of plagiarism. A lawyer sending you a court summons. Nothing special... I'll take care of them.

Dumas and Maquet watch her as she walks towards the chateau.

DUMAS

(still a little dreamy)

What a marvellous woman... so discreet, efficient, loving, and thoughtful.

MAQUET

You are far too spoiled, Alexandre...

Dumas snaps out of it.

DUMAS

All right! Let's get back to work!

MAQUET

Bragelonne...

DUMAS

Monte-Cristo for the theatre! I still
get to choose!

The two monkeys continue to squabble over the apple.

20. INT. DINING ROOM, CHATEAU DE SAINT MESME - EVENING

Maquet has invited sub-prefect Crémieux to dinner at his home, Le Château de Saint-Mesme, .

Nouveau riche designs, fire crackling in the hearth.

In the rococo dining room, two stucco figurines of black men brandish chandeliers.

At the head of the table, the master of the house presides over dinner.

Caroline Maquet has placed the sub-prefect to his right.

The rest of the table is occupied by Maquet's numerous offspring.

In all, there are eight children, boys and girls from five to eighteen - silent, well-mannered, anxious to leave the table, where they are bored to death.

Augustin, the odd-job servant is dressed in livery to serve dinner, assisted by the governess.

SUB-PREFECT CREMIEUX

Thinking about it, Monsieur Maquet, it
clearly can't be easy working with
this Dumas... He definitely has
talent, but he also has opinions...

MAQUET

Opinions?

CREMIEUX

He was one of the republican dreamers
who colluded in the fall of Charles X.

MAQUET

That was long ago... He is much more
moderate now.

CREMIEUX

What an odd couple you make! A
royalist and a republican!

MAQUET

If you ask me, Alexandre Dumas is a
fair-weather republican... He has

always known how to bend with the wind.

CAROLINE

Like all great despots...

MAQUET

(light-hearted)

My wife is a little quick-tempered with Dumas...

CAROLINE

I say what I think, that's all!

CREMIEUX

Be careful, my dear lady... Today it can be a little dangerous to say out loud what one thinks... but since I know your feelings for the king, I have no fears.

CAROLINE

I believed in Louis-Philippe, Monsieur Crémieux, but no longer! With age, he has become authoritarian... He distrusts parliament. He wants to govern all by himself... Meetings are forbidden... taxes are going up... unemployment is widespread. I am not talking about the working class. I am the daughter of shopkeepers.

This time, Maquet shoots her a look. In vain.

CREMIEUX

(amused)

I didn't know. What do your parents do?

MAQUET

Caroline... It is perhaps time to begin the main course...

CAROLINE

I am not ashamed to say that my father had a grocery on Rue St. Sulpice.

Maquet snaps his fingers!

MAQUET

Augustin! The guinea-fowl...

AUGUSTIN

Coming right up, sir...

CREMIEUX

More than ever Madame, one needs to choose one's side. I'm sure it doesn't amuse the King to be so uncompromising.

MAQUET

(more two-faced than ever)

He has no choice... Conspirators are growing like weeds.

CREMIEUX

The police are under great pressure... You've heard of this Karl Marx who was expelled by Interior Minister Guizot? He's a communist who preaches the dictatorship of the proletariat! Do you hear? *(almost shouting)* The dictatorship of the proletariat!

Deathly silence.

Augustin presents the bird to Maquet who begins to carve it.

CREMIEUX

We will be pitiless with the nation's enemies! *(to Maquet)* Make that clear to your friend, Dumas. You never know, he might get the idea into his head to man the barricades again...

MAQUET

I know him by heart. And you forget his origins... Alexandre Davy-Dumas de la Pailleterie, grandson of a marquis and son of a general.

CREMIEUX

On the subject of his origins... I have never trusted Negroes!

It's too much for Caroline who wipes her mouth and gets up.

CAROLINE

I need to see how the chocolate soufflé is doing.

ARNAUD-JOSEPH

(the eldest of the boys)

May we come with you, mother? It's delicious, but we're no longer hungry.

CAROLINE

Yes, come along. Politics is not for children.

The children beat a rapid and overjoyed retreat.

Maquet and the sub-prefect find themselves alone at the table.

CREMIEUX

Your wife is rather too strong-minded,
Monsieur Maquet...
She isn't an...anarchist?

Maquet gives a hollow laugh.

MAQUET

Caroline, an anarchist? What a strange
idea! The wing or the leg,
Monsieur Crémieux?

CREMIEUX

The white, always the white...
(practically whispering)
Let's take advantage of your wife's
absence to talk about serious
things... where are you with La
Bochetière?

MAQUET

She refuses to part with it...

CREMIEUX

But you own it!

MAQUET

It has sentimental value for Caroline.
It is the first property I
bought with my royalties...

CREMIEUX

Think it over... I'll give you fifty
thousand more...

MAQUET

I am terribly sorry...

CREMIEUX

I think that women today are not doing
their duty! Don't you
agree with me?

MAQUET

Augustin! Serve the St-Emilion!

21. INT. MASTER BEDROOM, CHATEAU DE SAINT-MESME - NIGHT

Caroline and Auguste Maquet are in their four-poster bed.

CAROLINE

At the lowest estimate, he owes us how much? The loans... royalties... interest... have you added it up? Be frank for once... Five hundred thousand? A million?

MAQUET

Alexandre is today considered the equal of Balzac and Victor Hugo. That is what is important.

CAROLINE

Oh really? And who does he have to thank for keeping such exalted company?

MAQUET

We complement each other perfectly... and good luck to the person who tries to discern who is the author of what...

CAROLINE

Well, it's not very hard for me... I know your style Auguste... The Three Musketeers is you... Go on, say it...

MAQUET

It's both of us...

CAROLINE

It's you!

MAQUET

Now, it's time to sleep, my dear...

Silence. He blows out his lamp.

Caroline leaves hers lit.

CAROLINE

Your sub-prefect is an repellant man...

MAQUET

He is a personal friend of Guizot's...

CAROLINE

So what? You're thinking of entering politics?

MAQUET

Please blow out your lamp.

Caroline does so.

CAROLINE

(in the darkness)

One day, will you take me to Trouville?

MAQUET

Too windy... Too much rain... Too many smells...

CAROLINE

I've never seen the sea.

MAQUET

Frankly, you're not missing much.

22. INT. DUMAS' STUDY, CHATEAU DE MONTE-CRISTO - DAY

Without Maquet, Dumas is going round in circles.

Through the window, he catches sight of Maquet getting out of his carriage.

Dumas sits down at his desk and pretends to be immersed in his work.

Maquet knocks at the door and enters the office.

DUMAS

Do you know what time it is?

MAQUET

I'm sorry, Alexandre, but I have a family.

DUMAS

It's lucky I didn't wait for you.
Anyway, I've made a decision... I'll take care of the character of Bragelonne and you'll take care of the royal family, the courtiers, Fouquet Colbert... that way we'll go twice as fast.

Maquet sits down and opens his satchel.

MAQUET

(removes a pile of handwritten pages)

I am going to tell you where I left off... so that we don't write the same thing twice.

DUMAS

We never write the same thing.

MAQUET

(reading)

"Raoul follows the road, he knew so well and that was very dear to his memory..."

DUMAS

Tell me something, Auguste... How do you manage to be faithful to one woman? There are days when I envy you...

MAQUET

Caroline has never disappointed me... she is an exceptional woman.

DUMAS

Even in bed?

MAQUET

You give too much importance to such things...

We guess Maquet's growing discomfort.

DUMAS

Such things as you call them can't withstand boredom.

MAQUET

So you're bored with Celeste?

DUMAS

She adores me.

MAQUET

You're complaining?

DUMAS

When someone adores you, there is nothing left to conquer...
(paces up and down) Last night I had a nightmare... All the women I've known set fire to my chateau, baying for revenge, Laure, Mélanie, Belle, Marie,

Hyacinthe, Ida, and more besides...
They had decided to bump me off...

The door opens. Celeste enters, frowning. She is holding a sealed letter.

CELESTE

Might I ask what is in this letter?

DUMAS

Nothing to worry about my pet... I invited Charlotte Desrives for the housewarming... That way we can meet her! (to Maquet) You're as curious as I am, aren't you?

Maquet struggles to conceal the panic rising in him.

CELESTE

And you're going to accommodate her in the chateau?

DUMAS

All the surrounding inns are full.
I'll put her in one of the outbuildings.

CELESTE

Did you meet her when you were in Trouville? I know you by heart Alexandre... You're a compulsive liar. And you, Auguste... you wouldn't be his accomplice in this, by any chance?

MAQUET

Me, his accomplice?

DUMAS

(to Maquet)

Would you mind going for a little stroll?

Maquet jumps up in relief.

Celeste signals to him to sit back down.

CELESTE

Stay here, Auguste!

Maquet sits back down.

DUMAS

You're being ridiculous! I know nothing about her. I don't

know her age or what she looks like...
I'm inviting her for the
simple reason that her letter moved
me... (to Maquet) You would do the
same thing in my shoes, wouldn't
you?

Maquet remains silent.

Celeste shakes her head sadly, and with a resigned air leaves the room.

Dumas rushes after her.

MAQUET

(jumping up)

Alexandre! I owe you the truth!

But Dumas has already gone.

23. INT. MASTER BEDROOM, MONTE-CRISTO - DAY

Dumas enters.

He sees Celeste curled up on the bed, shoulders heaving as she sobs... He sits near her... gently strokes her hair.

He notices the letter addressed to Charlotte on the bed.

DUMAS

(taking the letter)

Watch what I do with this letter...

Celeste turns over. Dumas tears the letter to pieces.

DUMAS

There you are... No more Charlotte...
Do you feel better now? Do you believe
me now?

She smiles. A slight smile that is still a little sad. He leans over to kiss her. She melts into his arms.

24. EXT. GARDENS, MONTE-CRISTO - DAY

While the gardeners continue to prepare for the housewarming, Maquet and Celeste stroll down a path.

MAQUET

He really tore it up?

CELESTE

Before my eyes...

MAQUET

(relieved)

Good.

CELESTE

I am not very proud of what I did.
When I think of that poor man dying in
prison...

MAQUET

An arsonist... he got what he
deserved, after all...

CELESTE

I know you don't think that... you
became a monarchist so as not
to embrace Alexandre's ideas... but
deep down...

MAQUET

Deep down, I don't know any longer
where I stand.

CELESTE

The other day, you defended this poor
soul...

MAQUET

Let's forget all about it, Celeste...
By tearing up the letter, Alexandre
proved that he loves you... that's the
main thing.

CELESTE

Sometimes I think I'm a fool.

MAQUET

No, you're in love.

CELESTE

Precisely. Love can make you an idiot.
Don't you agree?

Maquet doesn't answer. They continue their stroll in silence.
Suddenly...

MAQUET

Celeste... I have a little favour to
ask of you. It's a little
embarrassing, I admit, but...

CELESTE

You know I can't refuse you anything.

MAQUET

Could you lend me the keys to your
apartment on Rue des Capucines?

Celeste stops walking. She can't believe her ears.

CELESTE

Auguste...not you...

He blushes like a naughty schoolboy.

She bursts out laughing.

MAQUET

I'm ashamed...

CELESTE

A passing fancy?

MAQUET

I wouldn't call it that.

CELESTE

And here I am thinking you're a
paragon of fidelity.

MAQUET

I thought I was, too...

beat)

And then one day, lightning strikes.

CELESTE

How old?

MAQUET

About twenty.

CELESTE

Of course.

MAQUET

What do you mean, of course?

CELESTE

It's pointless fighting against youth.
I know it will happen to me one day...
It's the fate of most women.

MAQUET

Celeste, you are so beautiful.

CELESTE

(snaps)

Spare me, please...

She sits on a bench. Maquet stands nearby, embarrassed.
Beat.

CELESTE

Does Alexandre know?

MAQUET

It's my personal life. It's none of his business.

CELESTE

You're right. He could still steal her from you! Very well... I will lend you keys, and it will be our little secret.

25. EXT/INT. IF PAVILION, MONTE-CRISTO - DAY

On auto-pilot, Maquet crosses the drawbridge leading to the If Pavilion.

He enters.

The ground floor is a single room. On the ceiling, stars on a blue background.

Curtains in a blue fabric. A sculpted mantelpiece over which are mounted weapons of war. Medieval wooden chests.

Maquet crosses the ground floor and heads up a spiral staircase.

On the first floor, he opens a door. The room is in darkness. It is his office.

He worms his way behind his desk and collapses in his armchair. He seems increasingly drained by his imposture. Pages are carefully piled up on the table.

Bragelonne on one side, Monte Cristo on the other. With a furious gesture, he sends everything flying.

He remains for a long moment prostrate, unable to move.

Then he takes his pen and dips it in the inkwell.

He writes:

MAQUET (V.O.)

My dear Charlotte,
Join me as soon as possible at my
apartment in Paris at 36, Rue des
Capucines. I'm on the second floor.
Yesterday, I went to see your father
at the Sainte Pélagie Prison...

26. INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE, TROUVILLE- EVENING

In the dining room, Charlotte, her hand trembling, stares delightedly at Maquet's letter:

MAQUET (V.O.)

I met a man who is terribly tired but
still profoundly resolute.
He told me that victory was not in
books but in the barrel of a
gun. He was right. Revolutionary
literature is no longer enough.
Action must be taken and I will be on
your side. Martin Desrives
will soon be a free man.
With my best wishes, Yours, Alexandre.

Charlotte kisses the letter that she has just received as she did
before with the dedication. She jumps up.

CHARLOTTE

Milie! Milie! Come quickly!

The elderly housekeeper rushes in. Charlotte hugs her.

CHARLOTTE

(shaking Emilie)

Alexandre wrote to me! Papa will soon
be free! Long live the revolution!
Long live the Republic! I love you
Emilie! I love you!

27. EXT. SAINTE PELAGIE PRISON, PARIS - DAY

Two municipal soldiers are on guard in front of Sainte-Pélagie
prison.

Maquet steps down from a carriage and signals to the coachman to
wait for him.

He approaches the soldiers.

MAQUET

Hello, my friends. I would like to
visit a prisoner.

1ST SOLDIER

Do you have a laissez-passer?

MAQUET

No... But I am a personal friend of
sub-prefect Crémieux.

1ST SOLDIER

Don't know him... Who are you?

MAQUET

Auguste Maquet, the writer.

1ST SOLDIER

Never heard of you.

2ND SOLDIER

Go get the chief... (eyeing Maquet)
This isn't a whorehouse, it's
a prison...

28. INT. PRISON GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The prison Governor (MONSIEUR DE ST-OMER) receives Maquet in his office.

MONSIEUR DE ST-OMER

Sit down... (Maquet does so). Captain
Ollier conveyed your request... Are
you personally acquainted with Doctor
Desrives?

MAQUET

No. His daughter Charlotte asked me to
visit him, and since she lives in
Trouville...

MONSIEUR DE ST-OMER

If I understand correctly, you're a
friend of the family.

MAQUET

You could say that.

MONSIEUR DE ST-OMER

And you've never met Martin
Desrives...

MAQUET

Never.

MONSIEUR DE ST-OMER

Then why are you here?

MAQUET

I have just explained that...

MONSIEUR DE ST-OMER

... You are a friend of his
daughter's.

MAQUET

I am also a close friend of the sub-
prefect Crémieux who knows
Minister Guizot well...

MONSIEUR DE ST-OMER

In that case, nothing could be
simpler... come back to see me

with a laissez-passer signed by the minister and everything will be settled, my dear... excuse me, I've forgotten your name...

MAQUET

(furious)

Auguste Maquet...

The Governor gets up. The interview is over.

MAQUET

Tell me at least if Martin Desrives is in good health...

MONSIEUR DE ST-OMER

You will see for yourself when you come back.

The Governor accompanies Maquet to the door where Captain Ollier is waiting to escort him out.

Monsieur de Saint-Omer sits down again at his desk. He dips his pen in the inkwell and writes: "To Monsieur Bocquin, chief of the King's police. Investigate a suspicious individual named Maquet, Auguste, claiming to be a writer. Urgent."

29. EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DAY

Pulled by six horses, a coach trundles through the countryside.

Inside, it is filled with dusty travellers juddering as the coach rattles along.

In a corner by the window, Charlotte gazes out at the countryside.

30. EXT. LA BOCHETIERE - DAY

Maquet and sub-prefect Crémieux trek through some woods. Maquet holds a map of his estate, indicating the boundaries, subdivisions and buildings.

MAQUET

Fifteen hectares... and I will give you the little mill...

CREMIEUX

(in a very good mood)

I don't understand my friend... yesterday it was no... today, it's yes.

MAQUET

What can I say? Women are very mercurial.

CREMIEUX

So much the better, if I'm the beneficiary. But why are you selling at the lowest price? Do you have problems?

MAQUET

No, Monsieur Sub-Prefect. I just have a small request to make from Alexandre Dumas...

CREMIEUX

(frowns)

Carry on.

MAQUET

The fate of Doctor Martin Desrives has moved him deeply... The poor man deserves to die with dignity in his house in Trouville.

CREMIEUX

Is that you speaking or Dumas?

MAQUET

Dumas, of course...

CREMIEUX

You must really be under his thumb... What does he give you in exchange? Glory?

MAQUET

That's my business.

CREMIEUX

If I understand correctly, you are selling La Bochetière for Dumas.

MAQUET

I shall make an appointment with my notary... Will you mention Doctor Desrives to your friend, Guizot?

31. INT. CELESTE'S APARTMENT, RUE DES CAPUCINES - NIGHT

An enormous bouquet of flowers in his hands, Maquet climbs the stairwell. He stops on a landing, takes out a bunch of keys, opens the big front door.

It is Celeste's apartment in Paris.

He lights all the candlesticks and restocks the heating stove with coal.

In a large sitting room, a table has been set with two porcelain plates and silverware. Maquet puts the bouquet in a vase, and then the vase in the middle of the table.

He has the air of a bashful lover waiting for his beloved...

He goes into the kitchen.

Lamb stew simmers in a large copper saucepan.

He stirs, tastes, adds a bit of salt, tastes it again, and puts the lid back on the pot.

Then he checks his fob watch and peeks out the window by pulling back the curtain. The street is empty.

He sits down in an armchair and takes out a letter from Charlotte that he must have read a thousand times, given its crumpled appearance.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)

Alexandre, dear friend,
Next Friday I will leave Rouen very
early so as not to keep you
waiting for supper. You can't imagine
how eager I am to see you
again...

Maquet sticks the letter in his pocket, takes a book from a table, and begins to read, but he has difficulty concentrating.

Horse hooves can be heard on the cobblestones...

He rushes over to the window.

It's only a carriage passing in the dark night.

He goes back to his armchair and opens his book again.

Yawns.

The tick-tock of the clock.

Little by little his head falls forward.

He snaps out of his drowsiness. Once, twice...

Then falls asleep.

Several knocks on the door wake him with a start.

All the candles have gone out.

The room is in darkness.

He bumps into a chair, lets slip a pained "bloody hell", and gropes his way down the corridor until finally he reaches the front door. Turn of the lock. Charlotte is on the threshold. With the spontaneity of youth, she rushes into Maquet's arms.

CHARLOTTE

(hurriedly)

Alexandre... Thank you... thank you...

Over Maquet's shoulder, she realizes that she is in the dark.

CHARLOTTE

What a good idea, not to have lit the candles... I'm sorry I'm late, but it isn't my fault, I'll explain everything. Please lock the door. Oh, what a joy to be with you.

Charlotte is very agitated and Maquet is completely overwhelmed. He sees her rush to the windows to close the shutters, one after the other.

CHARLOTTE

Okay! You can give us some light!
Don't you smell burning?

MAQUET

It's the candles.

Maquet lights a gas lamp on a chest of drawers.

The lamp reveals a disaster. The candles have dripped on the tablecloth and plates...

MAQUET

I fell asleep.

CHARLOTTE

I promise you I smell something burning.

MAQUET

(tapping his forehead)

Dear God! The stew!

He charges into the kitchen where Charlotte joins him. Thick black smoke spews from the pot.

CHARLOTTE

(bursts out laughing)

And here I am dying of hunger!
Don't look so glum, Alexandre!
Is there some wine at least?

Cut.

In the kitchen. They toast.

CHARLOTTE

To the revolution, Alexandre!

MAQUET

To the revolution, Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

Now tell me about my father. Did you see him? How is he?

MAQUET

Much better... but tell me, didn't you bring any luggage?

CHARLOTTE

My friends are bringing my bags. They shouldn't be long.

MAQUET

Your friends?

CHARLOTTE

(mysterious)

Our friends... They're the reason I'm so late, but tell me more about my father. What did he say? Did he recognize you?

MAQUET

Of course, he recognized me. We spoke about Bard and Bixio but above all about the future.

CHARLOTTE

It is my father's future that interests me.

MAQUET

One of my close friends who is the sub-prefect is going to put a word in for him with Minister Guizot.

CHARLOTTE

Guizot! You can't be serious! He's our worst enemy!

MAQUET

Guizot is in a difficult position, Charlotte. Freeing your father will be a sop to public opinion.

CHARLOTTE

(nods)

That's logical.

Horse hooves are heard on the pavement.

Charlotte rushes to a window. She peers through a shutter.

CHARLOTTE

You wouldn't have something red?

MAQUET

Red?

CHARLOTTE

A dust cloth, a piece of fabric, any old thing.

They search every corner of the room. In vain.

CHARLOTTE

In the bedroom, perhaps? Sorry, I'm acting as if I were at home.

MAQUET

But you are at home, Charlotte.

In the bedroom. A large bed in ebony with a reddish-orange bedspread.

MAQUET

A piece of that?

CHARLOTTE

No. A bright red that can be seen in the night. The red flag of our comrades, Alexandre! Does that ring any bells?

MAQUET

(more and more disoriented)

Of course... what was I thinking?

Charlotte catches sight of a chest of drawers and pounces on the first drawer. Maquet doesn't have the time to stop her. Petrified, he sees her rummaging through Celeste's underwear. With a triumphant air, she brandishes a pair of red silk panties.

CHARLOTTE

This will do nicely.

MAQUET

It's my cousin's lingerie.

CHARLOTTE

I'm hardly in a position to ask you about your personal life...

She goes back into the dining room. Maquet follows. He sees her slip her hand between two louvers and wave the panties at the window.

MAQUET

What on earth are you doing?

CHARLOTTE

Telling them that the coast is clear.

Maquet is discovering another Charlotte, determined, secretive, bossy. A little leader in petticoats.

CHARLOTTE

Hide behind the screen!

MAQUET

But why?

CHARLOTTE

Do as I say, Alexandre. It's for your safety.

A staccato knock is heard on the door. Maquet dashes behind the screen. A man's voice gives the password: "Death to Guizot!"

Charlotte opens up.

From his hiding place, Maquet sees two men enter. One of the two revolutionaries is Charlotte's age, with long curly hair and a romantic air.

He takes Charlotte in his arms and holds her tight.

Poor Maquet is paralyzed.

YOUNG STRANGER

(whispers)

It's been so long.

CHARLOTTE

(likewise)

Too long...

YOUNG STRANGER

Is Dumas with you?

CHARLOTTE

Dumas is with us... I'll introduce you to him.

THE YOUNG STRANGER

Another time... we can't stay.

The two men fetch two wooden crates that they left on the landing with Charlotte's trunk.

They dump everything in the dining room.

YOUNG STRANGER

Can you manage by yourself?

CHARLOTTE

I always do.

Leaning over, he gives her a long kiss on the mouth.

CHARLOTTE

Go quickly!

The two men exit. Charlotte closes the door behind them.

She remains lost-in-thought for a moment, then...

CHARLOTTE

Alexandre? Are you still there?

Shattered by what he just glimpsed, Maquet tries to assume a detached air. He looks at the two crates and Charlotte's trunk.

MAQUET

That's your luggage?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, with a little extra. Would you please help me?

She opens a crate. Maquet takes a step backwards: it is filled with rifles.

CHARLOTTE

In the other crate, there are pistols, cartridges, and powder. (She looks hard at Maquet). You seem unhappy.

MAQUET

Not at all. I just wonder if this is a good place for storing weapons...

CHARLOTTE

Louis-Philippe's secret police has eyes and ears everywhere. Alexandre, don't tell me your apartment is watched! Come on, help me... We'll hide it all under the bed.

MAQUET

Under the bed? Are you sure?

CHARLOTTE

Alexandre! What's the matter with you?

Maquet takes the carafe of wine, fills a glass and downs it in one.

MAQUET

(returning Charlotte's gaze)

I'm not Alexandre Dumas...

CHARLOTTE

You will become him again...

MAQUET

What do you mean?

CHARLOTTE

Alexandre Dumas has kept quiet for fifteen years... We all know that... Now he must be born again from the ashes! The French people is preparing to take revenge and we need a captain! Come on, let's get to work! (She takes two rifles from the crate and passes them to Maquet) Under the bed... and on top of the wardrobe.

Overcome, Maquet obeys.

They shuttle back and forth between the living room and bedroom, carrying armfuls of guns.

CHARLOTTE

Why are you looking at me like that?

MAQUET

You are so beautiful.

CHARLOTTE

(hands him a pair of pistols)

Beauty never made anyone intelligent.

MAQUET

Let's say then that you are intelligent and beautiful. Your fiancé is a lucky man.

CHARLOTTE

Jean-Baptiste? He's still so young.

MAQUET

(hides the pistols in a drawer)

He's your age.

CHARLOTTE

We'll see about that later, when the Republic has been proclaimed.

In the bedroom.

Charlotte lays sacks of gunpowder on the bedspread. One of the sacks has a hole in it and spills a little black powder on the bedcover.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry... (smiles) Your bed mustn't go up in flames!

MAQUET

You are the one who is going to sleep in it, Charlotte. I'm going home.

CHARLOTTE

At this hour? Don't even think about it.

MAQUET

A little night air will do me good.

CHARLOTTE

Just for me, stay until morning.

For Maquet, the situation is becoming explosive, to say the least.

MAQUET

(with a defeated air)

If you insist.

She tenderly kisses Maquet on the cheek.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you.

She removes the bolster pillowcase.

MAQUET

What are you doing?

CHARLOTTE

It's an excellent hiding place for the gunpowder.

MAQUET

You know best. I'll leave you to change. You'll find everything you need in the bathroom.

CHARLOTTE

Goodnight, Alexandre...

MAQUET

Goodnight, Charlotte...

Maquet leaves and closes the door.

He slumps on the sofa.

Through the door, he hears Charlotte humming.

Suddenly, he bites his lips. He is racked by sobs. He tries to pull himself together, but he is overcome by immense distress.

In the bedroom, Charlotte continues singing to herself.

32. EXT. RUE DES CAPUCINES - DAWN

Maquet drags his feet down Rue des Capucines, deserted in the wee hours of the morning.

Suddenly, a man emerges from a doorway and follows him at a distance.

A café has just opened.

The policeman following Maquet passes by the café.

Inside, he sees the owner serving Maquet a glass of absinthe.

POLICE CHIEF BOCQUIN (V.O.)

At about 11 p.m., Charlotte Desrives, daughter of Doctor Desrives currently incarcerated at Ste Pélagie prison, appeared at 36, Capucines Street, at the apartment of Mademoiselle Celeste Scriwaneck, where Auguste Maquet, former History teacher and regular collaborator of Alexandre Dumas'...

33. INT. MINISTER GUIZOT'S OFFICE - DAY

The police chief is reporting to the minister.

Under the gilded ceilings of his office, Guizot is enthroned behind an enormous desk. Seated side-by-side are Sub-Prefect Crémieux and Monsieur Bocquin, Chief of the King's Secret Police, a small, pudgy, colourless bureaucrat.

BOCQUIN

One hour later, two suspicious individuals unloaded some crates and a trunk. One has been formally identified as Jean-Baptiste Béraud, aged 19. At 6:30 a.m., the man called Maquet left the apartment. He was in an advanced state of intoxication. He continued to drink at the Ranou café.

GUIZOT

Okay, that's enough Bocquin... The rest we know. Maquet misses his train and returns home in a coach.

BOCQUIN

(to Crémieux)

He's the same man who was denied entry to the prison by Monsieur de Saint-Omer and who came to ask you for help on behalf of Alexandre Dumas.

GUIZOT

Alexandre Dumas! Finally we're getting somewhere! Apparently, he is the mastermind behind the gang.

CREMIEUX

(perplexed)

I can't quite believe it, Minister. Maquet has never hidden his monarchist sympathies.

GUIZOT

He is a straw man, Crémieux! He is under Dumas' influence and obeys his every word.

CREMIEUX

Alas, it's true. I have seen it for myself... *(to Bocquin)*. But Monsieur Bocquin, why didn't you arrest Maquet and this Charlotte Desrives?

BOCQUIN

We're interested in Alexandre Dumas, Monsieur Sub-Prefect. We are preparing a vast round-up of terrorists.

GUIZOT

This is why I am going to arrange for Desrives to be freed... The people will cheer and Dumas will be distracted, thus allowing us to trace the network right to the top... Continue to maintain good relations with your friend Maquet, Monsieur Prefect.

CREMIEUX

(can't believe his ears)

Monsieur Prefect?

GUIZOT

You heard me... *(he gets up)*
Congratulations, Crémieux.

The two men shake hands.

34. INT. MAQUET'S STUDY, CHATEAU DE SAINT-MESME

Accompanied by Doctor Bélincourt, the family physician, Caroline knocks on the door.

CAROLINE

Auguste! It's me! I am with Dr. Bélincourt. May he come in?
(to the doctor) He hasn't left his study now for two days. He came home completely drunk and since then... (on the verge of tears) he speaks incoherently. He calls himself all kinds of names... impostor, renegade, good-for-nothing. (She knocks again) Auguste! (She jiggles the door handle, to no avail). Please open the door!

DOCTOR BELINCOURT

Auguste is simply suffering from overwork.

CAROLINE

But doctor... you can't very well make a diagnosis if you haven't even seen him!

DOCTOR BELINCOURT

I know him... He's a perfectionist who no longer feels worthy of his ideal.

CAROLINE

What ideal?

DOCTOR BELINCOURT

Alexandre Dumas, of course!

CAROLINE

Him again! Can he be cured?

DOCTOR BELINCOURT

They must be separated... they're a hellish couple.

CAROLINE

I know it only too well. But how?

DOCTOR BELINCOURT

Alexandre Dumas must understand once and for all that Auguste is not married to him but to you Caroline.

CAROLINE

(forced laugh)

And what do you prescribe?

DOCTOR BELINCOURT

(knocks on the door)

Auguste? It's Armand. Caroline would dearly like you to attend the Monte-Cristo housewarming together!

(Stunned, Caroline looks at him) And I think it's an excellent idea. Your wife needs a little amusement and everyone will admire you together. Auguste! Do you hear me?

The door is unlocked, and opens.

Maquet appears, in his dressing gown, unshaven, his hair a mess, and dark bags under his eyes.

MAQUET

Is this a joke?

DOCTOR BELINCOURT

No. It's a prescription.

35. INT. DUMAS' STUDY, CHATEAU DE MONTE-CRISTO - DAY

In his study, Dumas is having a fit of nerves.

Dozens of crumpled pages are littered on the floor.

Celeste enters with the morning's mail.

DUMAS

Well?

CELESTE

(spreads the mail on the desk)

Nothing...

DUMAS

(in a dismal tone)

Three days without any news. He's never done that before.

Celeste picks up the pages lying on the floor and tosses them into the waste basket.

CELESTE

Can I toss everything away? No regrets?

DUMAS

There is not a single sentence worth saving.

CELESTE

I'm sure you're exaggerating.

DUMAS

I have no inspiration.

CELESTE

You never stop proclaiming that you can do without him and as soon as he's absent a few days, you can't sleep, you can't write, and you go round in circles like a caged lion.

DUMAS

His mere presence gives me ideas. It's very mysterious but that's how it is.

CELESTE

I've never been able to work out who writes what.

DUMAS

He has no talent as a writer. But I do not pay him to have talent. I pay him to sit in front of me, listen and take notes. That's the price of my freedom to invent.

CELESTE

It's freedom in chains.

DUMAS

Auguste is my first reader.

CELESTE

Reader or mirror?

Dumas puts his hand on his heart.
He seems to have difficulty breathing.

CELESTE

(rushes over)

What's wrong?

DUMAS

I am suffocating...

CELESTE

Shall I fetch Dr. Valeyrand?

DUMAS

I'd prefer you to fetch Auguste.

He takes Celeste's hand and places it on his chest.

DUMAS

See how fast it's beating? It's not normal...

CELESTE

(beat; sighs)

All right... I think I know where Auguste is.

DUMAS

What do you mean "you think you know"? Isn't he at home? Where is he?

CELESTE

He's at my apartment in Paris... with a young woman.

DUMAS

What?

Dumas straightens up in a flash.
He reacts like a cuckolded spouse.

CELESTE

I promised not to tell you, but given your condition.

DUMAS

He's done that to me?

CELESTE

Done what? He's imitated his model.

DUMAS

The bastard.

CELESTE

Calm down, sweetheart. I promise he'll be here tomorrow for your housewarming.

She kisses him tenderly on the forehead and exits.

DUMAS

(distraught)

The bastard... The monkey! The little rat!

36. EXT. CELESTE'S BUILDING, RUE DES CAPUCINES - DAY

A coach rattles down Rue des Capucines.

Celeste gets out and enters her building.

After a few seconds, the policeman Flanchet, seen previously spying on Maquet, also enters.

He knocks on the door of the concierge who clearly knows him.

INSPECTOR FLANCHET

Well?

CONCIERGE

That's Mademoiselle Celeste
Scriwaneck, who rents the
apartment.

37. INT. CELESTE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Celeste knocks on the door. No answer. She knocks again.

CELESTE

(shouting)

Auguste! It's Celeste! I know you're
in there!

She slides her key in the lock and opens the door.

She advances slowly, notices Charlotte's trunk in the dining room,
and reaches out to open it when a voice stops her in her tracks.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

Just help yourself!

Celeste spins round.

Hiding in a nook of the apartment, Charlotte aims a pistol at her.

CELESTE

(astonished)

Who are you?

CHARLOTTE

A friend of Alexandre Dumas'... And
you?

CELESTE

Alexandre Dumas? Are you sure of what
you're saying?

CHARLOTTE

(pistol still pointed at Celeste)

I asked you a question! What are you
doing here?

CELESTE

This is my apartment!

CHARLOTTE

I'd be very surprised! This apartment belongs to Alexandre Dumas... You must be on the wrong floor.

CELESTE

Do you know Auguste Maquet?

CHARLOTTE

Who?

CELESTE

(dismayed)

Are you sure you don't know him?

CHARLOTTE

(loses her temper)

I've already told you. No!

CELESTE

Alexandre came here?

CHARLOTTE

Three days ago! Since then, I've had no news.

Celeste collapses on the sofa.

It takes all her strength not to burst into tears.

What she is imagining is overwhelming: Alexandre Dumas used Maquet to obtain the keys to her apartment and spend the night away from home.

Maquet pretended to be in love.

Celeste swallowed his story hook, line, and sinker.

CELESTE

(looks up)

I am Celeste Scriwaneck... Monsieur Dumas' secretary...and

you...you are Charlotte Desrives?

(Charlotte nods)

I honestly didn't expect such a pretty young woman. Alexandre has spoken a lot about you... Would you mind putting your pistol away?

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry...*(she places it on a chest of drawers)*. How is he?

CELESTE

Alexandre? Er... yes... he seems all right... I don't know everything... I mean, every detail of his private life... He just asked me to assure you

of his affection. At the moment, he's
having difficulty writing and...

She doesn't finish the sentence.

CHARLOTTE

And what?

CELESTE

It's surely related to his condition.

CHARLOTTE

What condition? I don't understand a
word you're saying!

CELESTE

That makes two of us...

CHARLOTTE

But where is he?

CELESTE

At home in his château.

CHARLOTTE

Really? He has a château?

CELESTE

Monte-Cristo... an extraordinary
bauble... I am amazed he didn't tell
you about it... Maybe he wanted to
surprise you. He has invited you
tomorrow for the housewarming... it
will be a big party with everybody who
is anybody.

CHARLOTTE

I couldn't care less about high
society! Did he speak to you about my
father?

CELESTE

He'll talk to you about that
tomorrow...

CHARLOTTE

You're hiding something from me.

CELESTE

Did he spend the night with you?

CHARLOTTE

When I woke up, he was gone.

CELESTE

Like most men. When the cock crows...

CHARLOTTE

Alexandre is no ordinary man... that's immediately obvious. What's the matter? Why are you crying?

CELESTE

I've just lost someone... someone who was very dear to me... Forgive me...

She turns away to hide her emotion.

Spontaneously, Charlotte comes to sit beside her on the sofa.

CHARLOTTE

I am so sorry...

CELESTE

Me too... He was a man I adored... a very great actor... one should never fall in love with an actor. How old are you Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

I'll be twenty next month.

CELESTE

(nods)

Your whole life before you... (gets up and tries to smile) It's no good fretting... Alexandre told me that you are to be the queen of the evening...

CHARLOTTE

The queen? What a horrible thought! I have no desire to be the queen! Anyway, all my clothes are creased...

CELESTE

Come with me... I think I've got exactly what you need.

Celeste leads Charlotte into the bedroom. She opens a wardrobe and chooses a dress.

CHARLOTTE

One of his cousin's dresses?

CELESTE

(holds the dress up against Charlotte)

He told you about his cousin?

(Charlotte nods). She has not

appeared in public for a long time...
She has retired to the country.

Celeste pushes Charlottes in front of a large mirror.
In the reflection, we see Charlotte's youthful smile.
She has never worn such a pretty dress...
Celeste's eyes are blurred by tears.

CELESTE

My, you're beautiful...

38. INT. POLICE CHIEF'S OFFICE - DAY

Inspector Flanchet makes reports to Police Chief Bocquin.

FLANCHET

Mademoiselle Scriwaneck stayed roughly
an hour...

BOCQUIN

Excellent, Flanchet...I don't know
what they're plotting but we've got
them... I've just received Dumas'
guest list... 400 of the great and the
good... plus Prefect Crémieux.

INSPECTOR FLANCHET

Dumas invited Crémieux?

BOCQUIN

Non...Crémieux invited himself... and
Dumas couldn't refuse. The prefect
will be accompanied by his private
secretary.

FLANCHET

(conscientious)

I'll take a note of his name...

BOCQUIN

Flanchet!

FLANCHET

Flanchet, like me? Small world...

BOCQUIN

Indeed. It will be an opportunity for
you... Try to be worthy of my trust.
You'll have to dress appropriately.

FLANCHET

(panics)

The prefect knows about this?

BOCQUIN

It's his idea, you idiot!

39. EXT. CHATEAU DE MONTE CRISTO - EVENING

Torches, globes, flares have been skilfully arranged to light the gardens of the Château de Monte-Cristo.

Musicians wearing wigs and 17th century costumes play Handel's Water Music to welcome the guests as they arrive in the gardens. It's cold. The guests are all wrapped up warm. Their breath condensates in the night air.

An endless line of carriages fills the approach road.

Under the supervision of Dumas' butler, Rasconi, valets in livery give directions.

A female guest with a man by her side bursts out laughing:

FEMALE GUEST

Oh my, he really thinks he's Fouquet!¹

HER ESCORT

Let's hope for his sake he doesn't end up in a dungeon

The couple disappears under the weeping willows.

Maquet and Caroline get out of their carriage. Rasconi welcomes them.

RASCONI

Monsieur Dumas will be delighted to see you! Were you ailing? With the cold weather we've been having...

MAQUET

(glum)

Where is he?

RASCONI

For the moment, no one may enter the chateau! Those are Monsieur's Dumas' orders... (He leans over to Maquet's ear) You will understand why shortly. Enjoy yourself, Monsieur Maquet, my humble respects, Madame Maquet... How are the children?

¹Nicolas Fouquet (1600-80), Louis XIV's chief steward, constructed the fabulous Château Vaux-Le-Vicomte and hosted such a lavish party at his new home that he was shortly thereafter sacked and prosecuted by the jealous king.

Caroline looks a little silly in her Sunday best cape, amidst the elegant guests trying to outdo each other in the extravagance of their outfits.

Around the château, on the lawns, tables have been set up and the guests huddle around numerous buffets.

Scented candles burn in earthenware dishes.

CAROLINE

(to her husband)

Come on! Make an effort! This is a party!

Maquet glimpses Celeste, dressed from head to foot in black.

CAROLINE

Is she in mourning?

MAQUET

(intrigued)

I'll find out.

Maquet joins Celeste who goes straight on the attack.

CELESTE

Are you looking for your accomplice?
Don't worry, he'll soon be ready. He's
doing his hair, powdering himself like
a coquette and he's right to be
nervous.

MAQUET

(taken aback)

Why do you that?

CELESTE

I held you in high regard, Auguste...

MAQUET

And that's no longer the case?

CELESTE

All I feel is a deep disgust for
men...

MAQUET

(alarmed)

Celeste!

She walks away to welcome new guests.

Distraught, Maquet goes back to his wife.

CAROLINE

Well?

MAQUET

Well what?

CAROLINE

Has she lost someone?

Maquet is miles away.

He sees Gérard de Nerval. The two men cheek-kiss.

NERVAL

Ten years! Ten whole years since I
introduced you to Dumas!

MAQUET

(distracted)

Yes, time flies.

Nerval bursts out laughing.

NERVAL

I see that you are becoming
philosophical...

CAROLINE

Monsieur de Nerval. Would you ask me
to dance?

NERVAL

(rubs his hands)

With great pleasure, Madame Maquet. It
will keep us warm.

CAROLINE

Please... Call me Caroline.

Maquet heads towards the chateau.

Nerval and Caroline watch him walk away.

CAROLINE

(to Nerval)

I don't believe it! Dumas invited
Crémieux? Whatever next!

NERVAL

Caroline... (She looks at him) Do we
give a damn? (She smiles) What
matters is the party... (She nods)
Champagne?

Caroline follows him.

Prefect Crémieux corners Maquet at the bottom of the steps outside
the château.

CREMIEUX

I bet you're surprised to see me here!

MAQUET

Oh, Monsieur Sub-Prefect, nothing surprises me anymore... friends... enemies... hypocrites...

CREMIEUX

(smiles sweetly)

Will you introduce me to Dumas? I have just been named Prefect of the Seine and Oise department. I may of use to him... and what's more (leans closer to Maquet's ear)... tomorrow I'll have sent to you the release order for Desrives, signed by the Minister. You see, with me, it's always quid pro quo. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. And I'm a fast worker.

MAQUET

(still elsewhere)

Thank you, Monsieur Prefect...

CREMIEUX

Allow me to introduce you to Monsieur Flanchet... who is temporarily my private secretary.

MAQUET

(holds out his hand, distractedly)

Very honoured, Monsieur temporary private secretary...

Suddenly, Michel the gardener almost jumps on Maquet. He is all worked up.

GARDENER MICHEL

Monsieur Maquet! Please do something! The guests are walking on my flower beds as if they were doormats!

MAQUET

(explodes)

That way their feet will smell less of shit!

Michel stands there, gawping. Never before has Monsieur Maquet been so vulgar.

Crémieux and Flanchet exchange looks.

CREMIEUX

(under his breath)
He's certainly very agitated...

FLANCHET

(likewise)
It's a very good sign.

Maquet reaches the top of the steps.
Two liveried valets, hired for the evening, stand in his way.

MAQUET

I absolutely must see Monsieur Dumas!

VALET

Sorry, that's impossible!

MAQUET

I am Auguste Maquet... his chief
collaborator.

The doormen remain stony-faced.

Maquet turns around.

From the top of the steps, he has an overview of the crowd of
guests.

What he sees at that moment makes him tremble... No, he's not
dreaming. It is indeed Charlotte, dazzling, moving forward on
Celeste's arm.

Incredulous, short of breath, heart pounding, Maquet runs down the
steps and melts into the crowd...

As if unleashing his hunting dog, Prefect Crémieux signals to
Flanchet to keep his eyes and ears wide open.

Alongside Celeste, all dressed in black, Charlotte is immaculate in
her virginal dress. She attracts everyone's attention...

CHARLOTTE

That was my first ever ride on a
train! It's incredible! (laughs) Do I
reek of smoke?

Like in a circus, a drum rolls and cymbals crash.

Dumas appears at the top of the steps, under the motto engraved in
stone on the pediment: "I love those who love me."
He is beaming.

His outfit gleams with crosses and badges.
A solid gold chain is draped across his waistcoat.
The guests give him a standing ovation.
He takes a deep bow. He is indisputably a star.

CHARLOTTE

Who is that ludicrous man?

CELESTE

Please, don't play games.

Liveried servants carry an enormous wicker basket covered with flowers that they set down at the bottom of the steps.

Rasconi signals to the men in charge of the fireworks who then light the Bengal lights.

Dumas comes down the steps. The butler lifts the lid off the basket and a young African springs out, slightly intimidated.

The crowd gasps.

DUMAS

What is your name?

ALEXIS

My name is Alexis, master...

DUMAS

Where do you come from?

Rasconi whispers in Dumas' ear.

RASCONI

He is a gift from the actress Marie Dorval... (pulls Alexis by the wrist) Come with me! You can't stay in the basket like a monkey!

Alexis obeys.

Dumas greets two or three persons and glimpses Maquet rushing towards him.

DUMAS

(icy)

Well, Maquet... you're keeping secrets from me now? I didn't expect that...

MAQUET

(defensive)

Alexandre... I really need to speak to you.

DUMAS

I thought you were sick...

MAQUET

I am, Auguste...

DUMAS

Love doesn't make you look poorly. Quite the contrary!

MAQUET

Listen to me...

DUMAS

To tell the truth, it's really not the time. Today is my party.

MAQUET

When I was in Trouville, in the room they reserved for you, by chance, one fine morning...

DUMAS

(glances over Maquet's shoulder)

Who is that charming person?

Maquet turns round. He goes weak at the knees.

Celeste and Charlotte approach, arm in arm.

Flanchet is close behind.

Of course, Celeste thinks she is getting her revenge. She gazes steadily at Dumas, expecting his face to betray him. But nothing of the sort happens. Charlotte is lost.

She looks at Maquet who hangs his head, wishing the ground would swallow him up.

CHARLOTTE

(stares at Maquet)

Alexandre... you have nothing to say?

MAQUET

(very pale, points to Dumas)

He is Alexandre...

Celeste explodes.

CELESTE

Stop trying to trick me! (to Dumas and Maquet) You've had a really good joke on me! (to Dumas). She's all yours... a girl of twenty with a drooling, dirty old man - it's pitiful. (to Charlotte) I wish you every happiness...

With tears in her eyes, Celeste heads towards the steps.

DUMAS

(stunned)

She's gone mad.

More and more confused, Charlotte stares at Maquet.

CHARLOTTE

Could I have an explanation?

MAQUET

(stammering)

When I saw you for the first time,
Charlotte, I couldn't resist
the temptation to... I wanted to tell
you sooner but...

DUMAS

Charlotte? You're Charlotte?

MAQUET

In Trouville, she mistook me for you
and I... I pretended to be
you... So, now you know.

DUMAS

You pretended to be me... (shakes his
head, incredulous) You're joking?

MAQUET

(babbles)

Unfortunately no... well yes... it was
a joke to begin with and then...

DUMAS

I'm impressed, Maquet! (bursts out
laughing) It's worthy of a great
novelist!

Charlotte is disconcerted.

MAQUET

I am terribly sorry, Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

(scowls)

Sorry? Is that all you can say?

Dumas is lapping it up.

MAQUET

I apologize...

Charlotte's answer is to give him a resounding slap.

A small crowd forms around them.

Crémieux joins Flanchet...

DUMAS

She's a fiery one! (to Maquet who rubs
his cheek) You must admit, you
deserved it.

Pale-faced, Maquet melts away into the crowd. He hears a guest remark "Dumas' ghostwriter has taken a thrashing!" to gales of laughter.

CREMIEUX

(to Flanchet)

Actually, that reassures me... A true monarchist like Maquet cannot sell his soul so easily to the devil...

INSPECTOR FLANCHET

(entranced by Charlotte)

To a she-devil! The temptation is even stronger, Monsieur Prefect. Have you seen her bosom?

CREMIEUX

(flustered)

Be quiet!

Alexandre and Charlotte remain facing each other.

CHARLOTTE

There's no reason for me to stay now...

DUMAS

On the contrary, you are my guest. Come, I will give you a tour of my château.

CHARLOTTE

I don't understand... Who is that man?

DUMAS

A very respectable person, who was right to fall in love with you, Charlotte... If it were me, I would have done the same...

Suddenly, rockets exploding in the sky signal the start of the firework display.

Gasps and applause from the crowd.

Like everyone else, Dumas looks up.

Charlotte takes advantage of the distraction to disappear into the crowd...

DUMAS

(gazing skyward)

Wait till you see what's next... Louis XIV would have been green with envy!

A new burst of multi-coloured rockets.

Dumas finally notices that Charlotte has gone.

The orchestra strikes up a saraband...

Dumas catches sight of Maquet holding a bottle of champagne.

DUMAS

Where did she go?

MAQUET

(glugs from the bottle)

I've no idea. I want to die...

DUMAS

(grabs the bottle)

You've caused a fine mess... Don't make things worse!

MAQUET

She hates me...

DUMAS

She has every reason... You're quite pathetic.

MAQUET

It was love at first sight,
Alexandre...

DUMAS

A devious trick, you mean.

MAQUET

Help me. I beg you...

DUMAS

(thinks)

Let me see what I can do...

Dumas disappears into the crowd.

Flanchet follows him...

Maquet hurries towards a buffet and grabs a glass of champagne...

Caroline appears.

CAROLINE

(anxious)

I've been looking everywhere for
you... Is it true what people
are saying? You were slapped by a
woman?

MAQUET

(despondent)

A lunatic who mistook me for Dumas.

Caroline bursts out laughing.

CAROLINE

That's so funny! It was bound to happen one day!

Dumas is at the ceremonial iron gates, with Rasconi.

RASCONI

She asked for a carriage to take her to the station...

DUMAS

Saddle up a horse!

Flabbergasted, Rasconi looks at him.

RASCONI

But monsieur...your guests...

DUMAS

They will wait, Rasconi! Go on!
Hurry! Do as I say!

40. EXT. ROAD TO THE CHATEAU - NIGHT

Flanchet is desperately trying to find the prefect's carriage. He goes from coachman to coachman...

FLANCHET

(to a coachman)

The prefect's carriage was here! I'm sure of it!

COACHMAN

I doubt it. I haven't budged all night. His carriage must be -

FLANCHET

In that case, I'm requisitioning yours! I am an Inspector of the king's police!

COACHMAN

I need to inform my master...

FLANCHET

Who is your master?

COACHMAN

The Minister of Education... He won't
be very pleased...

41. INT. MASTER BEDROOM, MONTE CRISTO - NIGHT

A large wardrobe is open.

Clothes are piled in a trunk...

Celeste is preparing to leave the château.

She stands at the window that looks out over the illuminated
gardens...

Maquet is seated on the edge of the bed.

MAQUET

I fell in love that very first
moment... As if I had been waiting for
her forever...

CELESTE

Be reasonable, Auguste... you have a
daughter of the same age...

MAQUET

Reason can't help me...

CELESTE

You would be ready to give everything
up? Your wife? (shamefully, he nods)
Your children? (He nods again) The
King of France?

MAQUET

Don't talk to me about the king...
I've had nightmares about him...

CELESTE

Come back to reality. She met
Alexandre Dumas, not you. If I
were Charlotte, I would not forgive
you...

42. EXT. ROAD TO ST GERMAIN EN LAYE TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

On a dark dusty path, Dumas rides at full pelt.

He catches sight of a carriage's lantern. Spurs his horse on even
more, overtakes the carriage, and signals to the coachman to stop.
The latter panics.

His horses swerve off the road and the carriage falls into a ditch.
Inside Charlotte shrieks.

Dumas leaps off his horse, yelling an insult at the coachman.

DUMAS

Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Leave me alone!

He scales the side of the carriage and opens the door.

DUMAS

Give me your hand...

She is obliged to hold out her hand to him.

With a sturdy grip, he hoists her up, then takes her in arms to help her down.

CHARLOTTE

Take me to the station, please.

DUMAS

There are no trains before noon tomorrow... You want to spend the night in a ditch? On a cold night like this?

Still a little dazed, Charlotte sits on an embankment. The coachman approaches, rubbing his head...

THE COACHMAN

You'll have to pay for my carriage... That was your fault... Who do you think you are? D'Artagnan?

CHARLOTTE

(to the coachman)

Don't you know you're talking to Alexandre Dumas?

COACHMAN

Honestly, it's him?

DUMAS

Well, yes, it's him.

COACHMAN

Forgive me, Monsieur Dumas... If I'd known...

DUMAS

Return to the château and tell my butler to serve you whatever you want Tomorrow, we'll settle up.

COACHMAN

Thank you, monsieur Dumas...

The coachman walks away.

Dumas glances at Charlotte...

Silence.

CHARLOTTE

What's his name?

DUMAS

The coachman?

CHARLOTTE

No! The impostor!

DUMAS

Maquet...

CHARLOTTE

If our paths cross again, I'll blow
his brains out!

DUMAS

(laughing)

Don't get carried away...

CHARLOTTE

What were you doing with such a crook?

DUMAS

Sometimes I wonder...

CHARLOTTE

He even told me he visited my father
in prison... and I believed him!

This time she bursts into tears.

Dumas sits beside her.

He talks softly...

DUMAS

You believed him because you honestly
thought he was me...

CHARLOTTE

I am a poor fool...

DUMAS

(passionately)

No Charlotte... You are heaven-sent.
Tomorrow I will take care of
everything... of you... your father...
and your future. I assure you, you'll
get the better side of the bargain.

He gets up and holds out his hand.

DUMAS

Come on... The party's just beginning.

43. EXT. CHATEAU DE MONTE-CRISTO - NIGHT

A glass of wine in his hand, Maquet wanders like a lost soul.
The orchestra plays waltz.
Caroline grabs her husband's arm.

CAROLINE

Honestly, I'm ashamed... you're not a
husband but a wet blanket! Shake a
leg! Stop drinking and dance with me!

Maquet allows her to pull him along like a puppet. He begins to
waltz with Caroline, stumbles, pulls himself together, and makes a
superhuman effort to act naturally.

CAROLINE

(in Maquet's ear)

Close your eyes... Remember our first
kisses... Here, in your arms, let me
dream that I am still eighteen!

Just then, Dumas makes a triumphant entry, perched on his horse
with Charlotte seated sidesaddle.

He makes his horse rear up. The orchestra stops playing.

The guests cheer the hero.

CAROLINE

Is that his new conquest? It can't be—
how old is she?

MAQUET

She looks very young...

CAROLINE

And do you think that's right?

MAQUET

No, it's shocking.

CAROLINE

It's not shocking, it's disgusting!

Dumas leaps and helps Charlotte down.

He invites her to dance. She is smiling again.

Dumas catches sight of Maquet. Mutters, as he goes by:

DUMAS

Sorry old boy, I did what I could...

Charlotte ignores Maquet.

Dumas shouts at the orchestra: "Music, please!"

All the dancers draw aside to allow them to start the dance alone.

Celeste was right.

Charlotte has become the queen of the evening.

MAQUET

(to Caroline)

We're going home...

CAROLINE

Go home if you like... I'm staying!

She sees Nerval.

CAROLINE

Gérard, you promised me a dance...

Nerval smiles and leads Caroline onto the dance floor.

Maquet goes over to the buffet and holds out his empty glass.

His eyes are riveted on Charlotte, twirling in Dumas' arms.

For just one dance, all her concerns fade away: her father, the revolution, and Maquet's imposture.

44. EXT. CHATEAU DE MONTE-CRISTO - NEXT MORNING

From Dumas' bedroom, climactic groans and screams.

Sophie and Clementine, waiting to serve breakfast, split their sides laughing.

45. INT. DUMAS' BEDROOM - MORNING

In the bed, Dumas releases Celeste.

CELESTE

It was divine...

DUMAS

It's always divine with you...

He gets up to slip on his dressing gown.

CELESTE

Yes, but you were even more passionate than usual...

DUMAS

Oh you know, in the morning I could find a pigeon seductive!

CELESTE

Were you thinking of Charlotte?

DUMAS

Charlotte? She's a child!

CELESTE

Let's not exaggerate... What are you going to do with her?

DUMAS

Help her as best as I can...

CELESTE

True, you are a republican body and soul...

DUMAS

Listen, my sweet little baby... Let me remind you that you were the one who brought her here...

CELESTE

(still laughing)

If you bed her, I'll leave you at once...

DUMAS

Bed her! A grievous expression!

CELESTE

And Auguste?

DUMAS

He gambled and he lost. Between you and I, he has more imagination than I gave him credit for...

CELESTE

He's madly in love with the girl...

DUMAS

He hasn't a chance...

CELESTE

And you?

DUMAS

What about me?

She smiles again.

A knock on the door.

Dumas calls out "Come in!" Sophie and Clémentine enter with breakfast.

DUMAS

How long have you been listening
outside the door?

The two maids are careful not to answer.

Sophie goes to open the shutters while Clémentine sets the tray on
the bed.

DUMAS

Is Mademoiselle Charlotte awake?

CLEMENTINE

She left for Paris very early this
morning. She said she will
return with the evening train...

DUMAS

Did she tell you where she was going?

SOPHIE

Yes, monsieur... She said she had
things to do in the apartment
of monsieur's cousin...

DUMAS

(surprised)

What cousin?

CELESTE

(laughing)

I'm the cousin...

DUMAS

So, the plot thickens.

CELESTE

We'll serialize it. Ask your friend
Auguste - it's his speciality...

DUMAS

My friend?

CELESTE

Yes, of course, your friend...

Grumpily, Dumas devours half the omelette on his plate in one
mouthful...

46. 47/ EXT CHATEAU OF MONTE-CRISTO - MORNING

On all sides, the damage is being repaired. The cut-up lawn, the
plants that have been trampled underfoot.

A carriage stops in the driveway.

Young Alexis hurries to open the door.

MAQUET

(getting down)

Thank you, my boy...

Maquet approaches the gardener.

MAQUET

Hello, Michel... Is Monsieur Dumas awake?

MICHEL

I think he's waiting for you in his study. Have you seen the carnage? Because of the fireworks, we have lost three trees... a sorbus acuparia... a nandina domestica...

Maquet isn't listening.

He heads towards the steps where he runs into Clémentine with her basket.

MAQUET

Hello, Clementine...Do you know if Mademoiselle Charlotte slept in the chateau?

CLEMENTINE

I saw and heard nothing...

Maquet shrugs and enters the chateau.

47. INT. DUMAS' STUDY - MORNING

Dumas is at his desk. He has already filled a fair number of pages. With his satchel in hand, Maquet timidly knocks on the door. Dumas doesn't react. He keeps writing. The door opens half-way. We see Maquet's haggard face.

DUMAS

(brusquely)

What are we going to do with Mazarin?

MAQUET

(taken aback)

Mazarin?

DUMAS

His suffering brings us two hundred new readers every day and you want to kill him off? It's a mistake, Maquet.

Maquet comes over.

He takes out his handkerchief and wipes his forehead.

DUMAS

What are you waiting for? Come on! To work! The party's over.

Maquet sits down.

MAQUET

Alexandre...

DUMAS

What?

MAQUET

Could we speak about Charlotte?

DUMAS

Oh yes, Charlotte... I'm most grateful. Thanks to you I had a delightful evening.. I went back for extra helpings four times... (He laughs) and she wanted more... and more... I'm hard just thinking about it.

Maquet's face just crumples.

MAQUET

You didn't do that?

DUMAS

You serve me a charming creature on a plate and expect me not to eat her? You know my appetite for good things.

Maquet stands.

MAQUET

You promised me...

DUMAS

I didn't promise you anything at all. You are a bad sport, Auguste...

MAQUET

Very well. I won't stay where I'm not wanted.

He heads for the door.

DUMAS

Maquet!

Maquet turns round.

MAQUET

It's over, Alexandre. We won't see each other again!

Dumas bursts out laughing.

DUMAS

Impossible... You sound like a schoolboy...

MAQUET

(voice catches in his throat)

Don't you understand? I love her?

DUMAS

Love, Maquet, is only a word... I miss you... since you've been gone my life is a desert... when are you coming back?

MAQUET

That's enough...

DUMAS

We were made for one another...

MAQUET

Shut up!

DUMAS

So you've fallen in love with a nymphet capable of going to bed with Dumas at the drop of a hat?

MAQUET

I don't know where I am, what I think...

DUMAS

I know. You've fallen very low...

MAQUET

I saw you dancing with her... I saw your eyes...

DUMAS

Charlotte is delightful, I was delighted, and that's as far as it went. Now if you want to make a mess of your life...

MAQUET

Did she talk to you about me?

DUMAS

In my opinion, you've no hope.

MAQUET

None?

DUMAS

None. Can we go back to Mazarin?

Maquet sits down again.

Opens his satchel and takes out his pages.

A knock on the door.

DUMAS

What is it now?

It is Celeste.

CELESTE

Visitors...

Dumas gets up and looks out the window. Double-takes.

DUMAS

Ida! What is she doing here? And who is that beautiful adolescent by her side?

CELESTE

Your daughter, Marie-Ange...

DUMAS

Oh...and that nasty-looking rascal?

CELESTE

Maitre Lacan, your ex-wife's lawyer...

DUMAS

And the dwarf tagging along behind?

CELESTE

A court bailiff...

DUMAS

Maquet, tell them I'm not in.

CELESTE

Rasconi told them just the opposite...

DUMAS

What a numbskull!

Dumas appears on the steps.

Marie-Ange rushes towards him.

MARIE-ANGE

Are you my Papa?

DUMAS

I certainly am! I can't believe how much you've grown! (to Ida) What shitty little scheme have you dreamed up now?

IDA FERRIER-DUMAS

I wanted to see just how far delusions of grandeur could go... And I'm impressed. How much do you think this folly is worth, Maître Lacan?

ESQUIRE LACAN

Between seven hundred and eight hundred thousand...

IDA FERRIER-DUMAS

I am not asking for much... just the balance of my dowry...

COURT BAILIFF

Plus the interest that should at least equal your living expenses...

DUMAS

Very well, go ahead. Impress yourselves... (takes his daughter by the hand) Come my dear, I'll show you the menagerie... (into Marie-Ange's ear) If they get on my nerves, I will lock them up in the monkey cage.

MARIE-ANGE

Not Mummy, surely?

DUMAS

No, not to your mother... She'd scare the monkeys!

49. INT. DUMAS' STUDY- DAY

Maquet and Celeste are alone in Dumas' study.

Maquet has not budged from his chair, totally demoralized.

From the window, Celeste watches events in the garden.

CELESTE

Charlotte will be here this evening...

MAQUET

What should I do?

CELESTE

Nothing...

MAQUET

Nothing. You can't be serious...

CELESTE

Keep a low profile, Auguste...

MAQUET

Are you still my friend?

Celeste turns around with a smile full of sadness.

CELESTE

I'll let the three of you sort things out...

MAQUET

You won't have dinner with us?

CELESTE

No. You know... women often have convenient migraines.

50. INT. DINING ROOM, MONTE-CRISTO - NIGHT

An immense table decorated with candelabras.
The table is set for three.

Dumas and Maquet wait for Charlotte.

Rasconi appears in the doorway.

RASCONI

She wasn't at the station...

DUMAS

(preoccupied)

You may serve...

Dumas takes his place at the head of the table.

Maquet sits on his left.

MAQUET

I hope nothing has happened to her.

DUMAS

What could have happened to her?

MAQUET

I helped her hide thirty rifles and ten pistols under Celeste's bed... and the bolster pillow is filled with gunpowder...

DUMAS

Are you mad?

MAQUET

Stendhal speaks of love as a sickness...

DUMAS

I don't give a damn about Stendahl! Did you think of Celeste? If the police turn up at her place... Did you tell her at least?

MAQUET

No...

DUMAS

Maquet... You've changed beyond recognition

MAQUET

I'll go to the bitter end...

DUMAS

The end of what, you dimwit? Are you going to mount the barricades? I've learned to be wary of the people... Give them a box of matches and they'll burn everything to the ground.

Sophie and Clementine arrive with the soup.

SOPHIE

Cream of lentils with foie gras and diced bacon... shall I remove Mademoiselle Celeste's plate?

DUMAS

It is Mademoiselle Charlotte's plate... leave it for the moment...

Clementine conscientiously fills their plates.

DUMAS

You see, Maquet, if it all goes off again, Paris will be choked with red...They'll destroy the monuments,

they'll plunder the Royal Palace.
Nothing will be spared, the
tapestries, curtains and books will be
burned, and they call that the
Republic!

Footsteps in the corridor. Charlotte makes her entrance in riding
clothes. It's yet another Charlotte, suddenly more masculine. The
two men rise.

CHARLOTTE

Sorry I'm late but St. Lazare Station
is surrounded by municipal troops...

She ignores Maquet.

DUMAS

(with a slight smile)
I believe you've met Monsieur
Maquet...

Charlotte sits down without comment.

CHARLOTTE

Celeste isn't eating with us?

DUMAS

She has a splitting headache...

Sophie fills Charlotte's plate.

CHARLOTTE

This time, I think we are ready. I saw
Béraud...

DUMAS

Emile? That takes me back to my
youth. What's become of him? (to
Maquet) Back then, he was expelled
from Polytechnique for singing the
Marseillaise...

CHARLOTTE

Béraud has been biding his time and
his time has come... he sincerely
hopes that you will assume the command
of the National Guard of Saint-
Germain-en-Laye and that you will
return to Paris...

Maquet can't conceal a smile as Dumas chokes on his food.

DUMAS

And you just toss that at me!

CHARLOTTE

(like a general)

You will march on the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs...

DUMAS

No less!

CHARLOTTE

The other Dumas wouldn't have
hesitated for a moment...

DUMAS

(frowning)

What other Dumas?

CHARLOTTE

(pointing to Maquet)

Him!

DUMAS

(furious)

His name is Auguste Maquet and he's a
royalist!

CHARLOTTE

(amused)

Really? You didn't tell me that
Monsieur Maquet...

It's the first time she speaks to Maquet.

MAQUET

(barely looking at her)

Only fools can't admit they're wrong.
You opened my eyes, Charlotte...
Sometimes it takes many lies to
discover the truth...

DUMAS

Good, Maquet, very good! You surpass
yourself!

The second course arrives: a nice, fat capon...

CHARLOTTE

(to Dumas)

And my father?

DUMAS

Your father... Tricky... This morning
I wrote to the Duke of Montpensier...

CHARLOTTE

That's the best you can do?

MAQUET

Unlike me, the royalist, Monsieur Dumas has many acquaintances among the aristocracy...

DUMAS

I trust Montpensier... He'll do all he can, but it will take time.

CHARLOTTE

My father is on his deathbed! There is no time to lose!

MAQUET

This's why I did what needed doing.
(hands Charlotte a letter) It is an order signed by Minister Guizot... Your father will be unconditionally released tomorrow...

Maquet has played his trump card.

It is easy to imagine Dumas' expression.

Charlotte reads the ministerial order...

CHARLOTTE

(overcome with emotion)

I don't know how to thank you...

MAQUET

(in a whisper)

Perhaps by forgiving me for my imposture...

Charlotte smiles at him.

51. INT. DUMAS AND CELESTE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dumas joins Celeste, who's in bed, reading.
He lies down next to her, fully dressed.

DUMAS

The girl is a public menace...

CELESTE

(laughs)

You include yourself in the public?

Dumas shrugs. Silence.

DUMAS

Answer me honestly... (She looks at him) Do you sometimes think that I am getting old?

She smiles.

CELESTE

Let's ask your friend what he thinks.

She slips her hand down the front of his pants.

DUMAS

You see... Limp.

Charlotte's laughter echoes up from the dining room.

52. INT. DINING ROOM, MONTE-CRISTO - NIGHT

Auguste and Charlotte drain the jug of wine.

CHARLOTTE

(tipsy)

Let's ask for another.

MAQUET

What's so funny about it?

CHARLOTTE

Everything... When I see myself at the inn, knocking on the door of the illustrious Alexandre Dumas... You thought I was the chambermaid!

MAQUET

And you thought I was Alexandre Dumas... I feel so ashamed...

CHARLOTTE

Stop punishing yourself. Tell me what was going through your mind.

MAQUET

I saw you...

CHARLOTTE

And then? I saw you, too.

MAQUET

(ill at ease)

Aren't you cold?

CHARLOTTE

Not at all...

Awkward silence.

MAQUET

So close to you, time flies by. You know, Charlotte... when I met Alexandre for the first time... I felt straight away - how can I put it - that it was pointless making long speeches... there was something natural about our meeting...

CHARLOTTE

It's love, isn't it?

MAQUET

(eyes blazing, looking at Charlotte)

Yes, it's love.

O.S., heavy footsteps on the stairs.

Dumas appears in the doorway, wearing his uniform of Major in the National Guard.

DUMAS

(thrusts out his hand, to Maquet)

Give me Guizot's order! It's an order!

MAQUET

Have you lost your mind, Alexandre!
What are you going to do with it?

DUMAS

Charlotte's father shouldn't languish in prison a minute longer! Come on, Charlotte! We're going!

CHARLOTTE

Now?

DUMAS

Yes, immediately!

Charlotte rushes to kiss Dumas.

Maquet stands there like a spare part.

CHARLOTTE

I'll get my cape...

She dashes joyfully upstairs.

MAQUET

We'll go together.

DUMAS

No, Maquet! Your place is here and mine is with the people! They are not

waiting for you but for Alexandre
Dumas! Go on! Don't force me to take
the document by force!

MAQUET

(livid)

You'd do that?

DUMAS

I can also tell Charlotte that you
refused to give it to me... she
had the good grace to forgive your
impotence but don't ask too much of
her...

MAQUET

Bastard...

DUMAS

(holds out his hand)

Come on...

Vanquished, Maquet takes the order from his pocket and gives it to
Dumas.

53. EXT. CHATEAU DE MONTE-CRISTO - NIGHT

At the foot of the steps, the château staff look as if Dumas has
dragged them all out of their beds.
The gardener Michel and his wife the cook, Sophie and Clementine,
Alexis, the butler Rasconi, etc...

The carriage is ready. Charlotte climbs in.
Dumas is about to join her when Celeste appears at the top of the
steps, wearing a dressing gown.

CELESTE

Alexandre! If you do this...

DUMAS

If I do what? The revolution? I've
been waiting for this moment
for years!

He climbs into the carriage and signals to the coachman to drive
off.

Celeste sees Maquet step out of the house. Haggard.

CELESTE

The bitch! she got what she wanted...

MAQUET

They're going to get Martin Desrives
out of prison...

CELESTE

Why haven't you gone with them?

MAQUET

My place is here.

CELESTE

Very well, stay in your place! I'll pack my bags! Clementine! Sophie! Go to my room and empty my wardrobes! Rasconi, get a carriage ready for me! I'll never set foot here again!

54. EXT/INT. COUNTRY ROAD/CARRIAGE (MOVING) - NIGHT

Dumas' carriage rattles down a country road headed for Paris...

CHARLOTTE

Auguste didn't want to come with us?

DUMAS

He hesitated... Then, at the last moment, he realized he had too much work.

CHARLOTTE

You should have convinced him to come...

DUMAS

I tried, but he is a dutiful fellow.

CHARLOTTE

You are very lucky to have him at your side.

DUMAS

I tell myself that everyday. He is irreplaceable.

He smiles at her seductively.

DUMAS

You know that you are devilishly beautiful?

CHARLOTTE

So Auguste told me...

DUMAS

Let's forget about Auguste for now. What makes you even more beautiful is the fact that you seem unaware of your

beauty. When I think of some of the narcissistic women I've known...

CHARLOTTE

Have there been many?

DUMAS

Too many. Far too many... I spent my life looking for what I have at last found...

CHARLOTTE

(smells a rat)

I understand. Celeste is an exceptional woman...

Dumas' seductive smile freezes.

CHARLOTTE

It's so obvious you're meant for each other.

DUMAS

No woman of her age can compete with your youth...

CHARLOTTE

My youth! I'd love to be Celeste's age! Everyone still treats me like a child!

Dumas begins to get edgy. He's struggling.

CHARLOTTE

When I think of Auguste...

DUMAS

(irritably)

Shall we forget him?

Without replying, Charlotte tilts her head towards the window.

55. INT. ANOTHER CARRIAGE ON THE SAME ROAD - NIGHT

Celeste and Maquet sit in the back of a carriage racing down the same road.

The roof is piled high with Celeste's luggage.

She is still beside herself with rage.

CELESTE

Why do you think he's doing this? For the workers who toil fifteen hours a day? No, he's doing it to impress that girl! He wants her in his bed! That's

the only thing that interests him, to
rut on her like a pig!

MAQUET

(shocked)

Calm down, Celeste. Alexandre stands
up for his convictions, too.

CELESTE

What convictions? Fighting
unemployment? Jailing those who profit
from the others' misery?

MAQUET

Are you becoming a revolutionary, too?

CELESTE

Absolutely! I won't let that little
bitch represent women! It's been
getting on my nerves for some time...
I've had enough of men's cowardice of
men. And that includes you,
Auguste. I never told you, but I find
you weak, terribly weak!

MAQUET

Since I met Charlotte, I've changed.

CELESTE

At your age, you should know yourself.

The carriage rattles away into the breaking dawn.

56. EXT. RUE DES CAPUCINES, PARIS - MORNING

A group of students crosses the road, singing the Marseillaise at
the top of their voices.

Shouts of "Long live the republic!" "Down with Guizot!"

A carriage stops outside 36, Rue des Capucines.
Maquet and Celeste step out.

CELESTE

(to the coachman)

Take my trunks up to the second
floor...

57. INT. CELESTE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Celeste and Maquet walk up the stairs to the second floor.
When they reach the landing, they find the front door open.

MAQUET

Charlotte must be here with her friends...

They enter. Total chaos.

Drawers are open, with clothes and books strewn on the floor.

CELESTE

The little tart. She ransacked my apartment for revenge?

MAQUET

(petrified)

Impossible...

And suddenly a stampede is heard on the stairs. A police captain is accompanied by some policemen.

POLICE CAPTAIN

Captain Trinquier of the King's Police...

58. INT. OFFICE, CHIEF OF POLICE - DAY

Bocquin, the chief of the King's Police, is in seventh heaven.

Celeste and Maquet are seated in front of him, both handcuffed.

A police officer remains on guard in the room.

BOCQUIN

A misunderstanding! That's the usual excuse! You won't get out of it that easily, Maquet... We've been watching you for some time...

MAQUET

At least tell me what I'm supposed to have done.

BOCQUIN

(to Celeste)

Mademoiselle Scriwaneck... how do you explain the presence of thirty rifles and ten pistols in your apartment?

CELESTE

I've no idea.

BOCQUIN

You sleep with gunpowder in your bolster and don't even know it?

CELESTE

It keeps me warm at night...

BOCQUIN

Stop making fun of me! Do you know what the two of you risk? The guillotine!

MAQUET

I can explain everything...

CELESTE

Quiet, Auguste... They will go to the gallows!...

MAQUET

I am a personal friend of Prefect Crémieux...

BOCQUIN

We are aware of that. You also know his private secretary, Monsieur Flanchet...

MAQUET

A charming fellow who loves petits fours...

BOCQUIN

(to the policeman)

Ask Inspector Flanchet to come in...

The policeman opens the door. Maquet's jaw drops.

Flanchet enters with another policeman. They flank young Jean-Baptiste, Charlotte's "fiancé," in chains.

BOCQUIN

Mademoiselle Scriwaneck... Jean-Baptiste Béraud was arrested in your apartment. He came for the weapons... Do you know him?

CELESTE

I've never seen the man before in my life.

BOCQUIN

Jean-Baptiste Béraud is the son of a wanted revolutionary whom we have been after for years... The name doesn't ring a bell?

Celeste shakes her head.

MAQUET

(overwhelmed)

Monsieur Flanchet... I believe we met at Monte-Cristo... Are you an Inspector or private secretary?

BOCQUIN

Maquet... your dear friend the Prefect Crémieux alerted us to your subversive activities. You're cornered like a rat... and Dumas won't be long in following you to prison... I imagine that at this moment he has gone to release Martin Desrives... thanks to an order duly signed by Minister Guizot... I'm afraid Maquet you've fallen into our net...

Crushed, Maquet looks at Celeste.

BOCQUIN

Flanchet...take a platoon of gendarmes and arrest Dumas for conspiring against the King.

59. INT. SAINTE-PELAGIE PRISON - DAY

Dumas and Charlotte walk down a corridor of the prison with the Governor, monsieur de St-Omer.

ST OMER

You understand, Monsieur Dumas, I don't have an easy job. With those coming in and those going out, I don't know which way to turn. What terrible times we live in!

DUMAS

Are there many coming in?

ST OMER

The police are constantly on edge. Just this morning a dozen rioters who were caught plundering an armoury.

CHARLOTTE

(impatient)

How is my father?

ST OMER

I won't deny, Mademoiselle, that he is very weak...

St-Omer leads them down a maze of corridors.

A guard opens a cell.

Martin Desrives is lying on a board. Charlotte rushes inside.

MARTIN DESRIVES

My Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

Papa, it's all right! You're free...
thanks to Monsieur Dumas.

MARTIN DESRIVES

(smiles at her)

How pretty you are... (coughs) Oh,
I'm so tired, you know. It's very damp
here. (sits up) Tell me... what's it
like outside? Is there still sun?

CHARLOTTE

The revolution is on the march!

MARTIN DESRIVES

(another hollow cough)

Excellent! Let's march with it.
(suddenly shivers)
I'm afraid...

CHARLOTTE

Afraid of what, Papa?

MARTIN DESRIVES

Bugs...

CHARLOTTE

(stares at him)

What bugs?

Desrives stares blankly straight ahead.

CHARLOTTE

Come on, Papa... Monsieur Dumas is
here.

MARTIN DESRIVES

(looks up at the ceiling)

It's always night here.

Dumas and St-Omer wait outside the cell.

ST OMER

(embarrassed)

I should warn you that Doctor Desrives
no longer has his wits about him...
Not all the time, at least.

Dumas sees Charlotte propping up her father.

Desrives gazes at the two men facing him. Miles away.

CHARLOTTE

Alexandre! Help me!

Dumas rushes forward.

MARTIN DESRIVES

Dumas! You came at last. I fear you may be a little late.

DUMAS

No, Martin. We'll get you back to health.

MARTIN DESRIVES

Start by overthrowing the monarchy. That's the only thing that can cure me.

DUMAS

We're almost there. The people is waiting for you...

ST OMER

(anxious)

The people?

DUMAS

(points to the cell)

Yes, the people, Monsieur de St-Omer. If I were you, I'd give your new office a spring clean.

A guard runs up.

GUARD

(out of breath)

Governor, we have new arrivals.

ST OMER

How many this time?

GUARD

Just two. Béraud's son and a fellow named Maquet...

CHARLOTTE

(in a panic)

Jean-Baptiste?

DUMAS

Maquet? Did you say Maquet?

Two gendarmes flank Maquet and Jean-Baptiste, both handcuffed.

DUMAS

(to Maquet)
What the hell are you doing here?

MAQUET

Hurry, Alexandre... They are coming to arrest you. We all fell into a trap!

ST OMER

(rediscovers his smile)
You see, the fight isn't over yet...

DUMAS

St-Omer, I order you to free these two innocents immediately!

ST OMER

For now, Monsieur Dumas, I take my orders from General Sebastiani...

Charlotte approaches Jean-Baptiste. Holds him tight.

CHARLOTTE

I promise you won't be here long.

Dumas is aghast.

ST OMER

It truly is a small world.

Captain Ollier comes to the rescue.

CAPTAIN OLLIER

(out of breath)
Governor... the situation outside is hotting up.

ST OMER

Be more precise, captain!

CAPTAIN OLLIER

They are swarming towards us, crying "Long live Dumas!" "Long live Desrives!" "Death to St-Omer!" What should we do?

DUMAS

(to the captain)
It's simple. Choose sides...

ONE OF THE GENDARMES

We came in by the back... but what the captain says is true... it's a riot. They have rifles and pikes...

The Prison Governor begins to panic.

ST OMER

(re. Maquet and Jean-Baptiste)

Lock these two up! (to Dumas,
Charlotte and Martin Desrives)
And you, get out of my sight!

The gendarmes hustle Maquet and Jean-Baptiste away.

MAQUET

(shouting)

Alexandre! Celeste has also been
arrested! She is in the women's jail!

Powerless to intervene, Dumas watches Maquet and Jean-Baptiste
being pushed into a cell. The key turns twice in the lock.

60. EXT. SAINTE PELAGIE PRISON - DAY

The soldiers are having a hard time restraining the crowd outside
the prison.

When Dumas steps out with Desrives and Charlotte, a huge cheer goes
up.

CHARLOTTE

(to Dumas)

Tell them we're going to win!

DUMAS

No, Charlotte, it's up to you to talk
to them.

He helps her to climb on an old cart.

CHARLOTTE

Comrades! Thanks to Alexandre Dumas,
my father is free at last!

Cheers.

CHARLOTTE

But the fight goes on! They have
thrown Béraud's son and Auguste Maquet
into jail!

Chants of "Free Béraud!" and "Free Maquet!"

Suddenly, Captain Ollier appears and shouts to his men:

CAPT. OLLIER

Troops! Let them in!

The soldiers lower their rifles and stand to one side.
Within seconds, the excitable crowd stampedes through the gates.
Dumas has to leap out of the way.
Desrives isn't so nimble.

DEMONSTRATOR

Free Desrives!!

CHARLOTTE

That's him! That's my father!

In the chaos, nobody hears her.

Desrives is swept back inside by the human tide and trampled.

Gunshots ring out.

The gendarmes inside the prison have opened fire.

The crowd panics. Some demonstrators fire back.

The gates are a crush of people pushing in all directions.

Dumas plunges into the throng and emerges carrying Martin Desrives' inert body.

61. EXT. IN A NEARBY STREET - DAY

Stretched out on the pavement, blood streaming from a head wound, Martin Desrives opens his eyes.

He sees Charlotte leaning over him.

Smiles at her.

CHARLOTTE

We've called for a doctor.

MARTIN DESRIVES

It's too late, sweetheart. I am a doctor. I know...

CHARLOTTE

(tears in her eyes)

Sssh.

MARTIN DESRIVES

Have you seen the sky? It's going to be a fine day.

Dumas kneels next to him.

MARTIN DESRIVES

Make the most of it.

DUMAS

(overwhelmed)

We will. We will.

Martin Desrives slowly fades away in his daughter's arms.

Charlotte breaks down in tears.

DUMAS

We'll take him to my apartment.

CHARLOTTE

I'll take care of it. Now, you must
free Céleste.

Dumas doesn't react.

CHARLOTTE

Did you hear me, Alexandre?

62. INT. PRISON CORRIDOR - DAY

The gendarmes who incarcerated Maquet and young Béraud lie dead on the floor.

His hands tied behind his back, Monsieur de St-Omer lies next to them, under no illusion that he is about to share the same fate.

Maquet and Jean-Baptiste are surrounded by rioters.

RIOTER #1

(to Jean-Baptiste)

So, Maquet, what was prison like?

JEAN-BAPTISTE

(points to Maquet)

He's Maquet. A real tough nut.

MAQUET

(suave)

In any case, thank you so much for
your speedy and efficient
intervention.

RIOTER

(from the heart)

Maquet's coming with us!

MAQUET

With pleasure. But where are we going?

JEAN-BAPTISTE

To the Assembly! Let's storm the
parliament! But watch out, they have
cannons.

Jean-Baptiste and Maquet are carried in triumph.

Béraud grins ecstatically. Maquet less so.

63. INT. DUMAS' APARTMENT, PARIS - NIGHT

It's pitch black outside. The street seems calm.

A door opens. Bedraggled, a pistol in his belt, Maquet appears.

He walks down the corridor.

Dumas is along in his vast study, lit by a gas lamp.

He's writing.

DUMAS

(looks up)

Ah, it's you. Or rather it isn't.

(gazes at him)

More like me, eighteen years ago. Are you a hero?

Maquet sits in an armchair facing Dumas.
He acts modest, downplaying the news...

MAQUET

The King has fled.

DUMAS

Thanks to you perhaps?

MAQUET

Eighteen years ago, you manned the
barricades.

DUMAS

Times have changed. Today, I'm working
on Bragelonne. Listen to this initial
description of the Viscount.

(picks up a page, reads)

"He was a young man of twenty-four or
twenty-five years of age, tall,
slender, wearing the charming military
uniform of the time with grace..."

MAQUET

(interrupts)

I don't give a damn about Bragelonne!
Have you forgotten the revolution?

DUMAS

It will happen without me.

(continues reading)

"His high boots enclosed a foot that
Mademoiselle de Montalais would have
gladly called her own were she to
dress as a man..."

MAQUET

Thirty-five dead tonight. Paris put to
the sword. And you want to sit it out?

DUMAS

Sit what out? Come back to earth, you
fool! May I remind you that you are
still in my pay and that we are now
even further behind schedule. The
revolution won't pay my bills.

MAQUET

At the present moment, I pay them.

DUMAS

Don't be so petty, my good friend. Our readers are growing impatient. My reputation depends on it.

MAQUET

On the subject of your reputation, even the Académie Française rejected you. You entertain the nation. You're a clown, nothing more. You'd do better to take Lamartine's example!

DUMAS

(incredulous)

Me? Dumas? You're mad!

MAQUET

A great poet, fine historian, member of parliament, future minister of the Provisional Government...

DUMAS

What are you waiting for? Rush over there to lick his boots!

MAQUET

(rises)

Let's talk seriously. I totted everything up. You owe me at least 456,000 francs. Excluding royalties.

DUMAS

(stands also)

You need to get some rest, Maquet. Your wife must be very worried. Poor Caroline... If only she knew her dearly beloved husband had been playing the revolutionary... and bashful lover. Charlotte's incredible! She's really got inside your head.

MAQUET

I want my money.

(leans forward, threatening)

I'm not joking. Otherwise, I'll sue and ruin you.

DUMAS

You don't want a war with me...

MAQUET

I will tell the journalists that I am behind all our books. I have in my safe a memorandum that recounts the evolution of my work on The Three Musketeers... from the original idea to the final stage. Everything is recorded and certified before a notary...

Dumas heads towards the bookcase, takes a volume at random and shows him the cover.

DUMAS

What does that say? Eh? What does it say? It says "The Queen Margot by Alexandre Dumas".

(takes another book).

And this one? Is that me or isn't it? D'Artagnan, Porthos, Aramis, who wrote it? Whose name is on the cover?

MAQUET

I'm the real Dumas and I'll prove it in court!

DUMAS

Just as I always thought. You're a minor clerk pretending to be a great writer.

MAQUET

I'll prove the contrary!

DUMAS

With your scribblings? Get out of my sight! I dispense of your meager services.

Shouts from the street.

Dumas goes over to the window.

Céleste runs in, wearing a dressing gown.

MAQUET

Céleste! You're safe...

CELESTE

(to Dumas, ignores Maquet)

Open the window, darling! The people demands to see you!

Chants of "Dumas! Dumas!" waft up from the street.
Alexandre takes a deep breath and throws open the window.
The torch-carrying crowd cheer to the rooftops.

DUMAS

Comrades! Lamartine wants to
confiscate your revolution! What we
want is the Republic! United and
indivisible! Everybody to the Town
Hall. I am with you!

(turns round)

Céleste, my love, please fetch my
coat.

(sees Maquet)

Ah, Maquet! Can you finish off the
portait of Bragelonne. A bravura piece
is what we need. I'll leave it with
you.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

What a lot of noise you're making!

They all spin round.

Charlotte stands in the doorway of Dumas' bedroom.

DUMAS

The noise is in the streets,
Charlotte. Will you come with me?

CHARLOTTE

That's Céleste's role. And you,
Auguste... don't stay here a minute
longer! Monsieur Dumas said he was
dispensing with your services.

DUMAS

Is that any business of yours?

Céleste helps Dumas on with his coat.

DUMAS

Get dressed, darling. On the balcony
of the Town Hall, we'll make a fine
couple.

CELESTE

Do you really think so?

DUMAS

(kisses her forehead)

Let's hurry!

He walks over to Maquet and grabs the pistol out of his belt.

DUMAS

You never know, it could come in handy. As for Bragelonne... I left off when he sets foot on dry land. The rest is pretty obvious. I have complete faith in you.

He exits.

Céleste goes out another door.

Maquet and Charlotte are left alone.

MAQUET

I didn't expect to find you here.

CHARLOTTE

My father will be buried tomorrow at Père-Lachaise cemetery.

MAQUET

I shall be there with you.

CHARLOTTE

No, Auguste. You are going to return straight home.

MAQUET

Of course... Family life by a raging fire. Games of backgammon with the children.

CHARLOTTE

Caroline must be proud of her husband.

MAQUET

What do you mean?

CHARLOTTE

If I were her, I couldn't stand the fact that my husband's talent merely fattened Alexandre Dumas' quill! You're worth more than that. Write a novel. Under your real name. I shall be your first reader.

MAQUET

(beat)

A love story?

She smiles and walks back to Dumas' bedroom, where her father lies in peace with candles at each corner of the bed.

MAQUET

Charlote...

At the door, she turns back to him.

MAQUET

(hushed)

Let me kiss you... once... just once.
Just so I can say I didn't dream it.

CHARLOTTE

(deeply moved)

Go! Quickly, Auguste.

He comes over.

Gazes at the corpse of Martin Desrives stretched out on Dumas' bed,
hands clasped over his chest.

CHARLOTTE

It's thanks to him that we met the
first time.

MAQUET

Do you regret it?

She brings her face closer to his and gives him a furtive kiss,
like a gentle caress with her lips.

CHARLOTTE

It wasn't a dream.

She enters and closes the door behind her.

Maquet stands there, at a loss, moved to tears.

64. INT. CHATEAU DE SAINT-MESME - EVENING

Augustin the valet carries a bowl of soup on a silver tray.

Stops outside Maquet's study.

He is followed by Caroline, who knocks on the door.

CAROLINE

Auguste, my love, it's me... I've
brought you some soup.

No answer. She knocks again.

CAROLINE

Auguste, can you hear me? Open the
door, please.

The door eventually opens.

Maquet is bearded, hirsute, eyes bloodshot from poring over his
manuscript.

MAQUET

I was finishing a sentence.

CAROLINE

Is it really finished? I can come back later if you want...

MAQUET

No, I need to eat.

CAROLINE

That's good news!

(takes the tray from Augustin)

Thank you, Augustin. Stay by the door in case Monsieur needs anything.

65. INT. MAQUET'S STUDY - EVENING

Shutters tightly closed, filthy oil lamps, candles burned down to the wick, crumpled pages on the floor, an unmade camp bed, books all over... It's Robinson Crusoe's cave.

Maquet seems exhausted.

Caroline puts the tray down on a dusty tabletop.

CAROLINE

Why don't you let Augustin in to dust from time to time?

MAQUET

No.

CAROLINE

Eat your soup... it'll go cold.

MAQUET

(anxious)

Well?

CAROLINE

Eat first, please.

MAQUET

Did you read it?

CAROLINE

I read what you gave me... the first three chapters.

MAQUET

It's enough to form an opinion.

CAROLINE

Let's say... it's promising.

MAQUET

Caroline, I know you. When I gave you the opening of Monte-Cristo to read

you bounced up and down. You ran out of words to praise me. You nearly choked on them.

CAROLINE

(ill at ease)

Monte-Cristo wasn't at all the same story...

MAQUET

I have undertaken a story of unrequited love. You think it's badly written?

(raises his voice)

Say it, for Christ's sake!

He comes over, shakes her.

The soup bowl is knocked to the floor.

MAQUET

I have always trusted your judgment. I want to know what you really think!

Caroline gazes at him, benevolently, but unable to think of a reply.

MAQUET

Tell me the truth! Do I go on or do I stop?

She takes him in her arms and affectionately strokes his hair.

CAROLINE

(whispers)

My poor friend...

A week later

66. EXT. CHATEAU DE MONTE CRISTO - DAY

A carriage stops in the driveway.

Looking more human, Maquet steps out.

There are a lot of people. Surveyors survey the land, some men dressed in dark suits are taking notes.

Celeste comes down the steps.

CELESTE

Hurry, Alexandre is waiting for you...

MAQUET

Who are all these people?

CELESTE

Monte-Cristo is up for sale... Madame Dumas won her trial. Is there room in your house at Bougival?

MAQUET

I just bought it. There's barely any furniture. Why? Does he want to move in?

CELESTE

Before the seizure of his possessions, I think he'd like to store some of his favourite paintings.

MAQUET

It's that bad?

CELESTE

The Historical Theatre will probably close... Alexandre really needs you.

MAQUET

You mean... financially?

CELESTE

No... You, Auguste.

67. INT. DUMAS' STUDY - DAY

Dumas is writing at his desk.
Crumpled pages are strewn all over the floor.
Maquet enters.

DUMAS

Ah, it's you...

MAQUET

That's right.

Maquet hangs his coat on a hanger.

Then he takes a chair and sits next to Dumas...

DUMAS

I'm a little lost...

MAQUET

I would be, in your shoes.

DUMAS

Is Caroline well?

MAQUET

(smiling)

Since the revolution, she looks ten years younger...

DUMAS

I wish I could say the same...

Suddenly, Maître Lacan, Ida Ferrier-Dumas' lawyer, nudges the door open and pokes his head in.

MAITRE LACAN

Excuse me, Monsieur, Dumas... we must do our work...

DUMAS

So must we all, Maître Lacan...

Lacan enters, accompanied by the bailiff whom we saw earlier (sc. 47). A clerk accompanies them.

MAITRE LACAN

A terracotta Venus with rose, 17th century. Value estimated at 1,000 gold francs... To be seized.

The clerk carries the sculpture away.

MAITRE LACAN

A three-legged walnut table...

DUMAS

Can you make a little less noise?

BAILIFF

We'll try, Monsieur Dumas... (to Lacan, whispers) I inventoried the overmantel...

Throughout the scene, furniture and ornaments are carried away.

The camera moves closer to the desk where Dumas and Maquet have begun to work.

DUMAS

In the novel, it's Beauchamp who reports the verdict to Albert, but in the theatre, that won't work anymore... It would be pathetic.

MAQUET

Interminable...

Dumas smiles.

DUMAS

Wonderful! You've rediscovered your sense of humour.

MAQUET

Humour is despair with good manners.

DUMAS

Nicely put, Auguste. But be careful...
I could steal that line from you...
What would you say if you stumbled
across it in one of my novels?

MAQUET

All's fair in love and war.

DUMAS

No... If I were you, I'd say, we write
well together.

MAQUET

We?

DUMAS

Yes, Auguste. You heard me. We. Now
imagine the impact on stage, when
Haydée accuses Morcerf of killing her
father and selling her into slavery.

MAQUET

It could be magnificent. I can picture
the audience with tears in their
eyes... foaming at the mouth... ready
to lynch Morcerf. That is great
theatre...

DUMAS

Can I leave it with you?

MAQUET

You'll have it in two hours.

DUMAS

Do the draught. I'll take care of the
rest.

MAQUET

With an extra hour, I can even put the
finishing touches on the dialogue...

DUMAS

It's up to you.

Maquet gets up.

DUMAS

No, no... Take my seat...(points to his pages) You have my outline on the desk here...

Dumas stands and holds his chair for Maquet.

Maquet sits down in Dumas' seat.

Suddenly, Dumas gives a start.

Maître Lacan is taking down a painting...

DUMAS

No! Not that one! I forbid you!

BAILIFF

(consulting his register)

Oil on canvas depicting Mademoiselle Celeste Scriveneck by a waterfall, by Huchon...

(to Esquire Lacan)

It's in the inventory...

MAITRE LACAN

Estimated value?

BAILIFF

It's not worth much...

MAITRE LACAN

(hands the picture to Dumas)

Very well... I give it to you as a present.

Dumas takes the portrait of Celeste and turns towards Maquet...

DUMAS

See you later, my friend.

MAQUET

See you later, Alexandre.

Dumas walks away with the picture under his arm.

He has the gait of an old man.

The room has been emptied of all its furniture...

As if he were alone on a desert island, Maquet flicks through a sheaf of pages.

CLOSE IN until we only see his hand, writing...

Roll end credits.

