

THE OTHER, OTHER WOMAN

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Excerpt

ACT TWO

SCENE 14

*(The convent garden. MME. EVOLETTE exits.
GENEVIEVE alone.)*

GENEVIEVE. O, Lord! How she grieves me. Her power, I fear.
My brother had warned me this town wouldn't hear
Of salvation for souls. And now I know why!
All of France is infected with the stench of Versailles.
And to say "Sex" and "Love" are two separate things
When I know that they're bound by blest golden rings!
And—I won't think too hard. For what would come next
Is admittance that I—sometimes—want to have (*Mouthed*) [Sex]...
When I loved no Body! *BUT that's my own sin—*
And if I am honest, *I am frequently* in
Emotional closeness with both women *and* men!—
But that's not romantic!(?) But then, once again—
NO IT'S NOT. Though I *love* them, their bodies: upset me.
While a Thinnnn, Pretty man? (*O, my God, come and get me.*)

(She slaps herself.)

GENEVIEVE. Pull it together. Marriage. Yes. That's that job for today.
Not for me. But for others. I'll fervently pray.
Though my mind's twisted and tempted in this town; yet *I know*
If you make no mistakes, you take Heavenly gold.
Therefore:

(Crossing herself.)

GENEVIEVE. Dear God. Please, send me one man, who's untainted by sin.
Who can point me in the direction that I ought to go in.
As a man should be leading (though I'll lead him instead)
Although! If you could send me a partner, to ease me from dread,
To let me be womanly, while *he* is the man—
Virgin Mary, assist me, and please [~~send me in~~]—

SCENE 15

VALENTINE. *(Entering.)* May I come in?

(GENEVIEVE turns to see VALENTINE.)

GENEVIEVE. *(Aside, to GOD.)* YES.

VALENTINE. The garden gate, it was open. But I don't mean to prevent
A nun's holy orations within this convent.

GENEVIEVE. I'm not a...Pray, sir, don't exit. You haven't intruded!

VALENTINE. I've interrupted your prayer. I don't mean to be rude—it's
Just I'm delayed for an appointment, been busy since ten!
My wife, she is sickly. There was an errand, and then...
But your pardon, dear Sister. If you'd grant a reprieve
And point me in the direction of Princess Genevieve?
I've been sent here a summons, although I don't see
What possible interest that she'd have in...

(He looks at GENEVIEVE and realizes:)

VALENTINE. Your Highness!

GENEVIEVE. Please rise. Monsieur Valentine?

VALENTINE. The same, and your servant.

GENEVIEVE. The pleasure is mine.
I've heard so much about you.

VALENTINE. All wicked, I hope?

GENEVIEVE. Indeed, quite the opposite. You're the resident Pope!
If the Pope were monogamous.

VALENTINE. Or...married?

GENEVIEVE. Amen!
(A poor joke. She regrets it, even as:) Can we start again?
Your reputation proceeds you as a virtuous soul:
The paragon politician who exerts self-control.
A man who is honest—and who, without complaint,
To his wife remains faithful. In short, sir, a saint.

VALENTINE. I doubt that conclusion. But thank you, your Grace.

GENEVIEVE. Genevieve, my good sir. At least in this place.
Won't you be seated?

VALENTINE. *Merci.*

GENEVIEVE. *De rien.*
So tell me, monsieur, what makes you the man?

VALENTINE. ...For?

GENEVIEVE. Making new laws. And enforcing them, too.

VALENTINE. I'm simply a lawyer. That's not what I do.
I'm practiced in law, but this town's clientele
Largely wants contracts.

GENEVIEVE. For their businesses?

VALENTINE. *Well...*
For their *business*, or rather—to say: to outline their diversions.
What one lover will do or not do, and with how many persons.
Who gets what money, progeny, custody from those...excursions.
In short, your/H...

GENEVIEVE. *Genevieve.*

VALENTINE. ...*Genevieve.* I outline their perversions.

GENEVIEVE. (*Heavenward.*) Praise the Lord.

VALENTINE. ...You *approve*?

GENEVIEVE. Of their actions? *Pas de tout.*
But if I understand correctly: neither do you.

VALENTINE. I'm just their lawyer—

GENEVIEVE. Indeed, you were forced.
You chose before choosing, which is not an endors-ment
Of the things that they do.
Indeed, Valentine, if it were all up to you:
What laws would you pass? Regarding marriage and s...uch?
You needn't fear to expose your true heart to my/[~~touch~~]....

VALENTINE. Can we speak like people?

(A pause.)

VALENTINE. ...I know it's not the custom, but:
It's been a long morning. A never-ending dawn
That never *quite* rises: like fog or thick goose feathers
Through which one can almost—*squinting*—
Believe the distant burning speck will not recede
Beneath earth's heavy counterpane again.
It's difficult to believe the sun will rise
When every dawn it teeters on th'horizon.
Sick, and full of daily obligations. Of promises
You're sorry that you keep—I speak too freely.

GENEVIEVE. No. No.
—'Tis strange to speak so freely, and yet:
There's something in you invites a confidence.
I would change the world.

VALENTINE. Are not afeared?

GENEVIEVE. Am petrified! This ancient world sinks beneath itself,
And every day grows hotter than the next.
You fear the sun won't rise, yet I can see it—*sinking*—
With heavy chains of sin that bind it down to darkness.

VALENTINE. Yes.

GENEVIEVE. And yet: I know that you and I, Monsieur,
Were made for something more.

VALENTINE. What more?

GENEVIEVE. I hardly know!—for Love.

VALENTINE. “Love.” A dangerous word.

GENEVIEVE. A word corrupted, maybe.
But I believe: not wholly lost. As you must know.
As you do love. As you have loved your wife.

VALENTINE. She's not my [~~wife~~]—
How can it be recovered? Command me, I'll obey.

GENEVIEVE. I hardly know! I am so...
Ignorant of the thing that I'd pursue.

VALENTINE.

(Sotto voce.)

So beautiful, so unblemished,
Courageous, powerful, and—

GENEVIÈVE.

(Overlapping entirely.)

Wherefore should I—who know so little of this world—
Seek to shift it from its axis?

GENEVIÈVE.

—And yet I *must*.

My vocation calls me and I am sure
That Christ Himself caused you and I to meet.
I speak too grandly. That's your cue to scoff.

VALENTINE.

I shall not laugh. Although many laugh at me.
I have been so long ridiculed—by my own *wife!*
Ridiculed for declaring I belong to *her* alone.
For wishing that our union fulfilled her.
For holding her too closely—But now:
To meet someone who agrees, who supports [~~me~~]...!

(A pause. This is dangerous. So:)

VALENTINE.

I met her when I was very young; we both were:
Young. Lucrèce and I, for that's her name.
Were playmates, once: both young and brave and I...
“Chose before choosing,” was your phrase, I believe?
I “chose before choosing;” begged her to wed, but...
Well, she never believed in [~~marriage~~]—

(Too far, so:)

She had so many suitors and enjoyed them, too!
But I offered my hand, and vowed—

GENEVIEVE.

(Overlapping.) To be true.

I understand you.

VALENTINE.

...I fear that you do. You're very...

(Catching himself.)

VALENTINE.

Well, as one might say, it's customary *now*
To consent merely to contracts—but I keep my vow.
As you do keep yours!

GENEVIEVE.

O, I'm not a/~~nut~~...

VALENTINE.

(Overlapping.) Yes! In this convent wall
You keep out calamity. And so: Holy—Can't fall!

(He looks at her. Revelation. She's "safe.")

VALENTINE. A pleasure. I'll help you. *Genevieve*. For no price.

GENEVIEVE. *Merci*, Valentine! Yes, let us seek out Paradise.
You'll be my virtue.

(She blows a kiss to him and exits.)

VALENTINE. ...And you'll be my vice.