

MADAME X

Written by

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We keep going to land--

7 INT. MANSION- AMELIE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

7

From behind: a YOUNG WOMAN, writes furiously by an open window. This is AMELIE (22), wild curly hair, still in her bed clothes.

A small bird lands on the open windowsill. Watches her curiously. Amelie does not stop writing, utterly consumed.

AMELIE (V.O.)

That I am really a Caribbean princess. A Moroccan spy. That I pushed my mother-in-law down the stairs in a murderous rage.

The room is in complete disarray. A large chest, open, its contents strewn across the floor: a bundle of **letters**, a **ripped white gown**, a **miniature** of a young girl with sad eyes.

EXT/INT. CHANNEL FERRY BOW. DAY.

JOHN SINGER SARGENT (26, PENSIVE, WORN) leans on the railing.

Wind whips through his hair, sea spray wets his light jacket. If he's cold he doesn't feel it.

AMELIE (V.O.)

And the artist. The portrait that ruined us.

Sinking **down** through the inner deck - **down** into the cargo hold.

BACK TO:

INT. MANSION - AMELIE'S BEDROOM. CONT'D

AMELIE

I once would have relished the mythos surrounding me. However, let me correct the most egregious mistakes and provide some real juice in the telling.

Amelie ceases her writing, revealing her face for the first time. Fierce brown eyes locked straight ahead.

AMELIE (V.O.)
Let me introduce you to me.

CUT TO:

TITLE: MADAME X

8 EXT. AVEGNO COUNTRY HOUSE GARDENS. DAY. 2 YEARS AGO. 8

A FLASH--

Light reflects onto the face of AMELIE (19, CLASSICAL FEATURES and GIRLISH CHARM)

She holds the ball - a boule- up at eye level. Behind her, a small group of YOUNG MEN (3) and WOMEN (3) watch on.

Amelie checks she's got their attention then turns back to her target: a small white ball- **the 'Jack'**- surrounded by several previously-thrown boules.

Amelie takes a running leap back and LOBS.

It hits another, which knocks the Jack sending it flying into a nearby bush.

Amelie's ball rolls to a stop far away from the stunned group.

A moustached young man, MARCUS (20), strides forward.

MARCUS
Good God, Avegno. You've killed the
jack, now no-one wins.

Amelie smiles, catlike.

AMELIE
Ah, but I didn't lose.

BIRTHDAY GUESTS (PRE-LAP)
(Singing)
--Joyeux Ann-i-versaire!

9 INT. AVEGNO HOUSE-DINING ROOM. DAY. 9

A bright pink birthday cake topped by several little candles on a dining table.

WHOOSH. Amelie blows out the candles.

She's seated at table of guests including: Marcus and PENELOPE (18, Amelie's cousin, often nervous).

- EDUARD (60s, Amelie's great-uncle) seated at the head of the table.

- And opposite Amelie, VIRGINIE (44), Amelie's mother. Proud and respectable, her very posture commands the room, even from her lesser seat.

Amelie leans in eagerly to cut herself a slice of cake.

EDUARD

(Booming voice)

Excellent work! Simply brilliant!
You should be proud of raising such
an exemplary daughter, Virginie.

VIRGINIE

(Eyes on Amelie)

Thank you, Uncle.

Amelie notices the look. Cuts her slice in half.

CUT TO:

AVEGNO HOUSE - DINING ROOM. LATER.

Afternoon light shines through the window. A QUIET MAID clears away empty lunch plates.

Virginie watches Amelie charm, flirt and tease her friends. The centre of everyone's attention.

EDUARD walks up behind her.

EDUARD

I'll never understand you're
determination to keep her
sequestered from society.

VIRGINIE

(Eyes on the group)

She's hardly sequestered, Uncle.
Would you disparage Penelope's
company?

EDUARD

Penelope is soon married. Then who
will Melie have? Her father would
wanted to see her wed. Soon.

Virginie turns away from the window and faces her uncle.

VIRGINIE

Uncle, your care and attention distinguishes you. We'd have been lost without you.

EDUARD

It is simply my duty, dear Ginny.

VIRGINIE

(Consider)

Yes, we all have our duties. Did you know, after her moved us to New Orleans, my father taught me to hunt.

EDUARD

Good Grace. Never respected propriety, did he?

VIRGINIE

Indeed. Far too messy. But he taught me one thing: a hunter's best tools are not his rifle and scope. It's patience and preparation.

CUT TO:

10

INT. AVEGNO HOUSE - AMELIE BEDROOM. NIGHT.

10

Amelie, in night clothes, sits cross-legged on the floor as Virginie - on the bed - brushes out her long hair.

Amelie's room is messy: laundry heaped on the floor, sheet music scattered amongst open jars of powders and creams.

VIRGINIE

Monsieur Gerard Noyer.

AMELIE

(Reciting)

50,000 Francs a year. Banker.
Married twice, most recently to
Priscille Noyer neé Normand. 7,000
Franc annuity.

VIRGINIE

Marquis Leon Babineaux.

AMELIE

20,000 Francs a year. Land owner.
Unmarried.

(MORE)

AMELIE (CONT'D)

Several debtors in Paris, Venice
and Amsterdam. Currently "on tour".

VIRGINIE

Mademoiselle Denise Phillipe.

AMELIE

Acquainted with the Prince of
Bavaria. 40,000 Francs per year
(Pauses)
Another 5,000 Francs when married.

Virginie pauses her brushing. Amelie scrubs through her mind--

AMELIE (CONT'D)

(Correcting)

5,450 Francs when married.

Virginie nods, placing down the brush. She swiftly braids
Amelie's hair, tying the end with a silk tie.

VIRGINIE

Teeth.

Amelie lifts her head and bares her teeth. Virginie inspects
with military precision. She nods. Amelie pokes out her
tongue.

VIRGINIE (CONT'D)

No more sweets.

AMELIE

Mama-

VIRGINIE

(Standing up to leave)

You have done well today, Melie.
Let's not lose momentum now.

Amelie forgets her protests, pleased at the compliment.

AMELIE

I won't, mama.

VIRGINIE

(Walking out)

Goodnight. And clean your room
before bed. You're not a child
anymore.

AMELIE

Yes, mama.

The door shuts.

Amelie picks up the sheet music and walks across the room place it inside her bedside.

Opening the drawer, we see a PHOTOGRAPH of two **young girls**. Amelie picks it up.

The older of the two smiles warmly, while the younger is a blur - clearly mid-tantrum when the shutter released.

Amelie rubs her finger over the older girls face. Carefully places the photo back in her drawer. Shuts it.

CUT TO:

12

EXT. CHURCH YARD GARDEN. DAY.

12

Penelope and Marcus walk arm in arm out of the church as a dozen WEDDING GUESTS throw rice and flowers over their heads.

LATER

The wedding guests let loose at the reception.

Lit by lamps and candles, a string quartet plays a lively round.

Virginie holds court over various mamas.

Penelope dances with a group of girls. Amelie claps along, watching. When Penelope whirls close--

PENELOPE

Melie, come dance and put us all to shame!

AMELIE

I'll join you soon, cousin.

Amelie watches longingly as a SERVER walks by with a tray of fresh pastries. She forces herself to turn away.

MARCUS (O.C.)

Watching your figure, Avegno?

Amelie startles and finds Marcus standing beside her, eyes on his new wife.

AMELIE

My heartiest congratulations, Marcus. You have made a great match in Penelope.

MARCUS

I suppose that makes us cousins now. Don't worry, we'll keep a spare room if you ever become a spinster.

AMELIE

Thank you for the gracious offer Marcus.

Marcus snorts, picks a discarded glass of red from a nearby table. Amelie watches the crowd, enjoying their night. No-one looking her way.

MARCUS

Maybe you should ask Pen for advice. Men like agreeable wives. Humble. Simple. *Quiet*.

Amelie tenses. Turns slowly towards Marcus. He's confused, but just stupid enough not to step back as she advances, *hocks* a glob of spit into his drink.

Marcus leaps back, disgusted--

At the same moment, a MAN steps into Marcus' path causing him to splash the wine splashes dramatically.

Mostly on himself, a drop on Amelie.

The man, PIERRE (42)--

PIERRE

(Babbling)

My goodness, my sincerest apologies. A most foolish and regrettable m-m--

He pulls short, bewitched by Amelie. He immediately pulls out a silk handkerchief and gives it to her, ignoring Marcus altogether.

Amelie considers the fabric, his expertly tailored suit, gleaming silver pocket watch. *Lack of ring*.

AMELIE

(Humility itself)

No apologies necessary, Monsieur. Our happy groom has clearly *had too much*.

She shoots Marcus a withering glare. He pales and dashes off.

PIERRE

I am always so clumsy. At the very least, allow me to pay the replacement cost of your dress.

AMELIE

If that feels appropriate. But first, surely we must be acquainted?

PIERRE

Oh! Oh yes. My name is Pierre Gautreau.

DOLLAR SIGNS flash before Amelie's eyes.

INSERT: PIERRE GAUTREAU. PARISIAN SHIPPING MAGNATE. 90,000 Francs a year (that's a lot).

Amelie can barely hide her glee.

13

EXT. CATHEDRAL STEPS. DAY.

13

Amelie dressed in an elaborate wedding dress stands proudly beside Pierre.

A PHOTOGRAPHER holds the shutter to his camera. He gestures: *ready?*

Amelie looks over Virginie standing by a beaming Eduard. Her mothers nods.

Amelie grins and turns to face the camera.

FLASH.

INSERT TEXT: "AMELIE GAUTREAU NEE AVEGNO. RECENTLY MARRIED. NOW VERY RICH."

14

EXT. GAUTREAU MANSION. DAY.

14

Pierre helps Amelie step out of a carriage. She gazes up at the home in awe. This is the biggest house she has ever seen.

AMELIE (V.O.)

Married life far exceeded my expectations. Mostly, because I never thought about *after*.

15 INT. GAUTREAU MANSION AMELIE'S ROOM. DAY.

15

Amelie swans into her grand room and falls onto the plush bed.

Her new Lady's Maid, MARIE (a little inexperienced but eager to please) unpacks Amelie's many cosmetics and arranges them on the vanity.

When she pulls out a small locked chest, Amelie jumps up and takes it from her with a firm smile

Marie doesn't press it and focuses on arranging Amelie's wedding photo. In it, Amelie is blinking.

A hand (Amelie's) slams the photo facedown.

AMELIE (V.O.)

Contrary to the more ridiculous rumours: I didn't engage any dark arts of seduction to secure Pierre.

16 AMELIE'S BEDROOM. DAY. - MONTAGE.

16

Pierre presents Amelie with a gleaming emerald and gold necklace.

- A set of new gowns.
- A bright orange parrot in a gilded cage.
- A box of hats.

Each time, Amelie squeals in delight and hugs him.

AMELIE (V.O.)

I simply laughed at his jokes and agreed with everything. Pierre seduced himself.

Amelie tries on a hat, examining herself in the mirror.

AMELIE (V.O.)

It suited me greatly, I thought. But never in my wildest dreams did I ever consider--*Louise*.

ATTENDANT (PRE-LAP)

I'm sorry Ma'am, your account has been frozen.

17 INT. DEPARTMENT STORE. DAY.

17

Amelie stands in disbelief. Behind her, an army of PORTERS hold clothes and trinkets.

AMELIE

You must be mistaken.

The SHOP ATTENDANT gives a lazy look over his books and shrugs.

ATTENDANT

I'm afraid--

CUT TO:

19 INT. GAUTREAU HOME - LOUISE'S STUDY. DAY.

19

LOUISE

--There is no mistake.

LOUISE (60)-- small but shrewd, bifocals perched on her nose-- sits at a wooden desk, reading from a giant ledger.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Since you have joined us in Paris, our household expenses have quadrupled.

AMELIE

Dear, mother-in-law, you must understand-

LOUISE

600 francs on new slippers. Another 200 francs on *strawberry tarts*-

AMELIE

Can a woman not eat?

LOUISE

A woman or a horse?

What a cow.

AMELIE

How can I expect to greet my visitors without refreshments?

LOUISE
(Arch)
What visitors?

CUT TO:

INT. GAUTREAU HOME - ENTRYWAY. DAY.

Two FOOTMEN stand at attention. It's quiet. Very quiet.

BACK TO:

LOUISE'S STUDY

AMELIE
Well- my mama will eventually visit
and- and- she *must* be properly
welcomed. Perhaps you should check
your books again.

LOUISE
I have maintained the financial
expenses of this family for
decades. I do not need to "check
the books again". They are correct,
because *I said they are*. Despite
Pierre's...hasty decisions - that
will not change. So I suggest you
learn how things work. Quickly.

AMELIE
But-

Louise slams her ledger shut, ending the conversation.

CUT TO:

INT. GAUTREAU HOME - HALLWAY/LIBRARY. DAY.

Amelie storms down the hallway and throws open the heavy
study doors.

AMELIE
Pierre, you must speak to your
mother. She is being absolutely-

Amelie cuts off and halts in her crusade.

Pierre stands with SARGENT (26). The younger man looks like
hadn't slept in days.

PIERRE

Amelie! Just in time my little bird. Come. I have a surprise.

Pierre drags Amelie into the room, she's hesitant, eyes still on Sargent. He nods politely, but is distracted, antsy.

PIERRE (CONT'D)

This is Monsieur Sargent. He's an American. Like you!

SARGENT

Ah, well. My parents are, ma'am.

PIERRE

Monsieur Sargent is a very talented portraitist--

Pierre finally reveal his "surprise": An almost full sized-portrait of Pierre ... and Louise. It's gorgeous, richly saturated and *incredibly* flattering.

AMELIE

(Not quite caught up)
Wh-what is this? Why have you--

Louise shuffles into the room.

PIERRE

(Even happier)
Mama! Your wedding gift has arrived. It's fantastic.

LOUISE

Anything for my sweet Pedro.

Pierre engulfs Louise in a hug, she pinches his cheeks and coos..

Amelie is horrified. She looks to Sargent for some kind of answer. He isn't paying attention, looking instead at his portrait, a bit pale-faced.

AMELIE

What do you mean, *wedding gift*? So, I can't buy new drapes but there's room in the budget for *this*? It's not even very accurate.

Sargent's gaze whips to her, sharp. Amelie swallows an apology, focuses on Pierre.

LOUISE

Pedro dear, I have a headache. Walk me to my room.

AMELIE

But-

PIERRE

(Sotto voce)

Shh. Mother has a headache Amelie.

(Mouthing)

We can discuss this later.

He carefully takes Louise's arm and the two leave the room. Amelie seethes.

AMELIE

(To Sargent)

I hope that entertained you.

SARGENT

I've seen worse. Mind you, I've also seen better.

(Turning to the portrait)

Do you really not like it?

AMELIE

You're skilful. Perhaps you can paint my mother-in-law out?

SARGENT

And how will you pay?

Amelie snorts - quickly covers her mouth at the unladylike sound.

Sargent laughs, unconcerned. He picks up his bag, leaning the the portrait on a chaise, and walks to the door.

AMELIE

(Calling after)

Monsieur Sargent. Have the driver take you home.

SARGENT

Ma'am, thank you, but it's unnecessary. I can walk.

AMELIE

Please, you're almost too hungover to stand. Go on, I'm very busy.

Sargent smiles ruefully, tips his hat, then leaves.

EXT. ART DISTRICT - POZZI'S OFFICE. DAY.

A thoroughly middle-class neighbourhood. Children run by, laughing and playing. A shopkeeper hawks bread. A couple argues outside a florist.

PRE-LAP: THE SOUND OF SPEWING.

INT. POZZI'S OFFICE - CONSULTING ROOM. DAY.

A simple, modern Surgeon's rooms.

Sargent is throwing up in a pot.

His friend, DR SAMUEL POZZI (30) - GOOD-LOOKING, FASHIONABLE, ITALIAN - throws him a rag. Sargent takes it gratefully, wipes his mouth.

POZZI

I wish you wouldn't antagonise your clients.

He walks to a well-stocked medicine cabinet. Pulls out two glass vials. He hands one to Sargent, now lying on the floor.

SARGENT

I couldn't have said anything too bad, she gave me a carriage.

Sargent swallows the medicine. Gags.

Pozzi laughs, hops onto his desk and shots his own vial.

Behind him, a swath of RED: a sumptuous portrait of the doctor in a scarlet robe. It captures Pozzi's bold energy *exactly*.

POZZI

And Marie Antoinette arrived at her execution in a golden carriage.

SARGENT

That's not true.

POZZI

The idea is. Trust me, *mio amico*, the denizens of the Belle Monde love to ruin. You'll be without commissions and forced to break your back in a warehouse--

SARGENT

--Infinitely better than painting
the egos of rich twats--

POZZI

--or painting *still life*.

SARGENT

Don't be dramatic.

POZZI

(Performing)
And think of your mother -
she writes me often/ Who will
support your parents? Your
sweet sister?

SARGENT (CONT'D)

/What?/How long have you been
writing her?/Do not write to
my sister.

Pozzi and Sargent stare off. Sargent stands down, sighs.

POZZI (CONT'D)

And your constant scowling makes me
look bad. I can't keep referring
you to patients.

SARGENT

Then stop.

POZZI

I care about you too much, *amico*.
(Gesturing to his
portrait)
And your services are so well
advertised. They're desperate to
meet you at the Opera.

SARGENT

What? *Absolutely not-*

POZZI

I will stay with you the entire
night.

SARGENT

That won't work again.

POZZI

You have my word this time.

SARGENT

As do have the women in Paris.

Pozzi pauses, re-strategising.

POZZI

Albert will be there.

Silence.

Sargent glares. Throws the empty glass at him.

Pozzi dodges, grinning triumphantly.

END OF SAMPLE.

If you would like to read more of this sample, or other samples written by Zaity, please contact via zaitoonsalman@outlook.com.