

**THE LADY WITH
THE CAMELIAS**

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The lady with the camelias by Alexandre Dumas

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by

ALEXANDRE DUMAS *fils*

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CHAPTER I

I HAVE always considered that, to create imaginary personages, one must have deeply studied mankind ; as, in order to speak a language, it is necessary to have learned it with care.

Not having yet attained the age of invention, I content myself with simple narration.

I beg the reader, therefore, to believe in the reality of the present story, of which all the characters, except the heroine, are actually living at this moment.

There are also, in Paris, witnesses of the greater part of the facts which I have placed on record ; and their testimony can be added to my own, should the latter be deemed insufficient.

Owing, however, to an accidental and personal circumstance, I am the only possessor of the essentials for writing this narrative ; because, to me alone were confided those final details, without which it would be impossible to render the tale either interesting or complete.

These details reached me in the following manner :

On the 12th of March, 1847, in passing through the Rue de Laffitte, I observed a large placard, announcing a grand sale of furniture and effects of a rich and curious description, belonging to a person lately deceased. The placard did not *name* the

person to whom the property had belonged; but announced that the sale would take place at No. 9, Rue d'Antin, on the 16th instant, from twelve until five o'clock.

It was further stated, that the articles would be "on view" at the above address, on the 13th and 14th.

I have always been an amateur of curiosities in furniture, and the like, and I resolved not to lose this opportunity, if not of buying, at least of examining the articles thus advertised.

The next day I bent my steps towards No. 9, Rue d'Antin.

Although it was still early, the apartments were already filled with visitors, both male and female, who, though clad in velvet, wrapped in cashmeres, and with costly equipages in attendance at the door, gazed with astonishment and admiration upon the luxury and magnificence by which they found themselves surrounded.

I soon discovered, however, the cause of some portion of the astonishment thus manifested; for, after a brief inspection, I had no difficulty in ascertaining that the apartments had belonged to one of those ladies who occupy so prominent a position in the gay world of Paris; and whose "establishments," as well as themselves, are under the maintenance and "protection" of some gentleman or gentlemen, who do not sustain the relation of either husband, father, or brother, to the fair *protégée*.

Now, if there be a thing in the world which the women of the world—the women of high society—are wild with curiosity to inspect, it is the internal arrangements of the establishments of ladies of the class above named, whose dashing equipages daily jostle their own, who have like them, and side-by-side with them, their box at the Opera or the Théâtre

Italien, and who display throughout the most brilliant scenes of Paris, the insolent opulence of their beauty, their jealousy, and their intrigues.

She in whose house we stood, was dead. The most virtuous women could therefore penetrate fearlessly to her very bed-chamber. Death had purified the air of this splendid mansion of vice ; and besides, there was the excuse (were one needful) of attending a public sale, without of necessity being aware to whom the house had belonged.

They had read the advertisements, and were desirous to see the things which those advertisements promised and to make choice in advance of such as they might choose to buy. Nothing could be more simple :—but it did not prevent their seeking with eager curiosity, amid these marvels of luxury, for the mysterious traces of that private life of the “ lady under protection,” respecting which they had heard so much, and conjectured so much more.

Unhappily the “ mystery,” if any had existed had died with the goddess of the temple ; and despite their goodwill thereto, these ladies could detect only what there was to be sold since the death, and nothing of what might have been purchasable during the life-time, of the occupant.

There remained, however, ample scope for purchases. The furniture was superb. Articles in rosewood and buhl, vases of Sèvres and China, services of plate, statuettes, satins, velvets, laces—nothing was wanting.

I walked through the apartments, following the noble inquisitives who had preceded me. They entered an apartment with hangings of Persian stuff, and I was on the point of entering also, when they came suddenly out again, smiling mysteriously, and as if their modesty had been somewhat shocked by this last object of inspection. This only increased