

LOUISE

Music by Gustave Charpentier

Libretto by Gustave Charpentier

First Performance: Opéra-Comique, Paris, February 2, 1900

Act I. Julian, the poet, can be seen across the way on his balcony through a large window in the tenement home of Louise and her parents. It is an April evening in Paris and Julian pours forth his love in song to Louise, who comes rushing to the window at the sound of his voice. As they express their longings openly, Louise's mother comes into the room, and hearing the conversation drags her away from the window. She scolds the girl for caring for a worthless poet and warns her to end the relationship. The argument between the two is interrupted by the arrival of the father. Louise is overjoyed to see that he has a letter from Julian asking for her hand, but this only causes a further outburst of rage from the mother. The father consoles Louise and reminds her that parental love and care are the reasons for the delay in making such a great decision. Louise, in tears, but somewhat consoled reads the evening paper as the curtain falls.

Act II, Scene 1. The weird people of the early hours wander the streets in front of the shops of Montmartre. Julian enters with some friends in search of Louise who works as a dressmaker in one of the shops. Louise accompanied by her mother arrives, and as soon as the mother leaves, Julian begs the girl to go with him to seek the freedom that Paris offers young lovers. She breaks away confused and, promising to marry him some day, dashes into her shop.

Scene 2. In the shop, Louise tries to work as the other girls gaily talk of love and the pleasures of life in Montmartre. Music from the streets sends the girls to the windows. It is Julian serenading Louise, who listens with mounting tension as the girls tease her. Louise says that she is ill and leaves, causing the girls to regret their derision. However they burst into laughter as they see Louise rushing away from the shop on Julian's arm.

Act III. In their garden in Montmartre, Louise tells Julian of her happiness since first she loved him. As evening falls, Paris is illuminated below and the lovers express their gratitude to the city for its gift of freedom. Julian's Bohemian friends enter and with others of the section crown Louise as Muse of Montmartre. At the height of the celebration Louise's mother appears saying that the father is near death and asks only for his lost daughter. Though suspecting trickery, Julian allows Louise to return to her parent's home.

Act IV. Three weeks later in the tenement home of her parents, Louise sits sewing, while her mother tends the still ailing father. The man has changed and is bitter towards his daughter for her ingratitude. Her mother continues her old reproaches until the girl is greatly agitated. The father takes his daughter on his lap and speaks to her again with love, but she asks for her promised freedom to return to Julian. She looks out the window into the gathering twilight as the sounds of the city seem to call her. She cries aloud for Julian and the love that she once knew. In rage her father tells her to leave and as he opens the door, Louise rushes into the night. He calls after her, but is too late, she is gone. He turns to the window and curses the city in his despair.