

*First Farewell*

A Drama in Two Acts\*

By Judy Baker Goss

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## Characters

Angeline Sullivan	Sixteen, and wanting to be any place but home.
Charles Sullivan	Angeline's father, a widower and attorney, determined never to lose again. Early 40's.
Sarah Bernhardt	French actress surviving on her passions and profits, as she conducts her first "Farewell Tour" of America at the age of 62.
Henry Leverett	African-American cook for Bernhardt, who expands his job to include Angeline's struggle. Mid-40's.
Cavaradossi Deneubourg	Bernhardt's lover and leading man, whose heart is never broken. Early 30's.
Jonathan McClure	Blacksmith's son from Lonoke, coming to Little Rock hoping to be Angeline's beau. Almost 18.
Jasper Shankley	New city councilman, enjoying the renown of greeting Bernhardt. Mid-30's.
Suzette Lambquin	Bernhardt's personal assistant, feeling more superior in rural America. Early 40's.

## Setting

Time: Early March, 1906.

Place: Little Rock, Arkansas, including the Sullivan's house, the Choctaw Station where the "Bernhardt Special" Pullman parks, and the Arkansas River bank.

ACT I

Scene 1

*(A March evening in the Sullivans' Victorian dining room, with an archway suggesting the kitchen, Off. Angeline, enters to serve her father cake and coffee at the end of dinner.)*

CHARLES

Nothing beats Marie's devil's food cake.

*(She exits.)*

The perennial birthday favorite!

*(She enters with her coffee, no cake.)*

ANGELINE

Delectable.

CHARLES

None for you, Angel?

ANGELINE

Go ahead, Papa. I sneaked a slice earlier!

CHARLES

*(Laughing.)*

Very well, dear.

*(Relishing his first taste.)*

Mmmm. Sixteen's a good age to learn Marie's cooking secrets.

ANGELINE

I'll ask. Sometime.

CHARLES

Cooking's important for young ladies—

ANGELINE

Yes. Case closed.

CHARLES

You had a letter in today's mail. Birthday greeting?

ANGELINE

A lovely card, covered in violets. From Aunt Carolyn.

CHARLES

No, I saw—

ANGELINE

I'll put it on your desk, after I remove the money.

CHARLES

Oh, money? Congratulations.

ANGELINE

Five dollars!

CHARLES

A small fortune. You should save—

ANGELINE

Oh, Papa! No sermons.

*(She takes her cup and saucer to kitchen, Off.)*

CHARLES

Encouragement: stretch the bounty. Let your celebration float like a steamboat down a lazy river.

*(She enters.)*

ANGELINE

Let's go, Papa!

CHARLES

Where?

ANGELINE

On a steamboat, not for the afternoon—all the way to New Orleans!

CHARLES

Lord, we've gone from a five-dollar gift to the French Quarter.

ANGELINE

Wouldn't it be thrilling?

CHARLES

Perhaps when you graduate, young lady—

ANGELINE

Papa, sooner!

CHARLES

Dear, a trip takes planning.

ANGELINE

Well, I won't wait to put it in my diary: Papa's promise, "a graduation trip to New Orleans, by steamboat."

*(Removing his cup, saucer and plate.)*

Please excuse me now.

*(Turning.)*

I have studies.

CHARLES

Or letters to write.

ANGELINE

What?

CHARLES

Today's letter for you wasn't written in your Aunt Carolyn's hand. Whose?

ANGELINE

Someone else from Lonoke.

CHARLES

Clearly, from the postmark.

ANGELINE

Why are you asking what you already know, Papa?

*(She exits, as to kitchen, Off.)*

CHARLES

I'm not cross-examining you. I simply presume you have a new friend, and I'm interested. Angeline?

*(She appears in the archway.)*

ANGELINE

Yes.

CHARLES

Someone you met on our Christmas visit?

ANGELINE

I saw him then. Don't bother about it, Papa.

CHARLES

Him? Sit for a moment more, Angel.

*(She remains standing.)*

CHARLES (Cont'd)

His family?

ANGELINE

It's Jonathan. Mr. McClure's son.

CHARLES

McClure.

ANGELINE

You know, the blacksmith.

CHARLES

Tom's boy. When were you at the smithy's?

ANGELINE

He brought the new latch and hinges for Aunt Carolyn's gate.

CHARLES

And from that chance encounter, you received a birthday greeting?

ANGELINE

We've been friends—

CHARLES

Evidently, but Carolyn's not mentioned—

ANGELINE

Why should she? Please, excuse me, Papa.

CHARLES

Not until you tell me more.

*(He indicates the chair, and she sits.)*

CHARLES (Cont'd)

What does Carolyn know about this boy?

ANGELINE

Nothing special.

CHARLES

She'd probably love you to marry and move to the country.

ANGELINE

He's not my beau!

CHARLES

Anything could happen. You're inexperienced, and Carolyn's a fool.

ANGELINE

The whole town loves her; she's kind to everyone. She doesn't criticize like—

CHARLES

How old is this boy?

ANGELINE

Seventeen, and he works hard—

CHARLES

I'll insist he treat you with respect. Perhaps I'll send a letter—

ANGELINE

Papa, let me have my own life.

*(She stands.)*

CHARLES

Fine, but it includes me. I'll meet Jonathan, when we're in Lonoke.

ANGELINE

Don't question him like a criminal! Our friendship's harmless.

CHARLES

Nothing clandestine remains harmless.

ANGELINE

You act like I'm a hussy!

CHARLES

And where did you learn that word?

ANGELINE

I'm sixteen.

CHARLES

*(Standing.)*

Whatever the age, I won't tolerate deception, Angeline.

ANGELINE

You're spoiling my birthday—my year, my life!

*(She pushes by him, and he grabs her arm.)*

CHARLES

I wish your mother were here.

ANGELINE

Why? You never even speak her name.

*(He drops her arm.)*

CHARLES

She could listen to your secrets about a beau.

ANGELINE

She'd let me have one, wouldn't she? Please, tell me what she'd say.

CHARLES

We both lost her.

ANGELINE

No. Your silence keeps me from ever having her.

CHARLES

I only mean to protect you—make your future as bright as those first camellias blooming by the porch swing.

ANGELINE

Papa, you can't lift the dreariness. I go to school, see the same friends, same sidewalks, same streetcars.

CHARLES

There are surprises, like mine this evening: Jonathan.

ANGELINE

I didn't meet him here.

CHARLES

The sameness of country life would annoy you, too.

ANGELINE

I won't move there! But I like to meet people, see things. You're huffy over a mysterious card—right here at home.

CHARLES

All right. I should remember that girls have passing fancies. Here, I saved the best gift for last.

*(Pulling tickets from his coat pocket.)*

Tickets to see *Madame Sarah Bernhardt* play at Forest Park amphitheater Tuesday evening.

ANGELINE

Oh, Papa! You remembered!

*(She kisses his cheek.)*

CHARLES

*(With a bow.)*

May I ask the pleasure of your company to see the world's greatest actress?

ANGELINE

*(Taking the tickets.)*

On the front row! *Magnifique!* So close.

CHARLES

And you may come to the Choctaw Station tomorrow, when her train passes in the afternoon on the way to Hot Springs. The City Council plans to stop her for a brief welcome to Arkansas.

ANGELINE

Truly?

CHARLES

Join me after school, and you can present her a bouquet.

ANGELINE

Wonderful!

CHARLES

The platform will be decorated with bunting—

ANGELINE

Papa, how could you keep such a thrilling secret?

CHARLES

I was invited just this afternoon.

ANGELINE

You'll speak to her?

CHARLES

Maybe. You know French. Help me compose an appropriate greeting?

ANGELINE

*Oui, Papa! I must study! Merci, merci. Tomorrow!*

*(She dashes from the room.)*

ANGELINE

*Bonne nuit!*

CHARLES

Goodnight, my angel.

*(Blackout.)*

Scene 2

*(Late afternoon the next day at the Choctaw Station, decorated with bunting and flags. Sounds of crowd, Off, awaiting Bernhardt's train. Charles enters from station door, removing a note from his coat pocket. He quickly reviews it, as fellow councilman, Jasper Shankley, enters.)*

CHARLES

Still on schedule?

JASPER

The "Bernhardt Special" clacked along right through Forrest City and Brinkley.  
*(Checking his pocket watch.)*  
Three fifty-seven—

CHARLES

Past Lonoke—with time for a stop.

JASPER

Yep. And still make Hot Springs on the button. But I'll wager a five spot: any honest to God chance to see *Madame* Star, Mr. Mayor himself would be planted right in front of us.

CHARLES

As if her first "Farewell Tour" was his damned idea, conceived in Little Rock!

JASPER

You pegged it!  
*(Looking around.)*  
And he'd be damned before he'd be late.

CHARLES

*(Laughing.)*  
He's a no show, and it galled him even more to give up his play tickets.

JASPER

What the hell?

CHARLES

Episcopalian pressure. He buckled under the Reverend's warning!  
*(In pastoral tones.)*  
"Friends, I warn you not to violate Holy Lent by viewing *Madame* Bernhardt's—"

JASPER

Powers of seduction.

CHARLES

Precisely. He morosely passed the duty to me.

JASPER

Forced from the limelight by piety.

CHARLES

*(Waving to a distant passing citizen, Off.)*

Leaving me to greet the crowd as well.

JASPER

You considering next year's ballot for mayor?

CHARLES

I won't deny it.

JASPER

Hot dog! You could pocket a hundred votes today.

CHARLES

Thanks for your loyalty, Shankley.

*(Tipping his hat to a lady in the crowd, Off.)*

I doubt that showing a less tender conscience about *Madame* Bernhardt will hurt my chances.

JASPER

Hell, no! Just look around.

CHARLES

In fact, I'm excited to see her again.

JASPER

What? I'll be damned if she's been around here before.

CHARLES

I saw her almost twenty years ago, in New York, playing Cleopatra.

JASPER

Mmm, quite the temptress. Now, remind me, back East then, your wife was an actress, too?

CHARLES

No. Seamstress. Occasionally made costumes, until Angeline was born.

JASPER

Hell I'm sorry, for going down a sad road.

CHARLES

No harm done.

JASPER

Well, was she as naughty as they say? Most likely didn't wear much as Queen of the Nile.

CHARLES

Voice and body flowed like a river of desire.

JASPER

Bring on this French gal, even if she is sixty-two!

CHARLES

And damn soon!

JASPER

Will a lucky lady be on your arm to see the play?

CHARLES

My daughter: in hopes of restraining her romantic urges to the stage.

JASPER

That won't last long.

*(Angeline enters, with a bouquet of red camellias. Charles waves at her.)*

JASPER (Cont'd)

Watch out, Sullivan. She'll play ragtime on your Victrola and kiss beaus before you know it.

CHARLES

*(Feigning a business reference.)*

And many thanks for your advice.

ANGELINE

Papa! Boys heard the tracks humming! Her train's here!

CHARLES

*(Smiling to the crowd.)*

Ladies and Gentlemen, the "Berhardt Special" approaches. Cheer and we'll persuade her to stop, however briefly.

JASPER

Unless she only stops to fill the coffers.

*(To Angeline.)*

JASPER (Cont'd)

Young lady, don't be heartbroken if your "Camille" doesn't appear until tomorrow night.

ANGELINE

I beg your pardon, *Madame* plays "Marguerite Gautier." There's no "Camille," she's the tragic "Lady of the Camellias."

JASPER

I stand corrected.

*(Sounds of the approaching train whistle.)*

ANGELINE

She must stop! My bouquet is perfectly red: for passion. You know, she perishes of consumption and a broken heart.

*(Train sounds grow louder.)*

ANGELINE (Cont'd)

Papa, what if she speaks too fast? She'll think me a clod!

*(Train whistle blows loudly.)*

CHARLES

Give a grand Little Rock cheer!

*(Charles, Jasper, Angeline wave and cheer, with crowd, Off. Charles and Jasper doff hats, Angeline lifts bouquet, but the train picks up speed, blows its whistle again and passes with thunderous sound before it disappears with fading noise.)*

JASPER

Hot damn! Left high and dry.

CHARLES

*(To Angeline.)*

Keep smiling, dear.

ANGELINE

Didn't she see us?

CHARLES

I'm sorry, Angel.

JASPER

Life kicks you in the shins sometimes. We should've waved money.

ANGELINE

She ignored our cheers.

CHARLES

Don't take offense.

ANGELINE

Well, you should.

CHARLES

Dear, stars are forced by their schedules.

ANGELINE

You're important, and we greeted her like royalty.

*(She tosses the bouquet to the ground.)*

CHARLES

*(To crowd, Off.)*

Friends, obviously, *Madame* Bernhardt's company makes urgent speed to Hot Springs for the evening performance. Thank you for coming to represent our city. I regret the disappointment, but she must have seen our gracious welcome, and I hope you enjoyed the camaraderie of good company. Until we gather at the theatre tomorrow evening, good afternoon!

*(He waves as people disperse, and shakes Jasper's hand.)*

ANGELINE

Does she think we're country bumpkins?

JASPER

It's not far from the truth, young lady.

CHARLES

Speak for yourself, Shankley. *Madame* Bernhardt hasn't met us yet.

JASPER

Showed little curiosity on first approach.

ANGELINE

True, Papa. Little Rock is completely ordinary.

*(She retrieves her bouquet, takes one flower and secures it in her hair.)*

ANGELINE (Cont'd)

I, for one, refuse to remain ordinary.

CHARLES

You're lovely. Wear another blossom tomorrow night, when we see *La Grand Dame* put on a show.

JASPER

And you can gossip all about it with your girlfriends.

ANGELINE

This was to be my special moment, like being onstage with *Madame Bernhardt*, not just clapping to see her die with hundreds of others.

CHARLES

Excitement will return at sunup. Let's get home for supper.

*(Charles and Jasper walk to the station door. Angeline remains.)*

CHARLES (Cont'd)

Start early for the streetcar tomorrow night. Power will be taxed to get the crowd to the amphitheater.

JASPER

Will do.

CHARLES

*(Looking back.)*

Come along, Angel.

ANGELINE

In a moment, Papa.

*(Men exit into station. Angeline looks in direction of vanished train.)*

ANGELINE (Cont'd)

*Alors, au revoir, Madame.* Is your car filled with bouquets and laughter? I'll meet you tomorrow, somehow.

*(She raises her bouquet to the ghost train and exits. Blackout.)*

Scene 3

*(That night, Angeline sits in bed writing in a diary by lamplight. The room has a small desk and chair, beside a curtained window looking onto a porch. Charles appears in the doorway.)*

CHARLES

I heard a furious pen. Did it dispel the fury?

ANGELINE

*(Closing the book.)*

Almost.

CHARLES

*(Entering.)*

Marie had interesting news: a curious young man stood near our corner earlier this afternoon.

ANGELINE

Curiously odd, or curiously investigating?

CHARLES

He leaned against a wagon, staring at our house.

ANGELINE

Was he tall?

CHARLES

“Lanky,” according to Marie. Sandy-haired, wearing a hat low, over his eyes.

ANGELINE

Jonathan, you assume? He might come to town—I don’t know when.

*(She puts the diary on her desk.)*

ANGELINE (Cont’d)

More importantly: can you see *Madame* tomorrow, before the play?

CHARLES

*(Standing.)*

Not likely. And you have school—

ANGELINE

Everyday! Tomorrow’s the one day in my life to meet Sarah Bernhardt.