

# WHO REMEMBERS ÉPONINE'S SISTER?

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A short comedy by  
Rex McGregor

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

MUCHE, small preteen girl, until yesterday a happy street urchin, now suffering from charity and employment.

AZELMA THÉNARDIER, teenage girl, an apprentice milliner, determined to be respectable despite her family's criminal background.

COSETTE, wealthy teenage girl, straightforward and easy-going.

## SETTING

A millinery shop in Paris.

## TIME

1830.

## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

French words generally have the stress on the last syllable. In the following guide, "uh" rhymes with "the."

|              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| Azelma       | uh-zal-MUH   |
| Cosette      | ko-ZET       |
| Éponine      | ay-po-NEEN   |
| Madame       | muh-DAHM     |
| Mademoiselle | muh-mwuh-ZAL |
| Muche        | moosh        |
| Thénardier   | tay-nard-YAY |
| Zelma        | zal-MUH      |

## NOTE

The Bechdel test asks whether a work of fiction features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. *Who Remembers Éponine's Sister?* goes even further. It never mentions any males at all.

*(A millinery shop in Paris. Hat racks display several spectacular hats with red, white and blue cockades.)*

*(MUCHE is bored as she sweeps the floor with a large broom. After checking she is unobserved, she balances the handle on her fingertip or performs other tricks.)*

*(AZELMA comes in with needle and thread. During the following, she makes adjustments to a hat.)*

**AZELMA:** Morning, Muche.

**MUCHE:** Likewise.

**AZELMA:** How are you getting on?

**MUCHE:** All right, I guess.

**AZELMA:** Remember Madame's rules. What are the three things a shop girl needs to be?

**MUCHE:** Cheerful. Polite. And...

**AZELMA:** Most importantly...

**MUCHE:** Um...

**AZELMA:** Honest.

**MUCHE:** I was gettin' there.

**AZELMA:** Let's try again. How are you settling in?

**MUCHE:** Exceptionally well, mademoiselle. Will that be all?

**AZELMA:** Save the cheerfulness and courtesy for the customers. But always be honest.

**MUCHE:** I am. I've settled like concrete. Feel like I been stuck in this job for years.

**AZELMA:** You only started yesterday.

**MUCHE:** I ain't cut out for hard labor.

**AZELMA:** You should be grateful Madame took pity on you.

**MUCHE:** Don't get me wrong. I love the meals. And the bed. But this work lark – it's the pits.

**AZELMA:** Would you rather still be out in the street? In misery and squalor?

**MUCHE:** It warn't so bad. I was less miserable than I am now.

**AZELMA:** You're learning a trade here, Muche.

**MUCHE:** I had a trade. An easier one. You don't get blisters from pickin' pockets.

**AZELMA:** You could land in prison, though. Like my sister.

**MUCHE:** She's only in for a short stint. She'll be out soon.

**AZELMA:** Not before she's learnt her lesson, I hope.

**MUCHE:** You're mean, Zelma.

**AZELMA:** I won't deny her absence is to my advantage. When she's around, no one pays any attention to me. It's always "*Éponine* and Azelma." I come last. If at all. Some people don't even know I exist.

**MUCHE:** *Éponine's* vicious. She pinched my arm. See? I've still got the bruise.

**AZELMA:** What she does has nothing to do with me. I aim to be respectable.

**MUCHE:** What's "respectable"?

**AZELMA:** Not having a family that makes you cringe.

**MUCHE:** Least you've *got* a family.

**AZELMA:** Would you like one? Take mine. They're all crooks.

**MUCHE:** Don't let Madame find out.

**AZELMA:** I've already told her. She appreciated my honesty.

**MUCHE:** You're both real saints.

**AZELMA:** She's glad to help me better myself. One day I'll have my own shop.

**MUCHE:** Sounds like hard work.

**AZELMA:** You needn't worry. I won't hire lazy, uncommitted staff.

**MUCHE:** I'm not lazy. I just like fun. Out in the street you can find things like...*this!*

*(Muche takes a large dead rat out of her apron and dangles it by the tail. Azelma squeals.)*

**AZELMA:** Throw that thing away!

**MUCHE:** Not on your life! You just proved its value.

**AZELMA:** At least put it away.

**MUCHE:** Sure. Gotta keep it a surprise.

*(Muche puts the rat back in her apron.)*

**AZELMA:** My shop will be vermin-free. No rats. Or urchins.

*(A shop doorbell tinkles.)*

**MUCHE:** Cheer up, Zelma. Here comes a customer.

*(COSETTE comes in.)*

**AZELMA:** Good morning, mademoiselle.

**COSETTE:** Hello. I wonder if you can help. My society friends keep teasing me about my bonnet. I need to show them I can be fashionable.

**AZELMA:** You've come to the right place. *(Indicating the hats:)* Patriotic Revolutionary. The latest craze.

**COSETTE:** Perfect. Would it inconvenience you if I buy several?

**AZELMA:** Not in the least. We can easily restock.



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**COSETTE:** Then I'll take all of these if I may.

**AZELMA:** Certainly, mademoiselle. Muche. Please fetch some boxes.

**MUCHE:** "Certainly, mademoiselle."

*(Muche goes out, leaving her broom.)*

*(Cosette puts a hat on.)*

**COSETTE:** Forgive my sudden extravagance. I've spent the last six years at a convent school.

**AZELMA:** You have my deepest commiserations.

**COSETTE:** Thank you. Mother Superior told me to be wary of the outside world. But everyone's so kind.

**AZELMA:** Except your society friends.

**COSETTE:** Oh, they *have* to bully me. It's an ancient tradition.

**AZELMA:** We've just had a second revolution. Things are supposed to have changed.

**COSETTE:** Not us refined young ladies. Our clothes may be up to the minute, but we're stuffy old stick-in-the-muds.

*(Muche comes back in, balancing a tall pile of boxes in front of her.)*

**AZELMA:** Muche. Stop showing off.

**MUCHE:** I managed to pick 'em up. But I can't put 'em down!

**COSETTE:** Let me give you a hand.

*(Cosette takes the boxes and puts them down.)*

**AZELMA:** You don't have to do that, mademoiselle.

**MUCHE:** She's allowed.

**AZELMA:** I'll calculate the bill. You start packing.

**COSETTE:** Righto.

*(Cosette starts packing hats in boxes.)*

**AZELMA:** I didn't mean you, mademoiselle.

**COSETTE:** It's no trouble.

**MUCHE:** Don't tell me you enjoy work.

**COSETTE:** It's a novelty for me.

**MUCHE:** If you're after a novelty, would you like to see what's in my apron?

**COSETTE:** I'd love to.

**AZELMA:** Muche! Don't you dare!

**MUCHE:** Madame said, "Always grant a customer's request."

*(Muche takes out the rat out and dangles it in Cosette's face.)*

**COSETTE:** What a whopper! How did you die, sweetheart?  
Tucking into too many food scraps?

*(Cosette kisses the rat.)*

**AZELMA:** You're not shrieking.

**MUCHE:** This must be faulty.

*(Disappointed, Muche puts the rat away.)*

**AZELMA:** Refined young ladies usually shriek.

**COSETTE:** Er... The nuns taught me to love all God's creatures.

**AZELMA:** If you say so.

**COSETTE:** That was such fun. But I must finish packing.

*(Azelma watches Cosette suspiciously as Cosette and Muche pack the hats.)*

**MUCHE:** You're gonna have a mission carryin' all these.

**AZELMA:** With an order this size we will of course deliver.

**COSETTE:** Lovely.

**AZELMA:** Muche. You like balancing things. You carry them.

**MUCHE:** How far away do you live?

**COSETTE:** About a twenty-minute walk.

**MUCHE:** Piece o' cake.

**COSETTE:** I'm happy to send for our carriage.

**MUCHE:** Don't bother. I'm dyin' to get out o' the shop. I can't stand bein' cooped up when the sun's shinin'.

**COSETTE:** That must be hard for a shop assistant.

**MUCHE:** I hate my job.

**COSETTE:** Why don't you leave?

**MUCHE:** If only I could! But I'm hooked on the food. And the bed.

*(Muche groans and picks up a box.)*

**COSETTE:** Here. I'll carry some.

**AZELMA:** Refined young ladies don't carry parcels through the streets.

**COSETTE:** I knew that.

**MUCHE:** Pile 'em up.

*(Muche holds a box. Cosette puts others on top.)*

**COSETTE:** You won't be able to see where you're going.

**MUCHE:** Is she allowed to guide me, Zelma?

**AZELMA:** Not if she's a refined young lady.

**COSETTE:** I have an idea. I'd like six yards of strong ribbon, please.

**AZELMA:** Certainly, mademoiselle. What color?

**COSETTE:** You choose.

*(Cosette takes the boxes and puts them on the floor.)*

**MUCHE:** Hey, what are you up to?

**COSETTE:** Just stand still please... Straight back.

*(Cosette picks up the broom and lays it across Muche's shoulders like a yoke.)*

**MUCHE:** I get it. Clever.

*(Cosette uses the ribbon to tie the boxes to the broom.)*

**COSETTE:** Keep each side evenly balanced. And you'll have a clear sightline.

**MUCHE:** Where did you pick up this trick?

**COSETTE:** Er...

**AZELMA:** From lugging buckets of water. As a child. I recognize you now, *Cosette*. Do you recognize me?

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