The School for Husbands

by Molière

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L'ÉCOLE DES MARIS.

COMÉDIE.

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THE SCHOOL FOR HUSBANDS. A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS. (THE ORIGINAL IN VERSE.)

INTRODUCTORY NOTICE.

The School for Husbands was the first play in the title of which the word "School" was employed, to imply that, over and above the intention of amusing, the author designed to convey a special lesson to his hearers. Perhaps Molière wished not only that the general public should be prepared to find instructions and warnings for married men, but also that they who were wont to regard the theatre as injurious, or at best trivial, should know that he professed to educate, as well as to entertain. We must count the adoption of similar titles by Sheridan and others amongst the tributes, by imitation, to Molière's genius.

This comedy was played for the first time at Paris, on the 24th of June, 1661, and met with great success. On the 12th of July following it was acted at Vaux, the country seat of Fouquet, before the whole court, Monsieur, the brother of the King, and the Queen of England; and by them also was much approved. Some commentators say that Molière was partly inspired by a comedy of Lope de Vega. La Discreta enamorada, The Cunning Sweetheart; also by a remodelling of the same play by Moreto, No puede ser guardar una muger, One cannot guard a woman; but this has lately been disproved. It appears, however, that he borrowed the primary idea of his comedy from the Adelphi of Terence; and from a tale, the third of the third day, in the Decameron of Boccaccio, where a young woman uses her father-confessor as a go-between for herself and her lover. In the Adelphi there are two old men of dissimilar character, who give a different education to the children they bring up. One of them is a dotard, who, after having for sixty years been sullen, grumpy and avaricious, becomes suddenly lively, polite, and prodigal; this Molière

had too much common sense to imitate.

The School for Husbands marks a distinct departure in the dramatist's literary progress. As a critic has well observed, it substitutes for situations produced by the mechanism of plot, characters which give rise to situations in accordance with the ordinary operations of human nature. Molière's method—the simple and only true one, and, consequently, the one which incontestably establishes the original talent of its employer—is this: At the beginning of a play, he introduces his principal personages: sets them talking; suffers them to betray their characters, as men and women do in every-day life,—expecting from his hearers that same discernment which he has himself displayed in detecting their peculiarities: imports the germ of a plot in some slight misunderstanding or equivocal act; and leaves all the rest to be effected by the action and reaction of the characters which he began by bringing out in bold relief. His plots are thus the plots of nature; and it is impossible that they should not be both interesting and instructive. That his comedies, thus composed, are besides amusing, results from the shrewdness with which he has selected and combined his characters, and the art with which he arranges the situations produced.

The character-comedies of Molière exhibit, more than any others, the force of his natural genius, and the comparative weakness of his artistic talent. In the exhibition and the evolution of character, he is supreme. In the unravelling of his plots and the dénouement of his situations, he is driven too willingly to the deus ex machina.

The School for Husbands was directed against one of the special and prominent defects of society in the age and country in which Molière lived. Domestic tyranny was not only rife, but it was manifested in one of its coarsest forms. Sganarelle, though twenty years younger than Ariste, and not quite forty years old, could not govern by moral force; he relied solely on bolts and bars. Physical restraint was the safeguard in which husbands and parents had the greatest confidence, not perceiving that the brain and the heart are always able to prevail against it. This truth Molière

took upon himself to preach, and herein he surpasses all his rivals; in nothing more than in the artistic device by which he introduces the contrast of the wise and trustful Ariste, raisonneur as he is called in French, rewarded in the end by the triumph of his more humane mode of treatment. Molière probably expresses his own feelings by the mouth of Ariste: for The School for Husbands was performed on the 24th of June, 1661, and about eight months later, on the 20th of February, 1662, he married Armande Béjart, being then about double her age. As to Sganarelle in this play, he ceases to be a mere buffoon, as in some of Molière's farces, and becomes the personification of an idea or of a folly which has to be ridiculed.

Molière dedicated The School for Husbands to the Duke of Orleans, the King's only brother, in the following words:—

MY LORD,

I here shew France things that are but little consistent. Nothing can be so great and superb as the name I place in front of this book; and nothing more mean than what it contains. Every one will think this a strange mixture; and some, to express its inequality, may say that it is like setting a crown of pearls and diamonds on an earthen statue, and making magnificent porticos and lofty triumphal arches to a mean cottage. But, my Lord, my excuse is, that in this case I had no choice to make, and that the honour I have of belonging to your Royal Highness, [Footnote: Molière was the chief of the troupe of actors belonging to the Duke of Orleans, who had only lately married, and was not yet twenty-one years old.] absolutely obliged me to dedicate to you the first work that I myself published. [Footnote: Sganarelle had been borrowed by Neufvillenaine; The Pretentious Ladies was only printed by Molière, because the copy of the play was stolen from him; Don Garcia of Navarre was not published till after his death, in 1682.] It is not a present I make you, it is a duty I discharge; and homages are never looked upon by the things they bring. I presumed, therefore, to dedicate a trifle to your Royal Highness, because I could not

help it; but if I omit enlarging upon the glorious truths I might tell of you, it is through a just fear that those great ideas would make my offering the more inconsiderable. I have imposed silence on myself, meaning to wait for an opportunity better suited for introducing such fine things; all I intended in this epistle was to justify my action to France, and to have the glory of telling you yourself, my Lord, with all possible submission, that I am your Royal Highness' very humble, very obedient, and very faithful servant,

MOLIÈRE.

In the fourth volume of the "Select Comedies of M. de Molière, London, 1732," the translation of The School for Husbands is dedicated to the Right Honourable the Lady Harriot Campbell, in the following words:—

MADAM,

A Comedy which came abroad in its Native Language, under the Patronage of the Duke of ORLEANS, Brother to the King of FRANCE, attempts now to speak English, and begs the Honour of Your LADYSHIP'S Favour and Acceptance. That distinguishing good Sense, that nice Discernment, that refined Taste of Reading and Politeness for which Your LADYSHIP is so deservedly admir'd, must, I'm persuaded, make You esteem Molière; whose way of expression is easy and elegant, his Sentiments just and delicate, and his morals untainted: who constantly combats Vice and Folly with strong Reason and well turn'd Ridicule; in short, whose Plays are all instructive, and tend to some useful Purpose:—An Excellence sufficient to recommend them to your LADYSHIP.

As for this Translation, which endeavours to preserve the Spirit as well as Meaning of the Original, I shall only say, that if it can be so happy as to please Your LADYSHIP, all the Pains it cost me will be over-paid.

I beg Pardon for this Presumption, and am, with the greatest Respect that's possible, Madam, Your Ladyship's Most Obedient and most Humble Servant,

THE TRANSLATOR.

Sir Charles Sedley, well known through a history of a "frolick" which Pepys relates in his "Diary," [Footnote: See Pepys' Diary, October 23, 1668.] wrote The Mulberry Garden, of which Langbaine, in his "An Account of the Dramatick Poets," states "I dare not say that the character of Sir John Everyoung and Sir Samuel Forecast are copies of Sganarelle and Ariste in Molière's l'École des Maris; but I may say, that there is some resemblance, though whoever understands both languages will readily and with justice give our English wit the preference; and Sir Charles is not to learn to copy Nature from the French." This comedy, which was played by his Majesty's servants at the Theatre Royal, 1688, is dedicated to the Duchess of Richmond and Lennox, a lady who has "'scap'd (prefaces) very well hitherto," but, says Sir Charles, "Madam, your time is come, and you must bear it patiently. All the favour I can show you is that of a good executioner, which is, not to prolong your pain." This play has two girls like Isabella, called Althea and Diana, two like Leonor, Victoria and Olivia, and four lovers, as well as a rather intricate plot. The Epilogue is amusing, and we give the beginning of it:—

Poets of all men have the hardest game, Their best Endeavours can no Favours claim. The Lawyer if o'erthrown, though by the Laws, He quits himself, and lays it on your Cause. The Soldier is esteem'd a Man of War, And Honour gains, if he but bravely dare. The grave Physician, if his Patient dye, He shakes his head, and blames Mortality. Only poor Poets their own faults must bear; Therefore grave Judges be not too severe.

Flecknoe has also imitated several of the scenes of The School for Husbands in The Damoiselles à la Mode, which is a medley of several of Molière's plays (see Introductory Notice to The Pretentious Young Ladies).

James Miller has likewise followed, in The Man of Taste (Act i., Scene 2). (see Introductory Notice to The Pretentious Young Ladies), one scene of the first act of

Molière's The School for Husbands.

Murphy, in The School for Guardians, has borrowed from three plays of Molière. The main plot is taken from The School for Wives; some incidents of the second act are taken from The Blunderer (see Introductory Notice to The Blunderer), but the scenes in which Oldcastle and Lovibond state their intention of marrying their wards, and the way in which one of the wards, Harriet, makes her love known to Belford is taken from The School for Husbands, though Leonor does not betray in the French comedy, as she does in the English, the confidence placed in her. The French Isabella acts like Harriet, but then she has a foolish and jealous guardian.

Wycherley in The Country Wife, probably acted in 1672 or 1673, and which is partly an imitation of Molière's School for Wives, has borrowed from The School for Husbands, the letter which Isabella writes to Valère (Act ii., Scene 8), and also the scene in which Isabella escapes disguised in her sister's clothes: but, of course, to give an additional zest to the English play, the author makes Pinchwife himself bring his wife to her lover, Horner. The scene hardly bears transcribing. He has also partly imitated in The Gentleman Dancing-Master, first performed in 1673, some scenes of The School for Husbands.

Otway, in The Soldier's Fortune (see Introductory Notice to Sganarelle, or The Self-Deceived Husband), has borrowed from Molière's School for Husbands that part of his play in which Lady Dunse makes her husband the agent for conveying a ring and a letter to her lover.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SGANARELLE, [Footnote: This part was played by Molière himself. In the inventory taken after Molière's death, and given by M. Soulié, we find: "A dress for The School for Husbands, consisting of breeches, doublet, cloak, collar, purse and girdle, all of a kind of brown coloured (couleur de muse) satin."] } } brothers.

ARISTE,)

VALÈRE, lover to Isabella.

ERGASTE, servant to Valère.

A MAGISTRATE.

[Footnote: The original has un Commissaire, who in Molière's time, appears to have been a kind of inferior magistrate under the authority of the Lieutenant-général de la Police. The Commissaires de Police were not established till 1699; and The School for Husbands was played for the first time in 1661.]

A NOTARY.

ISABELLA,)) sisters. LÉONOR, }

LISETTE, maid to Isabella.

Scene.—A PUBLIC PLACE IN PARIS.

THE SCHOOL FOR HUSBANDS.

(L'ECOLE DES MARIS).

* * * * *

ACT I.

SCENE I.—SGANARELLE, ARISTE.

SGAN. Pray, brother, let us talk less, and let each of us live as he likes. Though you have the advantage of me in years, and are old enough to be wise, yet I tell you that I mean to receive none of your reproofs; that my fancy is the only counsellor I shall follow, and that I am quite satisfied with my way of living.

AR. But every one condemns it.

SGAN. Yes, fools like yourself, brother.

AR. Thank you very much. It is a pleasant compliment.

SGAN. I should like to know, since one ought to hear everything, what these fine critics blame in me.

AR. That surly and austere temper which shuns all the charms of society, gives a whimsical appearance to all your actions, and makes everything peculiar in you, even your dress.

SGAN. I ought then to make myself a slave in fashion, and not to put on clothes for my own sake? Would you not, my dear elder brother—for, Heaven be thanked, so you are, to tell you plainly, by a matter of twenty years; and that is not worth the trouble of mentioning—would you not, I say, by your precious nonsense, persuade me to adopt the fashions of those young sparks of yours?

[Footnote: The original has vos jeunes muguets, literally "your young lilies of the valley," because in former times, according to some annotators, the courtiers wore natural or artificial lilies of the valley in their buttonholes, and perfumed themselves with the essence of that flower. I think that muguet is connected with the old French word musguet, smelling of musk. In Molière's time muguet had become rather antiquated; hence it was rightly placed in the mouth of Sganarelle, who likes to use such words and phrases. Rabelais employs it in the eighth chapter of Gargantua, un tas de muguets, and it has been translated by Sir Thomas Urquhart as "some fond wooers and wench-courters." The fashion of calling dandies after the name of perfumes is not rare in France. Thus Regnier speaks of them as marjolets, from marjolaine, sweet marjoram; and Agrippa d'Aubigné calls them muscadins (a word also connected with the old French musguet), which name was renewed at the beginning of the first French revolution, and bestowed on elegants, because they always smelled of musk.]

Oblige me to wear those little hats which provide ventilation for their weak brains, and that flaxen hair, the vast curls whereof conceal the form of the human face;

[Footnote: The fashion was in Molière's time to wear the hair, or wigs, very long, and if possible of a fair colour, which gave to the young fashionables, hence called blondins, an effeminate air. Sganarelle addresses Valère (Act ii. Scene 9), likewise as Monsieur aux blonds cheveux. In The School for Wives (Act ii. Scene 6), Arnolphe also tells Agnès not to listen to the nonsense of these beaux blondins. According to Juvenal (Satire VI.) Messalina put a fair wig on to disguise herself. Louis XIV. did not begin to wear a wig until 1673.]

those little doublets but just below the arms, and those big collars falling down to the navel; those sleeves which one sees at table trying all the sauces, and those petticoats called breeches; those tiny shoes, covered with ribbons, which make you look like feather-legged pigeons; and those large rolls wherein the legs are put every morning, as it were into the stocks, and in which we see these gallants straddle about with their legs as wide apart, as if they were the beams of a mill?

[Footnote: The original has marcher écarquillés ainsi que des volants. Early commentators have generally stated that volants means here "the beams of a mill," but MM. Moland and E. Despois, the last annotators of Molière, maintain that it stands for "shuttlecock," because the large rolls (canons), tied at the knee and wide at the bottom, bore a great resemblance to shuttlecocks turned upside down. I cannot see how this can suit the words marcher écarquillés, for the motion of the canons of gallants, walking or straddling about, is very unlike that produced by shuttlecocks beaten by battledores; I still think "beams of a mill" right, because, though the canons did not look like beams of a mill, the legs did, when in motion.]

I should doubtless please you, bedizened in this way; I see that you wear the stupid gewgaws which it is the fashion to wear.

AR. We should always agree with the majority, and never cause ourselves to be stared at. Extremes shock, and a wise man should do with his clothes as with his speech; avoid too much affectation, and without being in too great a hurry, follow

whatever change custom introduces. I do not think that we should act like those people who always exaggerate the fashion, and who are annoyed that another should go further than themselves in the extremes which they affect; but I maintain that it is wrong, for whatever reasons, obstinately to eschew what every one observes; that it would be better to be counted among the fools than to be the only wise person, in opposition to every one else.

SGAN. That smacks of the old man who, in order to impose upon the world, covers his grey hairs with a black wig.

AR. It is strange that you should be so careful always to fling my age in my face, and that I should continually find you blaming my dress as well as my cheerfulness. One would imagine that old age ought to think of nothing but death, since it is condemned to give up all enjoyment; and that it is not attended by enough ugliness of its own, but must needs be slovenly and crabbed.

SGAN. However that may be, I am resolved to stick to my way of dress. In spite of the fashion, I like my cap so that my head may be comfortably sheltered beneath it; a good long doublet buttoned close, as it should be,

[Footnote: The young dandies in the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV., wore slashed doublets, very tight and short.]

which may keep the stomach warm, and promote a healthy digestion; a pair of breeches made exactly to fit my thighs; shoes, like those of our wise ancestors, in which my feet may not be tortured: and he who does not like the look of me may shut his eyes.

SCENE II.—LÉONOR, ISABELLA, LISETTE; ARISTE and SGANARELLE, conversing in an under-tone, unperceived.

LEO. (To Isabella). I take it all on myself, in case you are scolded.

LIS. (To Isabella). Always in one room, seeing no one?

ISA. Such is his humour.

LEO. I pity you, sister.

LIS. (To Léonor). It is well for you, madam, that his brother is of quite another disposition; fate was very kind in making you fall into the hands of a rational person.

ISA. It is a wonder that he did not lock me up to-day, or take me with him.

LIS. I declare I would send him to the devil, with his Spanish ruff, and…

[Footnote: The Spanish ruff (fraise) was in fashion at the end of Henri IV.'s reign; in the reign of Louis XIII., and in the beginning of Louis XIV.'s, flat-lying collars, adorned with lace were worn, so that those who still stuck to the Spanish ruff in 1661, were considered very old-fashioned people.]

SGAN. (Against whom Lisette stumbles). Where are you going, if I may ask?

LEO. We really do not know; I was urging my sister to talk a walk, and enjoy this pleasant and fine weather; but…

SGAN. (To Léonor). As for you, you may go wherever you please. (To Lisette). You can run off; there are two of you together. (To Isabella). But as for you, I forbid you—excuse me—to go out.

AR. Oh, brother! let them go and amuse themselves.

SGAN. I am your servant, brother.

AR. Youth will…

SGAN. Youth is foolish, and old age too, sometimes.

AR. Do you think there is any harm in her being with Léonor?

SGAN. Not so; but with me I think she is still better.

AR. But…

SGAN. But her conduct must be guided by me; in short, I know the interest I ought to take in it.

AR. Have I less in her sister's?

SGAN. By Heaven! each one argues and does as he likes. They are without relatives, and their father, our friend, entrusted them to us in his last hour, charging us both either to marry them, or, if we declined, to dispose of them hereafter. He gave us, in writing, the full authority of a father and a husband over them, from their infancy. You undertook to bring up that one; I charged myself with the care of this one. You govern yours at your pleasure. Leave me, I pray, to manage the other as I think best.

AR. It seems to me…

SGAN. It seems to me, and I say it openly, that is the right way to speak on such a subject. You let your ward go about gaily and stylishly; I am content. You let her have footmen and a maid; I agree. You let her gad about, love idleness, be freely courted by dandies; I am quite satisfied. But I intend that mine shall live according to my fancy, and not according to her own; that she shall be dressed in honest serge, and wear only black on holidays; that, shut up in the house, prudent in bearing, she shall apply herself entirely to domestic concerns, mend my linen in her leisure hours, or else knit stockings for amusement; that she shall close her ears to the talk of young sparks, and never go out without some one to watch her. In short, flesh is weak; I know what stories are going about. I have no mind to wear horns, if I can help it; and as her lot requires her to marry me, I mean to be as certain of her as I am of myself.

ISA. I believe you have no grounds for….

SGAN. Hold your tongue, I shall teach you to go out without us!

LEO. What, sir….

SGAN. Good Heavens, madam! without wasting any more words, I am not speaking

to you, for you are too clever.

LEO. Do you regret to see Isabella with us?

SGAN. Yes, since I must speak plainly; you spoil her for me. Your visits here only displease me, and you will oblige me by honouring us no more.

LEO. Do you wish that I shall likewise speak my thoughts plainly to you? I know not how she regards all this; but I know what effect mistrust would have on me. Though we are of the same father and mother, she is not much of my sister if your daily conduct produces any love in her.

LIS. Indeed, all these precautions are disgraceful. Are we in Turkey, that women must be shut up? There, they say, they are kept like slaves; this is why the Turks are accursed by God. Our honour, sir, is very weak indeed, if it must be perpetually watched. Do you think, after all, that these precautions are any bar to our designs? that when we take anything into our heads, the cleverest man would not be but a donkey to us? All that vigilance of yours is but a fool's notion; the best way of all, I assure you, is to trust us. He who torments us puts himself in extreme peril, for our honour must ever be its own protector. To take so much trouble in preventing us is almost to give us a desire to sin. If I were suspected by my husband, I should have a very good mind to justify his fears.

SGAN. (to Ariste). This, my fine teacher, is your training. And you endure it without being troubled?

AR. Brother, her words should only make you smile. There is some reason in what she says. Their sex loves to enjoy a little freedom; they are but ill-checked by so much austerity. Suspicious precautions, bolts and bars, make neither wives nor maids virtuous. It is honour which must hold them to their duty, not the severity which we display towards them. To tell you candidly, a woman who is discreet by compulsion only is not often to be met with. We pretend in vain to govern all her actions; I find that it is the heart we must win. For my part, whatever care might be

taken, I would scarcely trust my honour in the hands of one who, in the desires which might assail her, required nothing but an opportunity of falling.

SGAN. That is all nonsense.

AR. Have it so; but still I maintain that we should instruct youth pleasantly, chide their faults with great tenderness, and not make them afraid of the name of virtue. Léonor's education has been based on these maxims. I have not made crimes of the smallest acts of liberty, I have always assented to her youthful wishes, and, thank Heaven, I never repented of it. I have allowed her to see good company, to go to amusements, balls, plays. These are things which, for my part I think are calculated to form the minds of the young; the world is a school which, in my opinion, teaches them better how to live than any book. Does she like to spend money on clothes, linen, ribands—what then? I endeavour to gratify her wishes; these are pleasures which, when we are well-off, we may permit to the girls of our family. Her father's command requires her to marry me; but it is not my intention to tyrannize over her. I am quite aware that our years hardly suit, and I leave her complete liberty of choice.

[Footnote: The School for Husbands was played for the first time, on the 24th of June, 1661, and Molière married Armande Béjart (see Prefatory Memoir), on the 20th of February, 1662, when he was forty, and she about twenty years old. It is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that the words he places in the mouth of Ariste are an expression of his own feelings.]

If a safe income of four thousand crowns a-year, great affection and consideration for her, may, in her opinion, counterbalance in marriage the inequality of our age, she may take me for her husband; if not she may choose elsewhere. If she can be happier without me, I do not object; I prefer to see her with another husband rather than that her hand should be given to me against her will.

SGAN. Oh, how sweet he is! All sugar and honey!

AR. At all events, that is my disposition; and I thank Heaven for it. I would never

lay down these strict rules which make children wish their parents dead.

SGAN. But the liberty acquired in youth is not so easily withdrawn later on; all those feelings will please you but little when you have to change her mode of life.

AR. And why change it?

SGAN. Why?

AR. Yes.

SGAN. I do not know.

AR. Is there anything in it that offends honour?

SGAN. Why, if you marry her, she may demand the same freedom which she enjoyed as a girl?

AR. Why not?

SGAN. And you so far agree with her as to let her have patches and ribbons?

AR. Doubtless.

SGAN. To let her gad about madly at every ball and public assembly?

AR. Yes, certainly.

SGAN. And the beaux will visit at your house?

AR. What then?

SGAN. Who will junket and give entertainments?

AR. With all my heart.

SGAN. And your wife is to listen to their fine speeches?

AR. Exactly.

SGAN. And you will look on at these gallant visitors with a show of indifference?

AR. Of course.

SGAN. Go on, you old idiot. (To Isabella). Get indoors, and hear no more of this

shameful doctrine.

SCENE III.—ARISTE, SGANARELLE, LÉONOR, LISETTE.

AR. I mean to trust to the faithfulness of my wife, and intend always to live as I have lived.

SGAN. How pleased I shall be to see him victimized!

AR. I cannot say what fate has in store for me; but as for you, I know that if you fail to be so, it is no fault of yours, for you are doing everything to bring it about.

SGAN. Laugh on, giggler! Oh, what a joke it is to see a railer of nearly sixty!

LEO. I promise to preserve him against the fate you speak of, if he is to receive my vows at the altar. He may rest secure; but I can tell you I would pass my word for nothing if I were your wife.

LIS. We have a conscience for those who rely on us; but it is delightful, really, to cheat such folks as you.

SGAN. Hush, you cursed ill-bred tongue!

AR. Brother, you drew these silly words on yourself. Good bye. Alter your temper, and be warned that to shut up a wife is a bad plan. Your servant.

SGAN. I am not yours.

SCENE IV.—SGANARELLE, alone.

Oh, they are all well suited to one another! What an admirable family. A foolish old man with a worn-out body who plays the fop; a girl-mistress and a thorough coquette; impudent servants;—no, wisdom itself could not succeed, but would exhaust sense and reason, trying to amend a household like this. By such

associations, Isabella might lose those principles of honour which she learned amongst us; to prevent it, I shall presently send her back again to my cabbages and turkeys.

SCENE V.—VALÈRE, SGANARELLE, ERGASTE.

VAL. (Behind). Ergaste, that is he, the Argus whom I hate, the stern guardian of her whom I adore.

SGAN. (Thinking himself alone). In short, is there not something wonderful in the corruption of manners now-a-days?

VAL. I should like to address him, if I can get a chance, and try to strike up an acquaintance with him.

SGAN. (Thinking himself alone). Instead of seeing that severity prevail which so admirably formed virtue in other days, uncontrolled and imperious youth here-about assumes… (Valère bows to Sganarelle from a distance).

VAL. He does not see that we bow to him.

ERG. Perhaps his blind eye is on this side. Let us cross to the right.

SGAN. I must go away from this place. Life in town only produces in me…

VAL. (Gradually approaching). I must try to get an introduction.

SGAN. (Hearing a noise). Ha! I thought some one spoke… (Thinking himself alone). In the country, thank Heaven, the fashionable follies do not offend my eyes.

ERG. (To Valère). Speak to him.

SGAN. What is it?… my ears tingle… There, all the recreations of our girls are but… (He perceives Valère bowing to him). Do you bow to me?

ERG. (To Valère). Go up to him.

SGAN. (Not attending to Valère). Thither no coxcomb comes. (Valère again bows

to him). What the deuce!… (He turns and sees Ergaste bowing on the other side). Another? What a great many bows!

VAL. Sir, my accosting you disturbs you, I fear?

SGAN. That may be.

VAL. But yet the honour of your acquaintance is so great a happiness, so exquisite a pleasure, that I had a great desire to pay my respects to you.

SGAN. Well.

VAL. And to come and assure you, without any deceit, that I am wholly at your service.

SGAN. I believe it.

VAL. I have the advantage of being one of your neighbours, for which I thank my lucky fate.

SGAN. That is all right.

VAL. But, sir. do you know the news going the round at Court, and thought to be reliable?

SGAN. What does it matter to me?

VAL. True; but we may sometimes be anxious to hear it? Shall you go and see the magnificent preparations for the birth of our Dauphin, sir?

[Footnote: The Dauphin, the son of Louis XIV. was born at Fontainebleau, on the 1st of November, 1661; The School for Husbands was first acted on the 24th of June of the same year; hence Molière ventures to prophesy about the Dauphin's birth.]

SGAN. If I feel inclined.

VAL. Confess that Paris affords us a hundred delightful pleasures which are not to be found elsewhere. The provinces are a desert in comparison. How do you pass your time?

SGAN. On my own business.

VAL. The mind demands relaxation, and occasionally gives way, by too close attention to serious occupations. What do you do in the evening before going to bed?

SGAN. What I please.

VAL. Doubtless no one could speak better. The answer is just, and it seems to be common sense to resolve never to do what does not please us. If I did not think you were too much occupied, I would drop in on you sometimes after supper.

SGAN. Your servant.

SCENE VI.—VALÈRE, ERGASTE.

VAL. What do you think of that eccentric fool?

ERG. His answers are abrupt and his reception is churlish.

VAL. Ah! I am in a rage.

ERG. What for?

VAL. Why am I in a rage? To see her I love in the power of a savage, a watchful dragon, whose severity will not permit her to enjoy a single moment of liberty.

ERG. That is just what is in your favour. Your love ought to expect a great deal from these circumstances. Know, for your encouragement, that a woman watched is half-won, and that the gloomy ill-temper of husbands and fathers has always promoted the affairs of the gallant. I intrigue very little; for that is not one of my accomplishments. I do not pretend to be a gallant; but I have served a score of such sportsmen, who often used to tell me that it was their greatest delight to meet with churlish husbands, who never come home without scolding,—downright brutes, who, without rhyme or reason, criticise the conduct of their wives in everything, and, proudly assuming the authority of a husband, quarrel with them before the eyes of their admirers. "One knows," they would say, "how to take advantage of this. The

lady's indignation at this kind of outrage, on the one hand, and the considerate compassion of the lover, on the other, afford an opportunity for pushing matters far enough." In a word, the surliness of Isabella's guardian is a circumstance sufficiently favourable for you.

VAL. But I could never find one moment to speak to her in the four months that I have ardently loved her.

ERG. Love quickens people's wits, though it has little effect on yours. If I had been…

VAL. Why, what could you have done? For one never sees her without that brute; in the house there are neither maids nor men-servants whom I might influence to assist me by the alluring temptation of some reward.

ERG. Then she does not yet know that you love her?

VAL. It is a point on which I am not informed. Wherever the churl took this fair one, she always saw me like a shadow behind her; my looks daily tried to explain to her the violence of my love. My eyes have spoken much; but who can tell whether, after all, their language could be understood?

ERG. It is true that this language may sometimes prove obscure, if it have not writing or speech for its interpreter.

VAL. What am I to do to rid myself of this vast difficulty, and to learn whether the fair one has perceived that I love her? Tell me some means or other.

ERG. That is what we have to discover. Let us go in for a while—the better to think over it.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—ISABELLA, SGANARELLE.

SGAN. That will do; I know the house, and the person, simply from the description

you have given me.

ISA. (Aside). Heaven, be propitious, and favour to-day the artful contrivance of an innocent love!

SGAN. Do you say they have told you that his name is Valère?

ISA. Yes.

SGAN. That will do; do not make yourself uneasy about it. Go inside, and leave me to act. I am going at once to talk to this young madcap.

ISA. (As she goes in). For a girl, I am planning a pretty bold scheme. But the unreasonable severity with which I am treated will be my excuse to every right mind.

SCENE II.—SGANARELLE, alone.

(Knocks at the door of Valère's house). Let us lose no time; here it is. Who's there? Why, I am dreaming! Hulloa, I say! hulloa somebody! hulloa! I do not wonder, after this information, that he came up to me just now so meekly. But I must make haste, and teach this foolish aspirant…

SCENE III.—VALÈRE, SGANARELLE, ERGASTE.

SGAN. (To Ergaste, who has come out hastily). A plague on the lubberly ox! Do you mean to knock me down—coming and sticking yourself in front of me like a post?

VAL. Sir, I regret…

SGAN. Ah! you are the man I want.

VAL. I, sir?

SGAN. You. Your name is Valère, is it not?

VAL. Yes.

SGAN. I am come to speak to you if you will allow me.

VAL. Can I have the happiness of rendering you any service?

SGAN. No; but I propose to do you a good turn. That is what brings me to your house.

VAL. To my house, sir!

SGAN. To your house. Need you be so much astonished?

VAL. I have good reason for it; I am delighted with the honour…

SGAN. Do not mention the honour, I beseech you.

VAL. Will you not come in?

SGAN. There is no need.

VAL. I pray you, enter.

SGAN. No, I will go no further.

VAL. As long as you stay there I cannot listen to you.

SGAN. I will not budge.

VAL. Well, I must yield. Quick, since this gentleman is resolved upon it, bring a chair.

SGAN. I am going to talk standing.

VAL. As if I could permit such a thing!

SGAN. What an intolerable delay!

VAL. Such incivility would be quite unpardonable.

SGAN. Nothing can be so rude as not to listen to people who wish to speak to us.

VAL. I obey you, then.

SGAN. You cannot do better. (They make many compliments about putting on their

hats). So much ceremony is hardly necessary. Will you listen to me?

VAL. Undoubtedly, and most willingly.

SGAN. Tell me: do you know that I am guardian to a tolerably young and passably handsome girl who lives in this neighbourhood, and whose name is Isabella?

VAL. Yes.

SGAN. As you know it, I need not tell it to you. But do you know, likewise, that as I find her charming, I care for her otherwise than as a guardian, and that she is destined for the honour of being my wife?

VAL. No!

SGAN. I tell it you, then; and also that it is as well that your passion, if you please, should leave her in peace.

VAL. Who?—I, sir?

SGAN. Yes, you. Let us have no dissembling.

VAL. Who has told you that my heart is smitten by her?

SGAN. Those who are worthy of belief.

VAL. Be more explicit.

SGAN. She herself.

VAL. She!

SGAN. She. Is not that enough? Like a virtuous young girl, who has loved me from childhood, she told me all just now; moreover, she charged me to tell you, that, since she has everywhere been followed by you, her heart, which your pursuit greatly offends, has only too well understood the language of your eyes; that your secret desires are well known to her; and that to try more fully to explain a passion which is contrary to the affection she entertains for me, is to give yourself needless trouble.

VAL. She, you say, of her own accord, makes you…

SGAN. Yes, makes me come to you and give you this frank and plain message; also, that, having observed the violent love wherewith your soul is smitten, she would earlier have let you know what she thinks about you if, perplexed as she was, she could have found anyone to send this message by; but that at length she was painfully compelled to make use of me, in order to assure you, as I have told you, that her affection is denied to all save me; that you have been ogling her long enough; and that, if you have ever so little brains, you will carry your passion somewhere else. Farewell, till our next meeting. That is what I had to tell you.

VAL. (Aside). Ergaste, what say you to such an adventure?

SGAN. (Aside, retiring). See how he is taken aback!

ERG. (In a low tone to Valère). For my part, I think that there is nothing in it to displease you; that a rather subtle mystery is concealed under it; in short, that this message is not sent by one who desires to see the love end which she inspires in you.

SGAN. (Aside). He takes it as he ought.

VAL. (In a low tone to Ergaste). You think it a mystery…

ERG. Yes…. But he is looking at us; let us get out of his sight.

SCENE IV.—SGANARELLE, alone.

How his face showed his confusion! Doubtless he did not expect this message. Let me call Isabella; she is showing the fruits which education produces on the mind. Virtue is all she cares for; and her heart is so deeply steeped in it, that she is offended if a man merely looks at her.

SCENE V.—ISABELLA, SGANARELLE.

ISA. (Aside, as she enters). I fear that my lover, full of his passion, has not understood my message rightly! Since I am so strictly guarded, I must risk one

which shall make my meaning clearer.

SGAN. Here I am, returned again.

ISA. Well?

SGAN. Your words wrought their full purpose; I have done his business. He wanted to deny that his heart was touched; but when I told him I came from you, he stood immediately dumbfounded and confused; I do not believe he will come here any more.

ISA. Ah, what do you tell me? I much fear the contrary, and that he will still give us more trouble.

SGAN. And why do you fear this?

ISA. You had hardly left the house when, going to the window to take a breath of air, I saw a young man at yonder turning, who first came, most unexpectedly, to wish me good morning, on the part of this impertinent man, and then threw right into my chamber a box, enclosing a letter, sealed like a love-letter.

[Footnote: The original has un poulet, literally "a chicken," because love-letters were folded so as to represent a fowl, with two wings; this shape is now called cocotte, from coq, and, though no longer used to designate a billet-doux, is often employed in familiar phraseology, in speaking of a girl who does not lead a moral life.]

I meant at once to throw it after him; but he had already reached the end of the street. I feel very much annoyed at it.

SGAN. Just see his trickery and rascality!

ISA. It is my duty quickly to have this box and letter sent back to this detestable lover; for that purpose I need some one; for I dare not venture to ask yourself…

SGAN. On the contrary, darling, it shows me all the more your love and faithfulness; my heart joyfully accepts this task. You oblige me in this more than I can tell you.

ISA. Take it then.

SGAN. Well, let us see what he has dared to say to you.

ISA. Heavens! Take care not to open it!

SGAN. Why so?

ISA. Will you make him believe that it is I? A respectable girl ought always to refuse to read the letters a man sends her. The curiosity which she thus betrays shows a secret pleasure in listening to gallantries. I think it right that this letter should be peremptorily returned to Valère unopened, that he may the better learn this day the great contempt which my heart feels for him; so that his passion may from this time lose all hope, and never more attempt such a transgression.

SGAN. Of a truth she is right in this! Well, your virtue charms me, as well as your discretion. I see that my lessons have borne fruit in your mind; you show yourself worthy of being my wife.

ISA. Still I do not like to stand in the way of your wishes. The letter is in your hands, and you can open it.

SGAN. No, far from it. Your reasons are too good; I go to acquit myself of the task you impose upon me; I have likewise to say a few words quite near, and will then return hither to set you at rest.

SCENE VI.—SGANARELLE, alone.

How delighted I am to find her such a discreet girl! I have in my house a treasure of honour. To consider a loving look treason, to receive a love-letter as a supreme insult, and to have it carried back to the gallant by myself! I should like to know, seeing all this, if my brother's ward would have acted thus, on a similar occasion. Upon my word, girls are what you make them… Hulloa! (Knocks at Valère's door).

SCENE VII.—SGANARELLE, ERGASTE.

ERG. Who is there?

SGAN. Take this; and tell your master not to presume so far as to write letters again, and send them in gold boxes; say also that Isabella is mightily offended at it. See, it has not even been opened. He will perceive what regard she has for his passion, and what success he can expect in it.

SCENE VIII.—VALÈRE, ERGASTE.

VAL. What has that surly brute just given you?

ERG. This letter, sir, as well as this box, which he pretends that Isabella has received from you, and about which, he says, she is in a great rage. She returns it to you unopened. Read it quickly, and let us see if I am mistaken.

VAL. (Reads). "This letter will no doubt surprise you; both the resolution to write to you and the means of conveying it to your hands may be thought very bold in me; but I am in such a condition, that I can no longer restrain myself. Well-founded repugnance to a marriage with which I am threatened in six days, makes me risk everything; and in the determination to free myself from it by whatever means, I thought I had rather choose you than despair. Yet do not think that you owe all to my evil fate; it is not the constraint in which I find myself that has given rise to the sentiments I entertain for you; but it hastens the avowal of them, and makes me transgress the decorum which the proprieties of my sex require. It depends on you alone to make me shortly your own; I wait only until you have declared your intentions to me before acquainting you with the resolution I have taken; but, above all remember that time presses, and that two hearts, which love each other, ought to understand even the slightest hint."

ERG. Well, sir, is not this contrivance original? For a young girl she is not so very

ignorant. Would one have thought her capable of these love stratagems?

VAL. Ah, I consider her altogether adorable. This evidence of her wit and tenderness doubles my love for her, and strengthens the feelings with which her beauty inspires me….

ERG. Here comes the dupe; think what you will say to him.

SCENE IX.-SGANARELLE, VALÈRE, ERGASTE.

SGAN. (Thinking himself alone). Oh, thrice and four times blessed be the law which forbids extravagance in dress!

[Footnote: It is remarkable that Louis XIV., who was so extravagant himself in his buildings, dress, and general expenses published sixteen laws against luxury; the law Sganarelle speaks of was promulgated November 27th, 1660, against the use of guipures, cannetilles, paillettes, etc., on men's dresses.]

No longer will the troubles of husbands be so great! women will now be checked in their demands. Oh, how delighted I am with the King for this proclamation!

[Footnote: The original has décri a proclamation which forbade the manufacturing, sale or wearing, of certain fabrics.]

How I wish, for the peace of the same husbands, that he would forbid coquetry, as well as lace, and gold or silver embroidery. I have bought the law on purpose, so that Isabella may read it aloud; and, by and by, when she is at leisure, it shall be our entertainment after supper. (Perceiving Valère). Well, Mr. Sandy-hair, would you like to send again love-letters in boxes of gold? You doubtless thought you had found some young flirt, eager for an intrigue, and melting before pretty speeches. You see how your presents are received! Believe me, you waste your powder and shot. Isabella is a discreet girl, she loves me and your love insults her. Aim at some one else, and be off!

VAL. Yes, yes; your merits, to which everyone yields, are too great an obstacle, sir. Though my passion be sincere, it is folly to contend with you for the love of Isabella.

SGAN. It is really folly.

VAL. Be sure I should not have yielded to the fascination of her charms, could I have foreseen that this wretched heart would find a rival so formidable as yourself.

SGAN. I believe it.

VAL. Now I know better than to hope; I yield to you, sir, and that too without a murmur.

SGAN. You do well.

VAL. Reason will have it so; for you shine with so many virtues, that I should be wrong to regard with an angry eye the tender sentiments which Isabella entertains for you.

SGAN. Of course.

VAL. Yes, yes, I yield to you; but at least I pray you,—and it is the only favour, sir, begged by a wretched lover, of whose pangs this day you are the sole cause,—I pray you, I say, to assure Isabella that, if my heart has been burning with love for her these three months, that passion is spotless, and has never fostered a thought at which her honour could be offended.

SGAN. Ay.

VAL. That, relying solely on my heart's choice, my only design was to obtain her for my wife, if destiny had not opposed an obstacle to this pure flame in you, who captivated her heart.

SGAN. Very good.

VAL. That, whatever happens, she must not think that her charms can ever be forgotten; that to whatever decrees of Heaven I must submit, my fate is to love her

to my last breath; and that, if anything checks my pursuit, it is the just respect I have for your merits.

[Footnote: We are of course to read between the lines: "If there is anything which could strengthen my resolution to save her, it is the natural detestation which I feel for you."]

SGAN. That is wisely spoken; I shall go at once to repeat these words, which will not be disagreeable to her. But, if you will listen to me, try to act so as to drive this passion from your mind. Farewell.

ERG. (To Valeère). The excellent dupe!

SCENE X.—SGANARELLE, alone.

I feel a great pity for this poor wretch, so full of affection. But it is unfortunate for him to have taken it into his head to try to storm a fortress which I have captured.

(Sganarelle knocks at his door.)

SCENE XI.—SGANARELLE, ISABELLA.

SGAN. Never did lover display so much grief for a love-letter returned unopened! At last he loses all hope, and retires. But he earnestly entreated me to tell you, that, at least, in loving you, he never fostered a thought at which your honour could be offended, and that, relying solely on his heart's choice, his only desire was to obtain you for a wife, if destiny had not opposed an obstacle to his pure flame, through me, who captivated your heart; that, whatever happens, you must not think that your charms can ever be forgotten by him; that, to whatever decrees of Heaven he must submit, his fate is to love you to his last breath; and that if anything checks his pursuit, it is the just respect he has for my merits. These are his very words; and, far from blaming him, I think him a gentleman, and I pity him for loving you.

ISA. (Aside). His passion does not contradict my secret belief, and his looks have

always assured me of its innocence.

SGAN. What do you say?

ISA. That it is hard that you should so greatly pity a man whom I hate like death; and that, if you loved me as much as you say, you would feel how he insults me by his addresses.

SGAN. But he did not know your inclinations; and, from the uprightness of his intentions, his love does not deserve…

ISA. Is it good intentions, I ask, to try and carry people off? Is it like a man of honour to form designs for marrying me by force, and taking me out of your hands? As if I were a girl to live after such a disgrace!

SGAN. How?

ISA. Yes, yes, I have been informed that this base lover speaks of carrying me off by force; for my part, I cannot tell by what secret means he has learned so early that you intend to marry me in eight days

[Footnote: In the letter which Isabella writes to Valère (see page 279), she speaks of a marriage with which she is threatened in six days. This is, I suppose, a pious fraud, to urge Valère to make haste, for here she mentions "eight days."]

at the latest, since it was only yesterday you told me so. But they say that he intends to be beforehand with you, and not let me unite my lot to yours.

SGAN. That is a bad case.

ISA. Oh, pardon me! He is eminently a gentleman, who only feels towards me…

SGAN. He is wrong; and this is past joking.

ISA. Yes, your good nature encourages his folly. If you had spoken sharply to him just now, he would have feared your rage and my resentment; for even since his letter was rejected, he mentioned this design which has shocked me. As I have been told, his love retains the belief that it is well received by me; that I dread to marry

you, whatever people may think, and should be rejoiced to see myself away from you.

SGAN. He is mad!

ISA. Before you, he knows how to disguise; and his plan is to amuse you. Be sure the wretch makes sport of you by these fair speeches. I must confess that I am very unhappy. After all my pains to live honourably, and to repel the addresses of a vile seducer, I must be exposed to his vexatious and infamous designs against me!

SGAN. There, fear nothing.

ISA. For my part I tell you that if you do not strongly reprove such an impudent attempt, and do not find quickly means of ridding me of such bold persecutions, I will abandon all, and not suffer any longer the insults which I receive from him.

SGAN. Do not be so troubled, my little wife. There, I am going to find him, to give him a good blowing up.

ISA. Tell him at least plainly, so that it may be in vain for him to gainsay it, that I have been told of his intentions upon good authority; that, after this message, whatever he may undertake, I defy him to surprise me; and, lastly, that, without wasting any more sighs or time, he must know what are my feelings for you; that, if he wishes not to be the cause of some mischief, he should not require to have the same thing told twice over.

SGAN. I will tell him what is right.

ISA. But all this in such a way as to show him that I really speak seriously.

SGAN. There, I will forget nothing, I assure you.

ISA. I await your return impatiently. Pray, make as much haste as you can. I pine when I am a moment without seeing you.

SGAN. There, ducky, my heart's delight, I will return immediately.

SCENE XII.—SGANARELLE, alone.

Was there ever a girl more discreet and better behaved? Oh, how happy I am! and what a pleasure it is to find a woman just after my own heart! Yes, that is how our women ought to be, and not, like some I know, downright flirts, who allow themselves to be courted, and make their simple husbands to be pointed at all over Paris. (Knocks at Valère's door). Hulloa, my enterprising, fine gallant!

SCENE XIII.—VALÈRE, SGANARELLE, ERGASTE.

VAL. Sir, what brings you here again?

SGAN. Your follies.

VAL. How?

SGAN. You know well enough what I wish to speak to you about. To tell you plainly, I thought you had more sense. You have been making fun of me with your fine speeches, and secretly nourish silly expectations. Look you, I wished to treat you gently; but you will end by making me very angry. Are you not ashamed, considering who you are, to form, such designs as you do? to intend to carry off a respectable girl, and interrupt a marriage on which her whole happiness depends?

VAL. Who told you this strange piece of news, sir?

SGAN. Do not let us dissimulate; I have it from Isabella, who sends you word by me, for the last time, that she has plainly enough shown you what her choice is; that her heart, entirely mine, is insulted by such a plan; that she would rather die than suffer such an outrage; and that you will cause a terrible uproar, unless you put an end to all this confusion.

VAL. If she really said what I have just heard, I confess that my passion has nothing more to expect. These expressions are plain enough to let me see that all is ended; I must respect the judgment she has passed.

SGAN. If… You doubt it then, and fancy all the complaints that I have made to you on her behalf are mere pretences! Do you wish that she herself should tell you her feelings? To set you right, I willingly consent to it. Follow me; you shall hear if I have added anything, and if her young heart hesitates between us two. (Goes and knocks at his own door).

SCENE XIV.—ISABELLA, SGANARELLE, VALÈRE, ERGASTE.

ISA. What! you bring Valère to me! What is your design? Are you taking his part against me? And do you wish, charmed by his rare merits, to compel me to love him, and endure his visits?

SGAN. No, my love; your affection is too dear to me for that; but he believes that my messages are untrue; he thinks that it is I who speak, and cunningly represent you as full of hatred for him, and of tenderness for me; I wish, therefore, from your own mouth, infallibly to cure him of a mistake which nourishes his love.

ISA. (To Valère). What! Is not my soul completely bared to your eyes, and can you still doubt whom I love?

VAL. Yes, all that this gentleman has told me on your behalf, Madam, might well surprise a man; I confess I doubted it. This final sentence, which decides the fate of my great love, moves my feelings so much that it can be no offence if I wish to have it repeated.

ISA. No. no, such a sentence should not surprise you. Sganarelle told you my very sentiments; I consider them to be sufficiently founded on justice, to make their full truth clear. Yes, I desire it to be known, and I ought to be believed, that fate here presents two objects to my eyes, who, inspiring me with different sentiments, agitate my heart. One by a just choice, in which my honour is involved, has all my esteem

and love; and the other, in return for his affection, has all my anger and aversion. The presence of the one is pleasing and dear to me, and fills me with joy; but the sight of the other inspires me with secret emotions of hatred and horror. To see myself the wife of the one is all my desire; and rather than belong to the other, I would lose my life. But I have sufficiently declared my real sentiments; and languished too long under this severe torture. He whom I love must use diligence to make him whom I hate lose all hope, and deliver me by a happy marriage, from a suffering more terrible than death.

SGAN. Yes, darling, I intend to gratify your wish.

ISA. It is the only way to make me happy.

SGAN. You shall soon be so.

ISA. I know it is a shame for a young woman, so openly to declare her love.

SGAN. No, no.

ISA. But, seeing what my lot is, such liberty must be allowed me; I can, without blushing, make so tender a confession to him whom I already regard as a husband.

SGAN. Yes, my poor child, darling of my soul!

ISA. Let him think, then, how to prove his passion for me.

SGAN. Yes, here, kiss my hand.

ISA. Let him, without more sighing, hasten a marriage which is all I desire, and accept the assurance which I give him, never to listen to the vows of another. (She pretends to embrace Sganarelle, and gives her hand to Valère to kiss).

[Footnote: This stage play is imitated by Congreve in The Old Bachelor, (Act iv., Scene 22) when Mrs. Fondlewife goes and hangs upon her husband's neck and kisses him; whilst Bellmour kisses her hand behind Fondlewife's back.]

SGAN. Oh, oh, my little pretty face, my poor little darling, you shall not pine long, I promise you. (To Valère). There, say no more. You see I do not make her speak; it is

me alone she loves.

VAL. Well, Madam, well, this is sufficient explanation. I learn by your words what you urge me to do; I shall soon know how to rid your presence of him who so greatly offends you.

ISA. You could not give me greater pleasure. For, to be brief, the sight of him is intolerable. It is odious to me, and I detest it so much…

SGAN. Eh! Eh!

ISA. Do I offend you by speaking thus? Do I…

SGAN. Heavens, by no means! I do not say that. But in truth, I pity his condition; you show your aversion too openly.

ISA. I cannot show it too much on such an occasion.

VAL. Yes, you shall be satisfied; in three days your eyes shall no longer see the object which is odious to you.

ISA. That is right. Farewell.

SGAN. (To Valère): I pity your misfortune, but…

VAL. No, you will hear no complaint from me. The lady assuredly does us both justice, and I shall endeavour to satisfy her wishes. Farewell.

SGAN. Poor fellow! his grief is excessive. Stay, embrace me: I am her second self. (Embraces Valère)

SCENE XV—ISABELLA, SGANARELLE.

SGAN. I think he is greatly to be pitied.

ISA. Not at all.

SGAN. For the rest, your love touches me to the quick, little darling, and I mean it shall have its reward. Eight days are too long for your impatience; to-morrow I will

marry you, and will not invite…

ISA. To-morrow!

SGAN. You modestly pretend to shrink from it; but I well know the joy these words afford you; you wish it were already over.

ISA. But…

SGAN. Let us get everything ready for this marriage.

ISA. (Aside), Heaven! Inspire me with a plan to put it off!

ACT III.

SCENE I.—ISABELLA, alone.

Yes, death seems to me a hundred times less dreadful than this fatal marriage into which I am forced; all that I am doing to escape its horrors should excuse me in the eyes of those who blame me. Time presses; it is night; now, then, let me fearlessly entrust my fate to a lover's fidelity.

SCENE II.—SGANARELLE, ISABELLA.

SGAN. (Speaking to those inside the house). Here I am once more; to-morrow they are going, in my name…

ISA. O Heaven!

SGAN. Is it you, darling? Where are you going so late? You said when I left you that, being rather tired, you would shut yourself up in your room; you even begged that on my return I would let you be quiet till to-morrow morning….

ISA. It is true; but…

SGAN. But what?

ISA. You see I am confused; I do not know how to tell you the reason.

SGAN. Why, whatever can it be?

ISA. A wonderful secret! It is my sister who now compels me to go out, and who, for a purpose for which I have greatly blamed her, has borrowed my room, in which I have shut her up.

SGAN. What?

ISA. Could it be believed? She is in love with that suitor whom we have discarded.

SGAN. With Valère?

ISA. Desperately! Her passion is so great that I can compare it with nothing; you may judge of its violence by her coming here alone, at this hour, to confide to me her love, and to tell me positively that she will die if she does not obtain the object of her desire; that, for more than a year, a secret intercourse has kept up the ardour of their love; and that they had even pledged themselves to marry each other when their passion was new.

SGAN. Oh, the wretched girl!

ISA. That, being informed of the despair into which I had plunged the man whom she loves to see, she came to beg me to allow her to prevent a departure which would break her heart; to meet this lover to-night under my name, in the little street on which my room looks, where counterfeiting my voice, she may utter certain tender feelings, and thereby tempt him to stay; in short, cleverly to secure for herself the regard which it is known he has for me.

SGAN. And do you think this…

ISA. I? I am enraged at it. "What," said I, "sister, are you mad? Do you not blush to indulge in such a love for one of those people who change every day? To forget your sex, and betray the trust put in you by the man whom Heaven has destined you to marry?"

SGAN. He deserves it richly; I am delighted by it.

ISA. Finally my vexation employed a hundred arguments to reprove such baseness in her, and enable me to refuse her request for to-night; but she became so importunate, shed so many tears, heaved so many sighs, said so often that I was driving her to despair if I refused to gratify her passion, that my heart was brought to consent in spite of me; and, to justify this night's intrigue, to which affection for my own sister made me assent, I was about to bring Lucretia to sleep with me, whose virtues you extol to me daily; but you surprised me by your speedy return.

SGAN. No, no, I will not have all this mystery at my house. As for my brother, I might agree to it; but they may be seen by some one in the street, and she whom I am to honour with my body must not only be modest and well-born; she must not even be suspected. Let us send the miserable girl away, and let her passion…

ISA. Ah, you would overwhelm her with confusion, and she might justly complain of my want of discretion. Since I must not countenance her design, at least wait till I send her away.

SGAN. Well, do so.

ISA. But above all, conceal yourself, I beg of you, and be content to see her depart without speaking one word to her.

SGAN. Yes, for your sake I will restrain my anger; but as soon as she is gone, I will go and find my brother without delay. I shall be delighted to run and tell him of this business.

ISA. I entreat you, then, not to mention my name. Good night; for I shall shut myself in at the same time.

SGAN. Till to-morrow, dear… How impatient I am to see my brother, and tell him of his plight! The good man has been victimized, with all his bombast!

[Footnote: The original has phébus, which is often used for a swollen and pretentious style, because it is said that a work on the chase, written in the fourteenth century by Gaston, Count of Foix, in such a style, was called Miroir de Phébus. It is

more probable that the word phébus, meaning showy language, is derived from the Greek phoibos, brilliant.]

I would not have this undone for twenty crowns!

ISA. (Within). Yes, sister, I am sorry to incur your displeasure; but what you wish me to do is impossible. My honour, which is dear to me, would run too great a risk. Farewell, go home before it is too late.

SGAN. There she goes, fretting finely, I warrant. Let me lock the door, for fear she should return.

ISA. (Going out disguised). Heaven! abandon me not in my resolve!

SGAN. Whither can she be going? Let me follow her.

ISA. (Aside). Night, at least, favours me in my distress.

SGAN. (Aside). To the gallant's house! What is her design?

SCENE III.—VALÈRE, ISABELLA, SGANARELLE.

VAL. (Coming out quickly). Yes, yes; I will this night make some effort to speak to… Who is there?

ISA. (To Valère). No noise, Valère; I have forestalled you; I am Isabella.

SGAN. (Aside). You lie, minx; it is not she. She is too staunch to those laws of honour which you forsake; you are falsely assuming her name and voice.

ISA. (To Valère). But unless by the holy bonds of matrimony…

VAL. Yes; that is my only purpose; and here I make you a solemn promise that to-morrow I will go wherever you please to be married to you.

SGAN. (Aside). Poor deluded fool!

VAL. Enter with confidence. I now defy the power of your duped Argus; before he can tear you from my love, this arm shall stab him to the heart a thousand times.

SCENE IV.—SGANARELLE, alone.

Oh, I can assure you I do not want to take from you a shameless girl, so blinded by her passion. I am not jealous of your promise to her; if I am to be believed, you shall be her husband. Yes, let us surprise him with this bold creature. The memory of her father, who was justly respected, and the great interest I take in her sister, demand that an attempt, at least, should be made to restore her honour. Hulloa, there! (Knocks at the door of a magistrate).

[Footnote: See page 261, note 5.]

SCENE V.—SGANARELLE, A MAGISTRATE, A NOTARY, ATTENDANT with a lantern.

MAG. What is it?

SGAN. Your servant, your worship. Your presence in official garb is necessary here. Follow me, please, with your lantern-bearer.

MAG. We were going…

SGAN. This is a very pressing business.

MAG. What is it?

SGAN. To go into that house and surprise two persons who must be joined in lawful matrimony. It is a girl with whom I am connected, and whom, under promise of marriage, a certain Valère has seduced and got into his house. She comes of a noble and virtuous family, but…

MAG. If that is the business, it was well you met us, since we have a notary here.

SGAN. Sir?

NOT. Yes, a notary royal.

MAG. And what is more, an honourable man.

SGAN. No need to add that. Come to this doorway; make no noise, but see that no one escapes. You shall be fully satisfied for your trouble, but be sure and do not let yourself be bribed.

MAG. What! do you think that an officer of justice…

SGAN. What I said was not meant as a reflection on your position. I will bring my brother here at once; only let the lantern-bearer accompany me. (Aside). I am going to give this placable man a treat. Hulloa! (Knocks at Ariste's door).

* * * * *

SCENE VI.—ARISTE, SGANARELLE.

AR. Who knocks? Why, what do you want, brother?

SGAN. Come, my fine teacher, my superannuated buck; I shall have something pretty to show you.

AR. How?

SGAN. I bring you good news.

AR. What is it?

SGAN. Where is your Léonor, pray?

AR. Why this question? She is, as I think, at a friend's house at a ball.

SGAN. Eh! Oh yes! Follow me; you shall see to what ball Missy is gone.

AR. What do you mean?

SGAN. You have brought her up very well indeed. It is not good to be always finding fault; the mind is captivated by much tenderness; and suspicious precautions, bolts, and bars, make neither wives nor maids virtuous; we cause them to do evil by so much austerity; their sex demands a little freedom. Of a verity she has taken her fill of it, the artful girl; and with her, virtue has grown very complaisant.

AR. What is the drift of such a speech?

SGAN. Bravo, my elder brother! it is what you richly deserve; I would not for twenty pistoles that you should have missed this fruit of your silly maxims. Look what our lessons have produced in these two sisters: the one avoids the gallants, the other runs after them.

AR. If you will not make your riddle clearer…

SGAN. The riddle is that her ball is at Valère's; that I saw her go to him under cover of night, and that she is at this moment in his arms.

AR. Who?

SGAN. Léonor.

AR. A truce to jokes, I beg of you.

SGAN. I joke… He is excellent with his joking! Poor fellow! I tell you, and tell you again, that Valère has your Léonor in his house, and that they had pledged each other before he dreamed of running after Isabella.

AR. This story is so very improbable…

SGAN. He will not believe it, even when he sees it. I am getting angry; upon my word, old age is not good for much when brains are wanting!

(Laying his finger on his forehead).

AR. What! brother, you mean to…

SGAN. I mean nothing, upon my soul! Only follow me. Your mind shall be satisfied directly. You shall see whether I am deceiving you, and whether they have not pledged their troth for more than a year past.

AR. Is it likely she could thus have agreed to this engagement without telling me?—me! who in everything, from her infancy, ever displayed towards her a complete readiness to please, and who a hundred times protested I would never force her inclinations.

SGAN. Well, your own eyes shall judge of the matter. I have already brought here a magistrate and a notary. We are concerned that the promised marriage shall at once restore to her the honour she has lost; for I do not suppose you are so mean-spirited as to wish to marry her with this stain upon her, unless you have still some arguments to raise you above all kinds of ridicule.

AR. For my part, I shall never be so weak as wish to possess a heart in spite of itself. But, after all, I cannot believe…

SGAN. What speeches you make! Come, this might go on for ever.

SCENE VII.—SGANARELLE, ARISTE, A MAGISTRATE, A NOTARY.

MAG. There is no need to use any compulsion here, gentlemen. If you wish to have them married, your anger may be appeased on the spot. Both are equally inclined to it; Valère has already given under his hand a statement that he considers her who is now with him as his wife.

AR. The girl…

MAG. Is within, and will not come out, unless you consent to gratify their desires.

SCENE VIII.—VALÈRE, A MAGISTRATE, A NOTARY, SGANARELLE, ARISTE.

VAL. (At the window of his house). No, gentlemen; no man shall enter here until your pleasure be known to me. You know who I am; I have done my duty in signing the statement, which they can show you. If you intend to approve of the marriage, you must also put your names to this agreement; if not, prepare to take my life before you shall rob me of the object of my love.

SGAN. No, we have no notion of separating you from her. (Aside). He has not yet been undeceived in the matter of Isabella. Let us make the most of his mistake.

AR. (To Valère). But is it Léonor?

SGAN. Hold your tongue!

AR. But…

SGAN. Be quiet!

AR. I want to know…

SGAN. Again! Will you hold your tongue, I say?

VAL. To be brief: whatever be the consequence, Isabella has my solemn promise; I also have hers; if you consider everything, I am not so bad a match that you should blame her.

AR. What he says is not…

SGAN. Be quiet! I have a reason for it. You shall know the mystery. (To Valére). Yes, without any more words, we both consent that you shall be the husband of her who is at present in your house.

MAG. The contract is drawn up in those very terms, and there is a blank for the name, as we have not seen her. Sign. The lady can set you all at ease by-and-by.

VAL. I agree to the arrangement.

SGAN. And so do I, with all my heart. (Aside). We will have a good laugh presently. (Aloud). There, brother, sign; yours the honour to sign first.

AR. But why all this mystery…

SGAN. The deuce! what hesitation. Sign, you simpleton.

AR. He talks of Isabella, and you of Léonor.

SGAN. Are you not agreed, brother, if it be she, to leave them to their mutual promises?

AR. Doubtless.

SGAN. Sign, then; I shall do the same.

AR. So be it. I understand nothing about it.

SGAN. You shall be enlightened.

MAG. We will soon return.

(Exeunt Magistrate and Notary into Valeère's house).

SGAN. (To Ariste). Now, then, I will give you a cue to this intrigue. (They retire to the back of the stage).

SCENE IX.—LÉONOR, SGANARELLE, ARISTE, LISETTE.

LEO. Ah, what a strange martyrdom! What bores all those young fools appear to me! I have stolen away from the ball, on account of them.

LIS. Each of them tried to make himself agreeable to you.

LEO. And I never endured anything more intolerable. I should prefer the simplest conversation to all the babblings of these say-nothings.

[Footnote: The original has contes bleus, literally "blue stories" because old tales, such as The Four Sons of Aymon, Fortunatus, Valentine and Orson were formerly sold, printed on coarse paper and with blue paper cover; a kind of popular, but not political, "blue-books."]

They fancy that everything must give way before their flaxen wigs, and think they have said the cleverest witticism when they come up, with their silly chaffing tone, and rally you stupidly about the love of an old man. For my part, I value more highly the affection of such an old man than all the giddy raptures of a youthful brain. But do I not see…

SGAN (To Ariste). Yes, so the matter stands. (Perceiving Léonor). Ah, there she is, and her maid with her.

AR. Léonor, without being angry, I have reason to complain. You know whether I have ever sought to restrain you, and whether I have not stated a hundred times that I left you full liberty to gratify your own wishes; yet your heart, regardless of my approval, has pledged its faith, as well as its love, without my knowledge. I do not repent of my indulgence; but your conduct certainly annoys me; it is a way of acting which the tender friendship I have borne you does not merit.

LEO. I know not why you speak to me thus; but believe me, I am as I have ever been; nothing can alter my esteem for you; love for any other man would seem to me a crime; if you will satisfy my wishes, a holy bond shall unite us to-morrow.

AR. On what foundation, then, have you, brother…

SGAN. What! Did you not come out of Valère's house? Have you not been declaring your passion this very day? And have you not been for a year past in love with him?

LEO. Who has been painting such pretty pictures of me? Who has been at the trouble of inventing such falsehoods?

SCENE X.—ISABELLA, VALÈRE, LÉONOR, ARISTE, SGANARELLE, MAGISTRATE, NOTARY, LISETTE, ERGASTE.

ISA. Sister, I ask you generously to pardon me, if, by the freedom I have taken, I have brought some scandal upon your name. The urgent pressure of a great necessity, suggested to me, some time ago, this disgraceful stratagem. Your example condemns such an escapade; but fortune treated us differently. (To Sganarelle). As for you, sir, I will not excuse myself to you. I serve you much more than I wrong

you. Heaven did not design us for one another. As I found I was unworthy of your love, and undeserving of a heart like yours, I vastly preferred to see myself in another's hands.

VAL. (To Sganarelle). For me, I esteem it my greatest glory and happiness to receive her, sir, from your hands.

AR. Brother, you must take this matter quietly. Your own conduct is the cause of this. I can see it is your unhappy lot that no one will pity you, though they know you have been made a fool of.

LIS. Upon my word, I am glad of this. This reward of his mistrust is a striking retribution.

LEO. I do not know whether the trick ought to be commended; but I am quite sure that I, at least, cannot blame it.

ERG. His star condemns him to be a cuckold; it is lucky for him he is only a retrospective one.

SGAN. (Recovering from the stupor into which he had been plunged). No, I cannot get the better of my astonishment. This faithlessness perplexes my understanding. I think that Satan in person could be no worse than such a jade! I could have sworn it was not in her. Unhappy he who trusts a woman after this! The best of them are always full of mischief; they were made to damn the whole world. I renounce the treacherous sex for ever, and give them to the devil with all my heart!

ERG. Well said.

AR. Let us all go to my house. Come, M. Valère, tomorrow we will try to appease his wrath.

LIS. (To the audience). As for you, if you know any churlish husbands, by all means send them to school with us.

[Footnote: This is the last time Molière directly addressed the audience at the end of

one of his plays; in Sganarelle he did it for the first time.]

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