

## LES PRÉCIEUSES RIDICULES

By Molière  
Translated by Brett B. Bodemer  
2021

### CHARACTERS

LA GRANGE, *rejected suitor*  
DU CROISY, *rejected suitor*  
GORGIBUS, *solid bourgeois*  
MAGDELON, *daughter of Gorgibus*  
CATHOS, *niece of Gorgibus*  
MAROTTE, *female servant of Magdelon and Cathos*  
ALMANZOR, *lackey of Magdelon and Cathos*  
Le Marquis de MASCARILLE, *valet of La Grange*  
Le Vicomte de JODELET, *valet of Du Croisy*  
Two Chair-Bearers  
Neighbors  
Musicians

*The scene is in Paris, in one of the lower rooms of the house of Gorgibus.*

## SCENE 1

*La Grange, Du Croisy*

DU CROISY

Mr. La Grange...

LA GRANGE

Yes?

DU CROISY

Look me in the eye, and tell me the truth.

LA GRANGE

Yes?

DU CROISY

What do you think of our visit? Did it go well?

LA GRANGE

What do *you* think?

DU CROISY

Not well at all, to be honest.

LA GRANGE

Well, I was certainly appalled. It's hard to imagine two country chickens putting on airs like that and treating us so poorly. Why, they barely had the decency to ask us to sit! All that whispering, yawning, rubbing of the eyes, and constantly asking, "What time is it?" And no matter what we said the best they could summon up was just "yes" or "no." You'd have thought we were the scum of the earth, the way treated us!

DU CROISY

It seems you are taking this quite personally.

LA GRANGE

You bet I am! And I vow I'll pay them back in their own kind! I know the source of their impertinence, it is no mystery. This stilted fashion of precious bearing has infected not only Paris, but has flowed into the provinces, where our two squabs have sucked up their full share of it. What they served up to us was a foamy broth of flirtation and preciousness. I see clearly now what it takes to be well-received here, and if you trust me, we can play a trick on them which will make them grasp their foolishness and better know their place.

DU CROISY  
How, exactly?

LA GRANGE  
I have a valet, named Mascarille, who passes among some people for a man of refined wit and manners – and at the moment there is no better currency. This eccentric servant has taken it into his head to be deemed a man of quality – dallying in gallantry and verse, and scorning other valets as lowly brutes.

DU CROISY  
So what do you propose?

LA GRANGE  
Propose? Well, we must... but let's get out of here first.

SCENE 2  
*Gorgibus, Du Croisy, La Grange*

GORGIBUS  
Ah! So you have seen my niece and my daughter! Things went well?

LA GRANGE  
You might want to ask them. But we give you many thanks for the favor that *you* have shown us, and remain your very humble servants.

GORGIBUS  
Hmm... Rather bent, I'd say. What's happened here? I must know more. Hey!

SCENE 3  
*Marotte, Gorgibus*

MAROTTE  
What do you wish, Sir?

GORGIBUS  
Where are your mistresses?

MAROTTE  
In their study.

GORGIBUS

What are they doing?

MAROTTE

Making pomade for their lips.

GORGIBUS

Again with the pomade!? Tell them to come down immediately. These wretches are out to ruin me with their pomade! Everywhere I look I see nothing but egg whites, virgin milk, and a thousand powders, creams and little gadgets I've never seen before. Since we arrived here they've used up the lard of at least a dozen pigs, and four valets could have dined their way to the afterlife on the sheep-hooves they've used up.

SCENE 4

*Magdelon, Cathos, Gorgibus*

GORGIBUS

Is it really necessary to spend such a fortune on greasing your snouts? And tell me: what have you done to make these two gentlemen leave so coldly? Didn't I command you to receive them as men of esteem, suitable as husbands?

MAGEDELON

And what esteem, my father, should we have had for their shocking conduct?

CATHOS

Yes, my uncle, how could you suggest that a girl of even remotely right mind could possibly endure them?

GORGIBUS

And just what was it you found so wrong with them?

MAGDELON

Ah, such sublime gallantry! What!? To start off by talk of marriage?

GORGIBUS

And where exactly would you have them start off? With adultery? Shouldn't we in fact consider this a point of praise? Is there nothing more honorable than this? And isn't the sacred bond they aspired to a testament to the integrity of their intentions?

MAGDELON

Oh, my dear father, you're hopeless! I feel ashamed to hear you speak in this manner, and you should at least try a little bit to learn a finer way of phrasing things.

GORGIBUS

Well, I don't know a finer way to phrase it than this. I tell you marriage is a simple and sacred thing, and honest men start with that.

MAGDELON

My God, if everyone felt like you, a novel would end in the prologue! A beautiful thing if Cyrus married Mandane at the outset, and Aronce married Clélie right away.

GORGIBUS

What in the world is she talking about?

MAGDELON

My father, my cousin and I are of one mind in these matters, and either of us can truly describe how marriage should take place only after a course of tribulations and adventures. A pleasing lover must know how to draw the milk from beautiful sentiments, expressing sweetness, tenderness and passion; he knows how to conduct his quest while respecting the proper forms. First, in the temple, or on a promenade, or in some public gathering, his gaze must alight on the woman of whom he becomes forthwith amorous; or else he must be fatefully conducted to her by a relative or friend, and depart in a reverie of melancholy. He must conceal his passion for a time from the object of his love, yet nonetheless render several visits, and never miss an opportunity to raise a gallant question on which the assembled wits can exercise themselves. The day of his declaration arrives, which is usually made in an arbored garden path, with the company but a little removed; and this declaration is followed by a prompt wrath, which appears in our blushing, and which, for a time, banishes the lover from our presence. After he discovers a way to appease us, and insensibly accustoms us to the discourse of his passion, he draws from us a vow which his pain has brought him to implore of us. Then come the adventures - rivals who throw themselves in the path of the established inclination, the persecution of fathers, jealous fits caused by false appearances, laments, despairs, and transports. That is how one accords with the good manners and rules of refined gallantry, which should never be dispensed with. But to come out and ask point blank for conjugal union, to court only to the extent of signing the marriage contract, is to put the cart before the horse. Again, my father, there is nothing more vulgar than this, and the thought of it alone disposes me to indelible nausea.

GORGIBUS

A beautiful style, indeed! What is this gibberish?

CATHOS

In fact, my uncle, my cousin has spoken most eloquently. How could we ever entertain men so utterly incommensurate with gallantry? I would wager that they have never seen the Portolan Chart of Love, and that amorous letters, sweet gestures and beautiful poems are for them an entirely unknown world. Isn't it obvious even to you that they are wholly deficient in the debonair bearing that inspires good opinion? To come courting in plain trousers unadorned by any lace, with such horrific hair and crowned by defenseless hats all unarmed with feathers -

My God! – and the entire ensemble suffering from an indigence of ribbons! And all this so perfectly matched by their drab dialogue. My God, what lovers are these! It's outrageous! I would also note that their buckles were from an inferior maker and should have been at least half again as large.

GORGIBUS

Have they inhaled too much pomade? Is this even French? Cathos, and you, Magdelon...

MAGDELON

Father! Refrain from these frightful names, and please use others.

GORGIBUS

What do you mean, frightful names? Aren't these the ones you were given at baptism?

MAGDELON

My God! You are so common! Sometimes I marvel that you could have had any part in the making of a daughter as inspired as myself. Has anyone *ever* spoken in the beautiful style either the name Cathos or Magdelon? Who could disavow that either name if used only once would shatter the most beautiful novel in the world?

CATHOS

It's true, my uncle. Even the most indelicate ear radically recoils when it hears these dissonant syllables. And so we have chosen others. The name of Polyxene, which my cousin has chosen, and that of Arminthe, which I have given myself, bear superlative grace which even you must recognize as undeniable.

GORGIBUS

No, no. I must speak bluntly. I do not recognize these other names, but only those that were given to you by your parents. As for these gentlemen who just left, their families and their means are fully known to me, and I am determined that you will take them as husbands. I grow weary of having you on my hands, for serving as a guardian for two young girls is just too heavy a burden for a man my age.

CATHOS

My uncle, all I can say is that I find marriage to be a totally shocking thing. How can one bear the thought sleeping next to a man who is unambiguously naked?

MAGDELON

Allow us at least a little breathing room in the high world of Paris, where we've just arrived. Let us weave the fabric of our novel at leisure, and not rush it to a conclusion.

GORGIBUS

No doubt about it – they've lost their minds. Once more, let me be clear: I will listen to no more of this nonsense. I will be absolute master! And to end all discussion, let me declare:

both of you will either be married soon, or you will both be nuns! It's as simple as that, I swear it!

SCENE 5

*Cathos, Magdelon*

CATHOS

My God, my dear! How frightful to see your father's spirit so deeply sunk in matter! And how his obtuse mind obtrudes such darkness on his soul!

MAGDELON

But what's to be done? Honestly, I am at a loss to explain him. I can scarcely persuade myself that I am really his daughter, and expect any day now that some marvellous event will reveal the truth of my more illustrious birth.

CATHOS

I am fully persuaded of it, too, for all signs point to it. And when I look at myself ...

SCENE 6

*Marotte, Cathos, Magdelon*

MAROTTE

A servant is asking if you are at home, and says his master would like to see you.

MAGDELON

Learn, you ignorant dolt, to announce people less crassly. Say "A functionary inquires to know if you are in a state susceptible to admitting visitors."

MAROTTE

Madame, you know I don't know Latin. Nor have I learned as you have the subtle philosophy in the *Grand Cyrus*.

MAGDELON

Ah, such impudence! How can one stand it? And just who is he, the lackey's master?

MAROTTE

The Marquis de Mascarille.

MAGDELON

Ah, my precious, a Marquis! Yes, go say that we can see him. It is doubtless some refined wit who has heard rumor of us!

CATHOS

There can be no doubt, my dear.

MAGDELON

We must receive them below. But let us take a moment to touch up our hair and uphold our reputations. Quickly, bring us the counselor of graces.

MAROTTE

What? You must speak like a Christian if you want to be understood.

CATHOS

Bring us the mirror, ignoramus, and be careful not to soil the glass by communicating your image to it.

SCENE 7

*Mascarille, Two Chair-Bearers*

MASCARILLE

Hey! Bearers, hey! La, la, la, la, la, la ! I think these brutes want to break me to pieces by crashing against these stone walls.

FIRST PORTER

Hey! The gate is narrow and you if you was us you would have done no better.

MASCARILLE

Fortunately, I do not suffer the misfortune of being you; and I have an inkling that you would prefer that I expose the splendor of my feathers to the inclement weather, and lay the inimitable pattern of my shoeprints in the mud. Go, be off now with your chair.

SECOND PORTER

Pay us first, if you please, Sir.

MASCARILLE

What?

SECOND PORTER

I said, Sir, that you should give us our money, if you please.

MASCARILLE, *slapping him*

What, wretch, demand money from a man of quality!

SECOND PORTER

Is this how one pays poor men? Will your quality give us something for dinner?

MASCARILLE

Ah! ah! ah! I will teach you to know yourselves! These low-lives dare play with me!

FIRST PORTER, *taking one of the chair-poles*

There! Pay us now.

MASCARILLE

What?

FIRST PORTER

I want my money right now.

MASCARILLE

That's reasonable.

FIRST PORTER

Out with it, then.

MASCARILLE

Yes, yes. You speak as you should, you do; but the other one is a wretch that doesn't know how to speak. There. Are you happy?

FIRST PORTER

No, I am not happy. You slapped my friend.

MASCARILLE

Easy now. Here, there's for the slap. One gets everything from me if one takes the right approach. Go, and come back soon, in order to carry me to the Louvre to attend the King's private bedtime.

SCENE 8

*Marotte, Mascarille*

MAROTTE

Sir, my mistresses will be here soon.

MASCARILLE

Do not rush them unduly; I am posted comfortably here, and will await their arrival.

MAROTEE

Here they are.

SCENE 9

*Magdelon, Cathos, Mascarille, Almanzor*

MASCARILLE, *after bowing*

My ladies, you will be surprised, no doubt, by the temerity of my visit; but you owe this indiscretion to your reputation; for the powerful charms of merit require that I pursue them everywhere.

MAGDELON

If you pursue merit, it is not on our lands that you should hunt for it.

CATHOS

If you find merit among us, you must have brought it here yourself.

MASCARILLE

No, Ladies ! I object to this false allegation. Yet it is now clear to me that renown justly accuses the two of you, for you thrust and parry with as great agility as any wits in Paris.

MAGDELON

Your kindness unjustly swells your praises to the limits of effusion; and we do not dare, my cousin and myself, to take the honey of your flattery to heart.

CATHOS

But my dear, we must have seats brought.

MAGDELON

Hey! Almanzor!

ALMANZOR

Madame.

MAGDELON

Quickly, convey to us the vehicles of conversation.

MASCARILLE

But, alas, is there any safety for me here?

CATHOS

What are you afraid of?

MASCARILLE

Some theft of my heart, some assassination of my liberty! I see here eyes full of potent mischief, likely to assail my freedom and cruelly bind me in chains as the Turk did the Moor. At my first approach their intent unsheathes like a glinting blade. Oh! By my faith, I distrust them! I must either take to my feet, or demand a solid guarantee that they will do me no harm.

MAGDELON

My dear, this fellow has stepped right out of a book.

CATHOS

Yes, he's a true Amilcar.

MAGDELON

Have no fear: our eyes bear no evil designs, and your heart can relax its guard in assurance of their integrity.

CATHOS

But please, Sir, do not be so pitiless towards this chair that has beckoned to you with its arms for a quarter hour; satisfy its desire to embrace you.

MASCARILLE, *after combing his hair and adjusting his lace*  
And indeed, Ladies, what do you think of Paris?

MAGDELON

Alas! What can we say? It would be the antipodes of reason to deny that Paris is the emporium of marvels, the epicenter of good taste, fine wit and gallantry.

MASCARILLE

For myself, I am convinced that, for men of refinement, beyond the confines of Paris there is no hope of salvation.

CATHOS

Who can contest it?

MASCARILLE

True, it is a bit muddy; but we do have the chair.

MAGDELON

And as we know, the chair is a marvelous rampart against the assaults of mud and ill weather.

MASCARILLE

Doubtless you receive many visitors: do tell which fine wits grace the bezel of your ring?

MAGDELON

Alas! We are not yet known, but are well on our way, and a friend has promised to lead hither the esteemed authors of that sublime tome, *Quintessential Epigrams*.

CATHOS

And he will bring others, moreover, known as sovereign arbiters of taste.

MASCARILLE

Dare I suggest, Ladies, that I may best accomplish this for you? For all the finest wits visit me, and I never rise in the morning without a handful of elegant souls in attendance.

MAGDELON

Ah! Our indebtedness would surpass all bounds if you were to render us such service. For in the end one must be acquainted with all such gentlemen if one aspires to high society. Such brilliant wits are of high repute in Paris; and for certain of them, just one visit alone suffices to give one renown as a connoisseur. Yet just as importantly one learns during their enlightening visits a hundred things that one absolutely must not *not* know. One keeps up with the latest reverses in love and with the most recent exchanges in verse and prose. One learns enough to say "So-and-so has composed the world's most beautiful play on such a subject; another has put startling new words to a tried-and-true melody; this one has composed a joyful madrigal; this other has written stanzas on infidelity; yesterday evening Sir So-and-so wrote a sestina to Lady Such-and-such, to which she responded at eight o'clock this morning; such an author devised a new plot twist; another has begun the third part of his novel." Knowing all of this and knowing it all early is what gives you worth in company.

CATHOS

In fact, it simply exceeds the ridiculous to preen oneself as a wit without knowing the smallest quatrain composed every day. And for myself, I could suffer no worse shame in the world than if someone came to ask me if I had seen something new and I had not seen it.

MASCARILLE

Truly, it is shameful not to be the first in the know. But don't worry. In no time I will establish in this very salon an Academy of Great Wits – and there will not be a scrap of verse in Paris that you won't know by heart before anyone else even hears it. I, too, make rhymes when the mood takes me, and in the most elegant chambers of Paris you can hear two hundred of my songs, as many sonnets, four hundred epigrams and a folio of madrigals, not to mention enigmas and portraits.

MAGDELON

I swear I am transported by portraits; I've never seen anything so gallant.

MASCARILLE

Portraits are difficult, and require a penetrating spirit: there are not a few of mine, which, when you see them, certainly will not altogether displease you.

CATHOS

Myself, I am insane over enigmas.

MASCARILLE

These tantalize the mind, and in fact, I made four of them just this morning, which I will give you shortly to guess.

MAGDELON

Madrigals are divine, when well turned.

MASCARILLE

They are a special talent of mine; and I am putting all of Roman history into madrigals.

MAGDELON

That will surely be the crown of beauty. I must have at least one copy of it, if you have it printed.

MASCARILLE

I promise you each one, bound in the finest Moroccan leather. Of course I have little concern to be published, but you know how persistent these booksellers are, and they will not leave me alone.

MAGDELON

It must be a great pleasure to see oneself in print!

MASCARILLE

I imagine so. By the way, I simply must recite an impromptu to you that I devised yesterday while visiting a Duchess friend of mine. When it comes to impromptus I am superb.

CATHOS

The impromptu is the touchstone of wit.

MASCARILLE

Listen, then.

MAGDELON

We are all ears.

MASCARILLE

*Oh! Oh! I am so heedless,  
While, not dreaming of evil, I see you,  
Your eye covertly steals my heart from me.  
Thief! Thief! Thief! Thief!*

CATHOS

Ah! That is the last word in gallantry.

MASCARILLE

Everything I do has a cavalier air, and reeks not of the scholar.

MAGDELON

Indeed, this leaves all bookishness in the dust.

MASCARILLE

Did you notice the beginning? *Oh! Oh!?* There's something extraordinary: *Oh! Oh!* As though a man suddenly recognizes his situation all at once: *Oh, Oh!* Sheer surprise: *Oh! Oh!*

MAGDELON

Yes, I find that *Oh! Oh!* admirable!

MASCARILLE

It's nothing, really.

CATHOS

Oh! What are you saying? Such off-handed effusions are priceless.

MAGDELON

So true; and I would rather have written this *Oh! Oh!* than an entire epic poem!

MASCARILLE

My God, you do have good taste.

MAGDELON

I dare avow that it is not totally bad.

MASCARILLE

But do you not also admire *I am so heedless, I am so heedless?* I had not noticed it myself at first: a way of speaking naturally: *I am so heedless, while, not dreaming of evil*, while innocently, without malice, like a poor sheep; *I see you*, that is to say, I entertain myself in considering you, I watch you, I contemplate you; *Your eye covertly...* How do you like this word, *covertly*? Is it not well chosen?

CATHOS

Beautifully so.

MASCARILLE

*Covertly*, not out in the open: it is like a cat that spies a mouse: *covertly*.

MAGDELON

Nothing could be better.

MASCARILLE

*Steals my heart from me, simply ravishes me. Thief, thief, thief, thief!* Would you not say that this is a man who cries right after a robbery? *Thief, thief, thief, thief!*

MAGDELON

One must avow that this is an inspired and gallant turn of words.

MASCARILLE

I feel impelled to sing it to the tune I composed for it.

CATHOS

You have learned music?

MASCARILLE

Me? Not at all.

CATHOS

How can that be?

MASCARILLE

It's simple: men of quality know everything without ever having learned anything.

MAGDELON

Everyone knows that, my dear.

MASCARILLE

Listen, and tell me if you find the tune to your taste. *Hem, hem. La, la, la, la, la.* This beastly weather has intensely violated the delicacy of my voice; but no matter, I will serve it up cavalierly, as best I can.

*(He sings.)*

*Oh! Oh! I am so heedless ...*

CATHOS

Ah! This tune is insanely imbued with passion. Couldn't one just die?

MAGDELON

So chromatic!

MASCARILLE

Do you not find the thought well expressed in the singing? *Thief!* ... and then, as if one cried out strongly, *Oh! Oh! Oh, thief!* Then all of a sudden, like a person out of breath, *Oh, thief!*

MAGDELON

Ah, yes, now that is knowing how to end, a grand end, the ending of all endings! It is all marvellous, I assure you; I am in thrall to both the music and words.

CATHOS

I have never experienced anything so powerful.

MASCARILLE

And it all came to me naturally, without study.

MAGDELON

Nature has treated you like a loving mother, and you are her darling child.

MASCARILLE

So how do you pass your time?

CATHOS

Doing nothing, or very little.

MAGDELON

Alas, until now we have endured a horrific famine of diversions.

MASCARILLE

Allow me one of these days, then, if you please, Ladies, to take you to the theater. In fact, a new play is about to open, and it would be my great pleasure to invite you to join me.

MAGDELON

How could we refuse?

MASCARILLE

But there is one condition. I must ask you to applaud when necessary: for I have agreed to show the worth of the play through my favor. The author came again this morning to beseech me. For it is the custom here for authors to read their plays to gentlemen in the hopes we shall find them good and give them reputation. I am very punctilious in this, and once I have promised a poet that I will show my support, I shout through the whole performance. I even cry out "*It's Magnificent!*" before the candles are lit.

MAGDELON

It is such an amazing place, Paris! A hundred things happen here each day that go all unknown in the impoverished countryside.

CATHOS

And since you have been kind enough to instruct us, we will do our duty and shriek our approval whenever you say.

MASCARILLE

Perhaps I am mistaken, but has anyone ever taken you for an actress?

MAGDELON

There might be something in what you say.

MASCARILLE

Ah! We shall see. By the way, have I told you that I have composed a play that I plan to have staged?

CATHOS

Really? To which company will you give it?

MASCARILLE

Silly question! To the only company that knows how to play it for all its worth. The other companies are full of ignorant players who – believe it or not - act the way people actually talk, and who do not know how to be bombastic, or how to halt completely at the pivotal phrase. But how else are we to tell where the verse is most beautiful if the actor does not stop and so let us know that we must applaud?

CATHOS

Yes, a thing of worth is worthless if the worth be not obvious.

MASCARILLE

What do you think of my accessories? Do they harmonize with my clothes?

CATHOS

From head to toe.

MASCARILLE

The ribbon is choice.

MAGDELON

Awesome. It is Perdrigeon all the way.

MASCARILLE

What do you think of the lace cascading at my knees?

MAGDELON

A fine effect.

MASCARILLE

They are at least half again as large as what is commonly worn.

MAGDELON

You are the epitome of elegance.

MASCARILLE

And these gloves – here, I beg you, inhale the fragrance a moment.

MAGDELON

They smell deliriously good.

CATHOS

I have never imbibed a better-concocted scent.

MASCARILLE, *presenting his wig for olfactory inspection*

And this?

MAGDELON

Completely sublime; it deliciously moves the mind.

MASCARILLE

But you have said nothing about my feathers. Do you not like them?

CATHOS

On the contrary, they are frightfully beautiful.

MASCARILLE

Do you know each plume cost me a gold Louis? Though truly everything is not enough for me, above all else I am most passionate about wearing what is best and most beautiful.

MAGDELON

I assure you that we are alike in that, you and I: I have a sublime delicacy when it comes to what I wear, and I cannot stand it if even my socks are made of rough stock or poorly-made.

MASCARILLE, *crying abruptly*

Aye! Aye! Go easy on me! Please! Ladies, this is no way to treat me. I must complain of your method. It is not honest.

CATHOS

What? What's the matter?

MASCARILLE

What? Both of you try my heart at the same time! Attacking me from left and right! Ah! It is against the laws of men. The parties are unequal, and I am going to cry murder.

CATHOS

One must admit that he has a unique manner.

MAGDELON

Such fascinating turns of wit.

CATHOS

Your fear is greater than your harm, and your heart cries before it is pierced.

MASCARILLE

How can you say that!?! It is pierced from head to foot!

SCENE 10

*Marotte, Mascarille, Cathos, Magdelon*

MAROTTE

Madame, someone asks to see you.

MAGDELON

Who?

MAROTTE

The Viscount Jodelet.

MASCARILLE

The Viscount Jodelet?

MAROTTE

Yes, Sir.

CATHOS

Do you know him?

MASCARILLE

He is my best friend.

MASCARILLE

Have him enter quickly.

MASCARILLE

We have not seen each other for a long while. Indeed, what a lucky chance!

CATHOS

Here he is now.

SCENE 11

*Jodelet, Mascarille, Cathos, Magdelon, Marotte*

MASCARILLE

Ah! Viscount!

*JODELET, as he and Mascarille embrace each other*

Ah! Marquis!

MASCARILLE

I am so happy to see you!

JODELET

And what joy I have in meeting you here!

MASCARILLE

Kiss me once more, I beg of you.

MAGDELON

My dear, look, we are beginning to be known. High society is already beating the path to our door.

MASCARILLE

My Ladies, allow me to present to you this gentleman here. Upon my word, he is worthy of your acquaintance.

JODELET

It is only just to render what one owes; and your attractions exact their lordly rights on all ranks.

MAGDELON

To say so is to stretch your civility to the very extremity of flattery.

CATHOS

Dear, we must note this day in our diary as the happiest day ever.

MAGDELON

Go along, boy, must we always repeat ourselves? Can't you see that we now require the suraddition of an armchair?

MASCARILLE

Do not be stricken to see the Viscount looking so; he has only recently recovered from an illness that has left his face pale as you see.

JODELET

Illness and pallor: such are the rewards of vigils at court and the trials of war.

MASCARILLE

Do you know, Ladies, that you see in the Viscount one of the most valiant men of our age? He is the cream of the crop, the brave of the brave.

JODELET

Spare me your praises, Marquis; for we both know that under the greatest fire your valor proved no less.

MASCARILLE

It is true that we served at the same time.

JODELET

And in the hottest places.

MASCARILLE, *looking at the women*

Yes, but not so hot as here!

JODELET

Our paths intersected in the army; and the first time that we saw each other, the Marquis commanded a cavalry regiment on the galleys of Malta.

MASCARILLE

That is true; but you entered the Army before me; and I was still a petty officer when you commanded two thousand horse.

JODELET

War is beautiful; but, sadly, the court today poorly compensates servants such as ourselves.

MASCARILLE

That's why I've hung my sword on the wall.

CATHOS

I have an intense soft spot for men of the sword.

MAGDELON

I love them, too; but prefer it when that their wit tempers their bravery.

MASCARILLE

Do you recall, Viscount, that night when we carried ourselves against the half-crescent rampart of the enemy at the siege of Arras?

JODELET

Would do you mean, half-crescent? It was a full-crescent rampart.

MASCARILLE

Ah, yes, now that I think of it, you are right.

JODELET

I should well remember it, I should: I was wounded in the leg by a grenade, of which I still bear the marks. Feel a bit, please, you will feel a little scar, right – there.

CATHOS

Indeed, it is a big scar.

MASCARILLE

Give me your hand, and touch that, there, right at the back of the head: do you feel it?

MAGDELON

Yes ... I feel something.

MASCARILLE

That's a musket shot I received during my last campaign.

JODELET

Here is where a sword went right through me through me during the attack at Gravelines.

MASCARILLE, *placing his hand on the button of his pants*

I will show you an intense wound.

MAGDELON

That's not at all necessary: we believe you without seeing it.

MASCARILLE

These are signs of honor which prove who we are.

CATHOS

We do not doubt who you are.

MASCARILLE

Viscount, is your coach still outside?

JODELET

Hm? But why do you ask?

MASCARILLE

Wouldn't it be nice to take these ladies into the freedom of the open air, and give them a countryside diversion?

MAGDELON

But I am sorry; we cannot leave today.

MASCARILLE

Then let us at least have some musicians brought in for a dance!

JODELET

Now that's a fine idea!

MAGDELON

To this we consent; but of course you realize we must then swell our company.

MASCARILLE

Hey! Champagne! Basque! Lorraine! Walloon! La Violet! Damn these lackeys! Where have all my men gone? There's not a gentleman in France served more badly than I. These low-lives are always wandering off and leaving me alone.

MAGDELON

Almanzor, find the Marquis' men and have them summon some musicians, and invite some of our esteemed neighbors to people the solitude of our ball.

MASCARILLE

Viscount, what do you think of these eyes?

JODELET

Well, Marquis, first I would know what you think of them?

MASCARILLE

Me? I fear our liberty will unlikely escape this place without a hearty flush. Even now these eyes send strange shocks to my very bowels, and my solidity hangs by a thread.

MAGDELON

His language is so natural! He puts things in the most beautiful light!

CATHOS

How this image threatens to flow beyond all bounds!

MASCARILLE

To prove the sincerity of what I've just said, I will make an impromptu.

CATHOS

Oh! I beg you to do so, with all the devotion of my heart: so that we might have something that you've pulled out of yourself expressly for us.

JODELET

Of course I would devise one, too, ladies; but I find that the incessant bleedings of the last few days have drained my poetic vigor.

MASCARILLE

Oh, how frustrating! Usually, the first verse comes easily of its own accord, even if later ones require just a bit of effort. But this is entirely too sudden: in any case, I will make you an impromptu at leisure, and I assure you that you will find it most exquisite.

JODELET

He has a wit like lightning.

MAGDELON

Striking and blinding at once.

MASCARILLE

Tell me, Viscount, how long has it been since you've seen the Viscountess?

JODELET

It's been ... at least ...three weeks.

MASCARILLE

Did you know, by the way, that the Duke came to see me this morning. He wished me to go stag-hunting with him in the countryside.

MAGDELON

Ah, here come our friends now.

## SCENE 12

*Jodelet, Mascarille, Cathos, Magdelon, Marotte, Lucile*

MAGDELON

Please forgive us, my dear friends, for this hasty invitation. These men have been seized by the caprice of giving our feet wings; we have invited you here to supplement the vacuity of our company.

LUCILE

We are very obliged for the favor.

MASCARILLE

This is but a makeshift ball; on a future occasion we shall give one with all due formalities. Have the musicians arrived?

ALMANZOR

Yes, Sir; they are here.

CATHOS

Go then, my dears, take your places.

MASCARILLE, *dancing alone by way of prelude*

La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la.

MAGDELON

His figure is the essence of elegance.

CATHOS

And his dancing, too.

MASCARILLE, *taking Magdelon*

Permit me to risk my liberty in inviting you to dance. In time, musicians, in time. Oh! Incompetents! It's impossible to dance. Don't you know how to play in time!?! La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la. Come on, keep the beat, you rustic fiddlers!

JODELET, *dancing next*

Hey ! Not so fast with the tempo: I've barely just recovered from being sick.

## SCENE 13

*Du Croisy, La Grange, Mascarille*

LA GRANGE, *a stick in hand*

Ah ! Ah ! Wretches! What are you doing here ? I've been looking for you for three hours.

MASCARILLE, *feeling the blows.*

Ow! Ow! Ow! You didn't tell me the blows would be this hard.

JODELET

Ow! Ow! Ow!

LA GRANGE

That's for you, wretch, posing as a man of station.

DU CROISY

That will teach you to know your place.

*(They leave.)*

SCENE 14

*Mascarille, Jodelet, Cathos, Magdelon*

MAGDELON

What's this all about?

JODELET

It's a bet.

CATHOS

What!?! You let yourself be beaten like that!

MASCARILLE

In truth, ladies, I did not dare react, because I am a violent man, and I was afraid I might lose all self-control.

MAGDELON

Endure an affront like that, in our presence!?

MASCARILLE

It's nothing, really. We've known each other a long time; and friends do not fall out over such a small thing.

SCENE 15

*Du Croisy, La Grange, Mascarille, Jodelet, Magdelon*

LA GRANGE

My word, you posers will not laugh at us, I promise you.

MAGDELON

How dare you come into our house and disturb us in this manner?

DU CROISY

Ask instead, ladies, how we dare endure that you receive our lackeys better than ourselves? Or how we can bear to let them pay court to you at our expense, even going so far as to give you a ball?

MAGDELON

Your lackeys?

LA GRANGE

Yes, our lackeys: and it is neither slightly nor dignified that you favor them as you do.

MAGDELON

Is it possible? What insolence!

LA GRANGE

But we shall no longer allow them the advantage of our clothes which perhaps raises them in your esteem; and if you would love them now, it will be for their own merits. Quickly, off with those clothes!

JODELET

Farewell, fine trimmings!

MASCARILLE

Behold what lies beneath the Viscount and the Marquis!

DU CROISY

Ha! Scoundrels, you have the audacity to trade on our stock? You must look elsewhere for graces that will render you agreeable to the eyes of your beauties.

LA GRANGE

Try and replace us, with our own clothes even? It is too much!

MASCARILLE

O Fortune, how inconstant you are!

DU CROISY

Quickly, strip down to the least thing.

LA GRANGE

More! All! Quickly! Hurry! Now, my ladies, in the state they are in, love them as much as you please. We leave you every liberty for that, and I assure you we shall bear no jealousy at all.

CATHOS

How can this be? This is the worst!

MAGDELON

I must crawl away and die of shame.

MUSICIANS, *to the Marquis*

What does this mean, then? Who's going to pay us?

MASCARILLE

Ask the Viscount.

MUSICIANS, *to the Viscount*

Who's going to pay us?

JODELET

Ask the Marquis.

SCENE 16

*Gorgibus, Mascarille, Magdelon*

GORGIBUS

Ah! From what I see here you two have really outdone yourself! And exactly how you two foppettes have carried on, the gentlemen just told me as they left.

MAGDELON

Ah! My father, they have played a spiteful trick on us!

GORGIBUS

Yes, that's so – but it was *you* who made them spiteful! And though I am in no way happy about it, we have no choice but to swallow the affront.

MAGDELON

Ah! If I be not revenged, I shall die of shame. And you, imposters, you dare to stay here after this outrageous insolence?

MASCARILLE

Treat a Marquis like this! So that's how the world is! The least disgrace – and those who cherished us suddenly spurn us! Come, my friend, let us go seek a better fortune elsewhere. It is clear that only vain appearance is loved here, while naked virtue gets no respect at all.

*(They both leave.)*

SCENE 17

*Gorgibus, Magdelon, Cathos, Musicians*

MUSICIANS

Sir, we've heard that you will satisfy their failure to pay.

GORGIBUS, *beating them*

I will satisfy you, all right. And here is the money I will pay you with. And you two, I don't know why I don't do the same to you. We'll be the stuff of fable and ridicule, the laughing stock of the world, thanks to you and your empty preciousness! Go hide yourselves; foolish geese, go hide yourselves forever. And you who have caused their folly - novels, poems, songs, and sonnets – all the pernicious amusements of idle minds – you can all go down a long, deep well to the devil!