LES PRÉCIEUSES RIDICULES

By Molière
Translated by Brett B. Bodemer
2021

CHARACTERS

LA GRANGE, rejected suitor
DU CROISY, rejected suitor
GORGBUS, solid bourgeois
MAGDEMON, daughter of Gorgibus
CATHOS, niece of Gorgibus
MARTOTTE, 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.

GORGBUS
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

GORGBUS
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?

MAGDELENON
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?

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

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

GORGBUS
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?

MAGDELENON
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.
GOR GI BUS
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.

MAGDELO N
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.

GOR GI BUS
What in the world is she talking about?

MAGDELO N
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.

GOR GI BUS
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...

MAGDEلون
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?

MAGDEلون
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 Arminte, 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?

MAGDEلون
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.

MAGDELMON
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 ! 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-lifes 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
Madelon, 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.

MAGDELEON
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.

MAGDELEON
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.

MAGDELEON
Hey! Almanzor!

ALMANZOR
Madame.

MAGDELEON
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.

MAGDEilon
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 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.

MAGDEilon
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.

MAGDELMON
Madrigals are divine, when well turned.

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

MAGDELMON
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.

MAGDELMON
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.

MAGDELMON
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.

MAGDEلون
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!

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

MASCARILLE
It’s nothing, really.

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

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

MASCARILLE
My God, you do have good taste.

MAGDEلون
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!*

**MAGDELANO**
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.

**MAGDELANO**
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.

**MAGDELANO**
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.

**MAGDELANO**
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.

**MAGDELANO**
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.

MAGDE rON
You are the epitome of elegance.

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

MAGDE rON
They smell deliriously good.

CATHOS
I have never imbibed a better-concocted scent.

MASCARILLE, presenting his wig for olfactory inspection
And this?

MAGDE rON
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.

MAGDE rON
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.

MAGDELOON
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.

MAGDELOON
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.
MAGDEلون
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.

MAGDELFON
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?

MAGDELFON
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 during the attack at Gravelines.

MASCARILLE, placing his hand on the button of his pants
I will show you an intense wound.

MAGDELFON
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?

MAGDE rON
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!

MAGDE rON
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-lifes are
always wandering off and leaving me alone.

MAGDE rON
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.
MAGDEilon
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.

Magdeilon
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.

Magdeilon
Ah, here come our friends now.
SCENE 12
Jodelet, Mascarille, Cathos, Magdelon, Marotte, Lucile

MAGDELOM
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.

MAGDELOM
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.

MAGDELMON
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?

MAGDELMON
Your lackeys?

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

MAGDELMON
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!

MAGDEلون
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.

MAGDEلون
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.

MAGDEلون
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!