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Dramatis Personae

SGANARELLE, brother to Ariste

ARISTE, brother to Sganarelle

ISABELLE, sister to Leonor, plighted to Sganarelle

LEONOR, sister to Isabelle, plighted to Ariste

LISETTE, waiting maid to Leonor

VALERE, suitor of Isabelle

ERGASTE, valet to Valere

MAGISTRATE

NOTARY

The Scene

Throughout: The Street outside the homes of Sganarelle, Ariste, Valere and the Magistrate in Paris.

About the Play

The School for Husbands (first produced in 1661) is the lesser-known precursor to *The School for Wives*, produced the following year. *School for Husbands* is the shorter piece, in three acts, but the themes are nearly identical. In both, a domineering older man insists that the only way to maintain one's wife's fidelity is to limit her exposure to the corrupt outside world. And while in *School for Wives*, we find the man essentially digging his own grave, as each precaution he takes has the opposite effect intended, in *School for Husbands*, we find the wife foiling his plans with her own initiative. It turns Isabelle into a much stronger, more resourceful character than Agnes of *School for Wives*.

The play begins amid an argument between Sganarelle and his brother, Ariste, about the care of two orphaned sisters with whom the men have been entrusted. While the elder brother, Ariste, treats his ward with generosity and permissiveness, Sganarelle insists that allowing a girl to circulate in society will only corrupt her, and thus has chosen to keep his ward, Isabelle, locked up at home. Impudent arguments from Ariste's ward, Leonor, and her maid, Lisette, only serve to further Sganarelle's point.

From her isolated balcony, Isabelle sees the young suitor, Valere, and falls in love with him. She plots ingenious ways to communicate with the young man, for instance, pretending to be offended by an overt interest that Valere has expressed (even though he never made any such entreaty). She repeatedly sends Sganarelle to confront him with messages of rebuke, and in the process manages to cue Valere to her own actual interest. When Valere acknowledges that Sganarelle is obviously the victor in their competition for her heart, he asks whether he can at least see Isabelle, to hear the rejection from her own lips.

Isabelle pretends a further outrage at this turn of events and (without naming names) expounds at length that, of the two men that Heaven has sent to her, one is entirely repugnant, while the other she would have for her very own. Sganarelle's vanity and Isabelle's cleverness keeps him from seeing the double meaning in her words, but they work their effect on Valere.

Sganarelle surprises Isabelle with plans for their immediate marriage, and she improvises a lie, confessing that Leonor is hiding in her room, awaiting the arrival of Valere, with whom she has secretly been having an affair. Sganarelle insists that "Leonor" immediately leave his house and, under cover of night, Isabelle, veiled and disguised, steals unimpeded over to Valere's home. Sganarelle follows, summoning both a notary and Ariste to the scene. Caught up in his desire to best his brother, he insists that Valere must immediately marry the woman inside (assuming that woman to be Leonor). Though saddened by the news, Ariste signs the marriage papers along with Sganarelle, and Valere reveals that his new wife is not Leonor, but Isabelle. Leonor arrives on the scene, acknowledging that she will gladly marry her guardian Ariste.

Added thoughts on this Shortened Version:

My goal in these works is to open the world of Molière to a broader audience, and the opportunity to create shorter variations of these plays gives me the hope that the spirit of Molière might be sparked in the hearts of actors and audiences who would never otherwise see him, while challenging young actors with style and language that carries them above and beyond their usual limitations. My hope is that, with the door to Molière wedged open to student-actors early on, they will be comfortable passing through that door again and again through the course of a long career.

Timing:

This play has been timed running under 40 minutes, but it demands an ever more aggressive attack on the speeches, as the verse rolls by without pause for “thought.” This is not to say there is not enough time to get one’s points across clearly, nor need the actors race through the dialogue. The key is delineating “not pausing” from “picking up the pace.” Most actors “picking up the pace” with material that is this textured become incomprehensible.

A simple elimination of pauses between one character’s lines and the next (people whose objectives are so compelling that they “can’t wait to get a word in edgewise”) will shorten the play by as much as ten minutes. If we take “silence” as our cue, then we’ve already dropped the ball. If we are thinking while our fellow performers are speaking, then, as in any heated discussion, there is never a moment of silence.

This is a terrific opportunity for actors to participate in a vision and a rhythm that is larger than themselves, feeding into the great stylistic engine that drives the play. Theoretically at least, ten one-word lines can be spoken in the same span as one ten-word line. It’s an important exercise in ensemble acting, one which may well dazzle and delight your audiences in the process.

Have fun, and break a leg!
Timothy Mooney

THE SCHOOL FOR HUSBANDS

adaptated by Timothy Mooney

FROM THE PLAY BY MOLIÈRE

ACT I

Scene One

(SGANARELLE, ARISTE.)

SGANARELLE.

Enough, dear brother! End this altercation!
What is it but relentless irritation?
While I respect your wisdom, and your years
(Though well advanced from mine), it yet appears...
I've other thoughts on how to treat a wife,
And I prefer my own approach to life.

ARISTE.

But none approve of what...

SGANARELLE.

Perhaps we'll find
Old coots, like you may not...

ARISTE.

You are too kind.

SGANARELLE.

Well if I must attend, here, without moving
Perhaps you'll tell of what they're not approving.

ARISTE.

I'd like to help, if you'd not so oppose...
This arrogance extends down to your clothes!

SGANARELLE.

Oh, must I now be tied to whims of fashion?
For trendy togs must I invent some passion?
Though you're the elder, by some twenty years,
It's you who dresses like the cavaliers!
And now, you find you won't be satisfied
Till everyone looks silly by your side!
Must I wear tiny hat with mammoth feather
Exposed unto the whims of wind and weather?
Or should I hide beneath a wig of blonde
That looks like something rescued from a pond?

Your sleeves which sample food at each buffet...
 Your breeches look like petticoats that way!
 No brother, ere such foolishness I'd wear,
 I'd rather socialize completely bare!

ARISTE.

The wise man would not consciously collide
 By struggling against the current tide;
 The failure to give wardrobe slightest scope
 Will simply mark you as a misanthrope!
 Much better to accommodate the custom
 Than stand alone bewailing you don't trust 'em.
 How better to explore the current vogue
 Than to, alone, call all the world a rogue!

SGANARELLE.

Old vanity's a most addictive drug
 For one who sports white hairs 'neath his black rug.

ARISTE.

You seem to see some flaw, or source of blame
 As though my age, itself, should be my shame!
 Is age, alone, not quite so harsh and vile
 That I must dress myself so out of style?

SGANARELLE.

However you might feel, I still intend
 To fail to follow this pernicious trend.
 I want to have a hat that stays up there,
 While covering a little of my hair!
 A doublet which will warm my stomach, more so
 Than overcoats which don't protect the torso!
 Our father dressed like this till he was dead
 And he who won't agree can turn his head!

Scene Two

*(SGANARELLE, ARISTE, and LEONOR, ISABELLE, LISETTE,
 talking unobserved at the front of the stage.)*

LEONOR. *(To ISABELLE:)*
 If there is trouble, say the fault is mine.

LISETTE.
 What? Can't you even get away to dine?

ISABELLE.
 Well, that's the rule.

LEONOR.

That's one rule you must break!

LISETTE. (*To LEONOR:*)

How glad you must be for his brother's sake!
Though fate matched you to one somewhat more old,
Such notions in his head have not caught hold!

ISABELLE.

How fortunate, for once, he went to sup
And neither dragged me with, nor locked me up.

LISETTE.

I'll send that pious prude on off to hell!
If...

SGANARELLE.

Whither to, dear ladies? Please do tell.

LEONOR.

Ah! Well, we couldn't quite come to decide...
It's too nice of a day to stay inside.

SGANARELLE.

The two of you may go enjoy the weather;
Enjoy it on your own or go together.

(*To ISABELLE:*)

But you, my dear, will stay behind with me.

ARISTE.

Good brother, do you not let her go free?
You will not let her, even with her sister...

SGANARELLE.

She's better off, right here, beside her mister.

ARISTE.

But...

SGANARELLE.

I live up to my sharp obligation,
Protecting her from rude emancipation.

ARISTE.

You think I fail to care for Leonor?

SGANARELLE.

I'll give no criticism on that score.
Their father trusted them to our good graces,
While knowing we would help them know their places;
That we'd choose them as mates, or else ensure

That neither would fall prey to lust or lure.
 And thus as father/husbands we would twice
 See to it they are led by wise advice.
 You go, explore your foolish way to woo,
 But don't attempt to tell me what to do!

ARISTE.

Now, I...

SGANARELLE.

No, I'll not have your misconstruing;
 Seems I'm the only one knows what he's doing!
 You let your girl run free in search of vice;
 For clothing, lackey, maid you pay a price;
 That's fine. Do as you will. And yet my wife,
 Will follow my instructions for her life.
 I'll see to it no flatterer goes near her
 And I will be the only one to hear her.
 We find the flesh is weak, and thus adorns
 The foreheads of the meek with lengthy horns!
 And thus since fate has picked her out as mine,
 Her education is of my design.

ISABELLE.

You have no cause...

SGANARELLE.

I don't want your opinion:
 Not as you steal away from my dominion.

LEONOR.

Now, sir...

SGANARELLE.

Now, you, *Madame*, may go your way.
 I've no desire to fight with you today.

LEONOR.

You don't want me to visit Isabelle?

SGANARELLE.

Quite frankly, no. You teach her all too well.
 She picks up all the impudence that's in you,
 And I would rather you should discontinue.

LEONOR.

Then let me, too, be frank, sir, in my turn.
 I know not if I echo her concern:
 But should she so endure this awful blister
 I don't believe that she could be my sister!

LISETTE.

You can't expect your loved one has much honor,
To have to put such cold restrictions on her.
Do you imagine that such rules restrict us,
Or that your foolish bondage may have licked us?
The man's not built who woman could not beat,
And such constriction coaxes her to cheat!
You take your chances; either you disgust us,
Or find a way, more joyfully, to trust us.
And if my man gave me such cruel suspicion
To cuckold him I'd make my foremost mission!

SGANARELLE. (*To ARISTE.*)

I see that you are teaching heady skills;
Does this contemptuous speech not give you chills?

ARISTE.

Their virtue's not based on how well you hide them,
But rather by the spirit that's inside them.
I do believe the woman's not been found
Whose virtue's owed to lock and gate and hound.
I might be much more scrupulous, like you,
If I believed that all she lacked to do
Me wrong, and give in to temptation,
Was that she'd not yet hit on the occasion!

SGANARELLE.

Such utter nonsense!

ARISTE.

Well, perhaps it is;
But I still say, for youth to have its fizz,
A gentle smile, a kind, forgiving chide,
Will help to give them virtue as a guide.
I'm gratified to give my ward the chance
To see a show, a concert, or a dance.
And if she buys a bow, some lace, a dress...
Such beauty will not make me love her less!
Her father's order gives her by constraint,
But exploitation of that would but taint
A match quite strained already by our ages,
So it will be her choice if she engages
An old man with four thousand crowns a year,
A tender heart, an understanding clear.
But I would rather sacrifice that thrill,
Than have her wed me here against her will.

SGANARELLE.

Such sweetness, brother! I can hardly stand it!

ARISTE.

My nature shapes itself as I command it.

SGANARELLE.

But when a youth enjoys ongoing vice,
You'll find that later on you'll pay the price.
And they'll not quickly change—

ARISTE.

Well then, why do it?

SGANARELLE.

Why change them?

ARISTE.

Why?

SGANARELLE.

Think how they'd misconstrue it!

ARISTE.

And what might they mistake?

SGANARELLE.

You mean to say,
That when you're wed she'll still go her own way?

ARISTE.

Why might she not?

SGANARELLE.

And you, sir, will embrace,
Each mark that she might draw upon her face?

ARISTE.

Oh, yes.

SGANARELLE.

And yield to dresses, shoes and balls,
While you stay home just wandering the halls?

ARISTE.

Of course.

SGANARELLE.

Sit idly by as gallants flatter?

ARISTE.

I guess.

SGANARELLE.

You'll act as though it didn't matter
However late the evening might have gotten?

ARISTE.

Most gladly.

SGANARELLE.

You are old, and you're besotten!

(To ISABELLE:)

Please leave us; such freethinking is offensive.

ARISTE.

I'll trust my wife, and I'll not grow defensive,
But will continue as I've, till now, gone.

SGANARELLE.

Thus will you be a cuckold and a pawn!

LEONOR.

If he will have me, he'll not be disgraced
By one who bends the laws of being chaste,
But if betrothed to you, right here and now,
I can't imagine keeping such a vow!

LISETTE.

Such sordid lifestyles we might well abhor,
But it seems just what you're now asking for!

SGANARELLE.

Just hold your tongue right there, you little slut!

ARISTE.

You've earned the right to be this humor's butt.
I'll go, but please hear this beyond your spite:
To lock up women isn't very bright.
Your servant, sir.

SGANARELLE.

Dear brother, I'm not yours!

Such lunacy! The foolish man explores
Such choices as will chase each new disaster.
He'll not survive a day as that girl's master!
I've never seen such ill-assembled troop,
Pretending they're a friendly family group!
Associating with them might just quell,
What fondness I have won from Isabelle.
I think it's time I took her from this place
Out to the country, for a change of pace.

Scene Three

(VALERE, SGANARELLE, ERGASTE.)

VALERE. (*At a distance from SGANARELLE:*)
Ergaste, there goes that villain that I hate:
The patron of the girl I venerate.

SGANARELLE. (*Not seeing the others:*)
I find that I can't keep myself from quarrels,
When I perceive the looseness of these morals!
Had I but spoken then as they do now,
I'd get a smack...

VALERE.
He didn't see my bow!

ERGASTE.
Perhaps he doesn't see out of that side,
Go round the man.

SGANARELLE. (*Not seeing VALERE:*)
It's just I can't abide
To stay here in the city one more day!
(*Finally seeing VALERE:*) What's this?

ERGASTE.
Move in.

SGANARELLE.
I thought some fop was there.
Again? (*Seeing ERGASTE:*) Aha! Now two are in my hair!

VALERE.
Do my respects, dear sir, disturb your thought?

SGANARELLE.
They might...

VALERE.
I'm sorry. It's just that I thought
To make the most of this most happy fate:
To make acquaintance with a man of weight!

SGANARELLE.
Ah, yes.

VALERE.
I hope you'll not see us as gapers;
In fact our fortune fixes us as neighbors!

SGANARELLE.

How nice.

VALERE.

Have you heard gossip from the court?
I'd gladly give you quite a full report.

SGANARELLE.

Why should I care?

VALERE.

Well, some are curious,
When rumors fly, both true and spurious.

SGANARELLE.

Well, I...

VALERE.

Such pomp you only find in Paris!
And from this city nobody could tear us.
The country's filled with awful rustic bores.
How do you pass the time?

SGANARELLE.

I have my chores.

VALERE.

And yet, some relaxation's not a sin,
As too much work can stretch a man too thin.
What do you do before you go to sleep?

SGANARELLE.

Whate'er I please.

VALERE.

Oh, sir, that is so deep!
If only *all* pursued those things that please,
We might one day find all mankind agrees!

SGANARELLE.

Your servant.

Scene Four

(VALERE, ERGASTE.)

VALERE. (*Of* SGANARELLE.)

Dolt! What thought you of that dunce?

ERGASTE.

Don't worry; we'll explore...
Let's go inside and strategize some more.

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene One

(ISABELLE, SGANARELLE.)

SGANARELLE.

From what you say, I recognize the house;
And I suspect I know the wicked louse!

ISABELLE. (*Aside:*)

Fair Heaven! Know my heart and do not blame
A stratagem suggesting to defame.

SGANARELLE.

You say Valere's the name the man goes under?

ISABELLE.

I did.

SGANARELLE.

That's just as well. Such stupid blunder!
Go in, now. I'll have words with this young rake!

ISABELLE. (*Aside:*)

This may appear an awful risk to take,
Presumptuous, or even boldly crass,
But what else might this life allow a lass?

Scene Two

(SGANARELLE, ERGASTE, VALERE.)

SGANARELLE.

Well, let's not hesitate; here is the door.
Hullo! Who goes? Don't think that you'll ignore...
Now that I know, it all falls into place,
Why he should bow and scrape and wish me grace,
But I shall quash his hopes in forceful fashion--

(*To ERGASTE, who has burst out the door:*)

You oaf! You earn yourself a wicked thrashing!
You knock me over; now you block the way!

VALERE.

Oh, sir, may I...

SGANARELLE.

I have some things to say.

VALERE.

For me, sir?

SGANARELLE.

You. Valere is how you're known?

VALERE.

Yes, sir.

SGANARELLE.

I'd like a word with you alone.

VALERE.

I place myself most firmly at your service!

SGANARELLE.

I want no service from you! Saints preserve us!

VALERE.

Won't you come in?

SGANARELLE.

No: out here will be best...

VALERE.

I beg, dear sir...

SGANARELLE.

I'm not here as your guest.

VALERE.

(To ERGASTE:) Sir, since our guest will break from our tradition,
Bring out a chair.

SGANARELLE.

I'll talk from this position.

VALERE.

Can I allow...?

SGANARELLE.

Yet more obsequious!

VALERE.

To be so rude to one who comes to see us?

SGANARELLE.

The rudeness which gives me the greater shock,
Is when one will not hear another talk!

VALERE.

I shall comply with your desire.

SGANARELLE.

That's good!

Such courtesies I'd banish if I could.

You know, I think; perhaps you know quite well,
That I am patron to young Isabelle?

VALERE.

Yes.

SGANARELLE.

Ah, that's good. I won't, then, waste your time.
But do you know her charms, so ripe, so prime,
Have led me to profound anticipation
Of when our love shall know its consummation?

VALERE.

No.

SGANARELLE.

Then, henceforward, know whom she adores.
You must forgo your suit to make her yours.

VALERE.

My suit?

SGANARELLE.

Yes, come, there's no point in pretending.

VALERE.

Who might suggest that such was my intending?

SGANARELLE.

A one whose word's as good as she who said it.

VALERE.

But who?

SGANARELLE.

Herself.

VALERE.

Herself?

SGANARELLE.

Yes, don't you get it?

She's loved me from the day I took her in,

And now she tells of webs you start to spin.

However you might try now to disguise

Her heart could read the language in your eyes.

Beneath those looks, your hunger screamed and shouted;

Your suit for her has been completely flouted!

Demanding that you make these eyes go mute,
She asks me thus to end your errant suit.

VALERE.

You say she brought this of her volition—

SGANARELLE.

To rend with no reserve her stern position:
That having seen the way you thus maneuver,
I must tell how offensively you move her.
She wants me to acquaint you with the fact,
That we are entering a holy pact,
However much you sigh and stare and gape,
You only stimulate her to escape.
And that you'll end your suit, sir, if you're smart.
That's all I have to say; I now depart.

VALERE.

Good Lord! Ergaste?

SGANARELLE. (*Aside:*)

It seems he's caught off guard!

VALERE.

What does this mean?

ERGASTE.

I wouldn't take it hard.
The message hides duplicity of meaning;
I don't think it reveals the way she's leaning.

SGANARELLE.

His face fills with dismay!

VALERE.

You think she wants—

ERGASTE.

He's watching; let's go think of our response.

SGANARELLE.

How sensibly I've tutored Isabelle!
Her mind adapts to my instruction well!

Scene Three

(ISABELLE, SGANARELLE.)

ISABELLE. (*Alone:*)

I pray against the thing I greatly fear:
That is, my lover might not read me clear.
And so, in spite of my confined detention,
I take this chance to clarify intention.

SGANARELLE.

I have returned.

ISABELLE.

What passed between you two?

SGANARELLE.

Your words distempered every breath he drew.
He stood aghast, and speechless as a stone.
I think we'll find him leaving us alone!

ISABELLE.

I fear I find you're wrong on that account.
He'll not relent his efforts to...surmount.

SGANARELLE.

What makes you think he hasn't had enough?

ISABELLE.

I fear he feels it's nothing but a bluff.
For as you left, a man out in the street
Walked 'neath my window, managing to greet
Me in the name of his intrepid master.
I tried to cut him off but he moved faster.
I went to close the window with a chide,
When box flew in, with love letter inside!
Thus was I left, alone and quite despoiled!

SGANARELLE.

Astounding! This young man will not be foiled!

ISABELLE.

My honor calls for this to be returned;
Both box and letter must be quickly spurned.
But such an errand begs for some assistance
I can't ask you...

SGANARELLE.

You must! At my insistence!
I take great joy, however mean or trite...

ISABELLE.

Then here, take this.

SGANARELLE.

Let's see; what does he write?

ISABELLE.

My Lord! Don't open it!

SGANARELLE.

Oh no? Why not?

ISABELLE.

He'd think that I had fallen for his plot!
 A decent girl must never even glance
 At aught that's sent by someone wearing pants!
 We must defeat the plans on which he's hopin'
 By giving it to him as yet unopen,
 And we can't send that message with much zeal
 If it appears we've tampered with the seal!

SGANARELLE. (*Aside:*)

Has ever woman reasoned so forthrightly?
 My love for her increases nearly nightly!
 (*To her:*) The discipline I've taught has taken hold,
 And as my wife you're worth your weight in gold!

ISABELLE.

Forgive me if I speak from intuition;
 Go on and open it; it's your decision.

SGANARELLE.

Oh no! I follow your hypothesis,
 And I can't see a single flaw to this.

Scene Four

(SGANARELLE, ERGASTE.)

SGANARELLE. (*Alone:*)

The girl's a jewel of keen-eyed consequence!
 To treat one look as scandalous offense!
 And getting some slight innocent love letter,
 She sets me after he who hoped to get her!
 I wonder if my brother's boorish ward
 Would act as well as she I've so adored!
 A woman's but the canvas for my paint...
 Hello!

ERGASTE.

Who's there?

SGANARELLE.

I carry a complaint.

My ward sends to your master this foul item,
Unopened, to disparage and to spite him.
She will receive no letters in gold boxes,
And thus it is himself that he outfoxes!

Scene Five

(VALERE, ERGASTE.)

VALERE.

Why was that oaf back raising such a din?

ERGASTE.

He brought a box, with letter tucked within.
He claims you sent the girl this fervent note;
Let's see what she has sent through that old goat.

VALERE. (*Reading:*)

"This letter surely comes as a surprise,
And I regret conveying it with lies,
And while some brazenness I may be nearing,
I beg you, blame it all upon my rearing;
Forgive me if I overstep my bounds,
But threatened marriage, six days hence, confounds.
And rather than give over to despair,
I hold the hope that you might choose to care.
And so I leave decorum due a maid,
That your intentions might yet be conveyed.
But be aware, our time is running out;
Fond hearts need but few words to ease their doubt.

ERGASTE.

A brilliant trick! The girl is a magician!
How simply she turns stalemate to fruition!
Would anyone suspect her of such ploys?

VALERE.

A life with her will be but loving joys!
This note reveals a mind both smart and shrewd;
'Til now, 'twas but her beauty had I viewed.
My love is multiplied again by two...

ERGASTE.

The dupe returns; now get a message through.

Scene Six

(SGANARELLE, VALERE, ERGASTE.)

SGANARELLE.

Well, there you are! Sir, do you now know better?
Or do you still stuff boxes with your letter?
You thought that some coquette had been discovered,
And so you slyly intrigued and you hovered.
But now you spill your powder on the ground;
Your aim has spun your musket all around!
It's time that you went elsewhere for the hunt;
You've shot your load off this time, to be blunt.

VALERE.

Indeed, sir, your good features do outweigh
Whatever I might be or do or say...

SGANARELLE.

How true that is.

VALERE.

I never would have thought
That such a rival might upset my plot!
I never would have tried my foolish plan
Had I perceived the measure of the man!

SGANARELLE.

Well, you know better now.

VALERE.

I cannot live up
To standards that you set; I thereby give up!

SGANARELLE.

Quite right.

VALERE.

Thus with the field now uncontested,
Do grant one boon to he whom you have bested:
If you would simply say to Isabelle
That in these months in which I fondly fell,
My love has been but as the driven snow:
No thought that she inspired was mean or low.

SGANARELLE.

That's good.

VALERE.

That had I been her love instead,
I only wished the two of us might wed.

SGANARELLE.

Good, good.

VALERE.

My feeling will not fade
As time divides and grows more old and grayed;
Tell her I'm destined, till the day I'm dead
To love the one who fell for you instead!

SGANARELLE.

Well said, dear sir, you show a certain class.
I'm sure this can't offend the tender lass,
Good day.

ERGASTE. (*To VALERE:*)

A total dupe!

SGANARELLE.

How sad I find
It that this fellow suffered so and pined.

Scene Seven

(SGANARELLE, ISABELLE.)

SGANARELLE.

I've never seen such sadness yet unspoken:
To see his box come back with seal unbroken!
His hope is gone, and he has left the field,
And yet he asked for this to be revealed:
"His love had been as pure as driven snow,
And no thought you inspired was mean or low.
And also, had he been your love instead,
He only wished the two of you might wed,
And he is destined, till the day he's dead
To love the one who fell for me instead."
His thoughts are fair, and I can hardly judge,
A worthy man by holding bitter grudge.

ISABELLE. (*Aside:*)

That is precisely what I had to hear;
His love reflects just how his eyes appear.

SGANARELLE.

What did you say?

ISABELLE.

I said that now it's clear
That you endorse his flirting and his leer!
And if you really love me you would hate
This man who tried to make of me his mate!

SGANARELLE.

But he knew nothing of your heart's desire,
And of the love to which we two aspire—

ISABELLE.

However else you might infer it, he
Makes vile attack on my dear purity!

SGANARELLE.

Do you suggest...

ISABELLE.

Oh yes, this wicked brute
Has plots that he will quickly execute.
I don't know how he might have overheard,
But plans of our quick nuptials have now stirred
The man to angle quickly to abduct me!
He won't be satisfied until he's plucked me!

SGANARELLE.

That's bad!

ISABELLE.

Oh, dear, sir, no! Can you suggest
That something untoward is in his breast?

SGANARELLE.

I'm shocked at how he tricks me in this business!

ISABELLE.

This comes of your most foolish fond forgiveness!
If you had not relented your attack,
He might have feared your wrath and not come back.
He thinks I hate you so that I'd delight
In being freed as from some horrid plight.

SGANARELLE.

He's mad.

ISABELLE.

It seems he's getting quite the knack
For mocking all you do behind your back.
I'm shocked one so protective of her honor,
Should have such wickedness be thrust upon her!
Please find some way to stop his boasts so wild,
Before you find your wife has been defiled!

SGANARELLE.

My darling, you need tell me nothing more;
I'll go and give that wicked man what for!

ISABELLE.

Tell him I'd like to see how far he dares;
I challenge him to take me unawares!
And if that's not sufficient motivation,
Our nuptials are a further inspiration!
And lest he courts a date with some disaster
He'd better heed my urgings ever faster!

SGANARELLE.

I'll pass that on.

ISABELLE.

But do make sure you do it
So that he sees the strength of feeling to it.

SGANARELLE.

I'll give it full extent of your fair passion.

ISABELLE.

And when you're finished with this harsh tongue lashing
Please hurry back to me where you belong;
I cannot bear to have you gone for long.

SGANARELLE. (*To Audience:*)

No girl has been so good since time began!
How happy shall I be to be her man!
Yes, this is how a woman may best please,
Not like coquettes who flirt and wink and tease.
Such amorous young girls give instigation
To husbands' shame and dark humiliation.
Aha! Here comes the infamous Don Juan!

Scene Eight

(VALERE, SGANARELLE, ERGASTE.)

VALERE.

Again! What now?

SGANARELLE.

These plots you seem to spawn.

VALERE.

What's that?

SGANARELLE.

Come now, don't act all that naive.

You thought that I would swallow and believe?

Your speeches are a hoax, a simple ruse,

While yet you leave your path all strewn with clues!

And now you plot outlandish vile abduction

To foul the work of my most fond instruction.

VALERE.

Where did you get such wild, outrageous views?

SGANARELLE.

The girl herself moved quickly to accuse:

She asks that I should tell you for all time

Just who it is who stirs her so sublime...

It's me! And she reviles your filthy plot!

Would rather die than be shamefully caught...

VALERE.

If what you say may be considered fact,

You've won her love where I have simply lacked.

SGANARELLE.

If? Just how loudly must she scream and shout it,

Before you face your fate and do not doubt it?

Let's go together, then, and let her say it!

And then, perhaps, to rest we two may lay it.

Scene Nine

(ISABELLE, SGANARELLE, VALERE.)

ISABELLE.

You bring him here! To me? What can this mean?

Have you some notion edging on obscene?

Are you now so entranced with all his merits
You thrust him on me 'fore the whole of Paris?

SGANARELLE.

Oh, no, I'd never part with you, my sweet,
I simply brought him that you might repeat
And show I represent these matters true,
To say these sentiments come straight from you.

ISABELLE.

Must I expose my soul completely bare,
'Ere you should realize for whom I care?

VALERE.

Madame, the things your patron had to say
Were unclear in their phrasing, or the way...

ISABELLE.

Well, since I feel so strongly what I spoke,
I'll not resist the answer you provoke.
Now listen carefully; you both must hear
That fate has led two choices to appear.
The one: I love beyond all expectation,
And he moves me with fervent inspiration;
The other one's no lover but a scourge,
And gives my gorge that elevating urge!
The one I plan my troth to fondly plight,
The other I'd be rid of like a blight!
But I have said enough; it is a pain
To humor he who woos me thus in vain.
I must be lifted up by happy marriage,
From walking death with one that I disparage.

SGANARELLE.

I'll make it quickly so.

ISABELLE.

I know it's crude,
For girl to take such forthright attitude.

SGANARELLE.

Oh, bless you, no! My sweetest, darling, dear!

ISABELLE.

Let him then, make his love for me quite clear!

SGANARELLE.

Oh, kiss my hand!

ISABELLE.

Let he, with fevered haste
Put end to life alone and ever chaste.
I here announce the fullness of intent
My heart is not for other ever meant.

(She pretends to embrace SGANARELLE, and gives her hand to VALERE to kiss instead.)

SGANARELLE.

My love! My pussycat! My darling, fair!
You'll not await much longer; that I swear!
There, there. *(To VALERE:)* You see how strength of love is surging?
She says all this without the slightest urging.

VALERE.

Madame, in answer to your fevered chide,
I will remove the man you can't abide.

ISABELLE.

Please do. I will extend to you my thanks:
I cannot stand the sight of face nor flanks;
The man is loathsome, hideous and vile...

SGANARELLE.

My dear!

ISABELLE.

Oh, should I speak in other style?

SGANARELLE.

Oh, I appreciate your strength of feeling,
But give the blood a moment for congealing...

VALERE.

Well, I shall gladly follow your command
In three days he you hate won't be at hand.

ISABELLE.

I cannot wait. Good bye.

SGANARELLE.

I empathize,

But...

VALERE.

No, sir. Do not worry; dry your eyes.
Madame is fair in her adjudication,
And I'll respond with quick accommodation.
Farewell.

SGANARELLE.

Poor man, he's pained by your pure wrath.
(To VALERE:) Let me embrace you on my love's behalf.

Scene Ten

(ISABELLE, SGANARELLE.)

SGANARELLE.

I pity him.

ISABELLE.

I'm filled with no such feeling.

SGANARELLE.

The love you give to me has got me reeling!
And just to show the joy of love's creation,
We'll not delay the wedding's consummation!
A week's too long; we'll wed first thing tomorrow!

ISABELLE.

Tomorrow?

SGANARELLE.

I can't bear to see such sorrow...
Tomorrow! Oh, the night will seem so long!

ISABELLE. (*Aside:*)

Oh, Heaven, help me! Where did I go wrong!?

End of Act II

ACT III

Scene One

(ISABELLE.)

ISABELLE.

How much I might prefer some fell disaster
Than wed this drab, dull, callous, scowling master.
I hope our gentle censors may excuse
My stooping to this well-intended ruse.
And since this threat now comes within my lair,
I blindly risk it all on my Valere!

Scene Two

(SGANARELLE, ISABELLE.)

SGANARELLE. (*To himself:*)

My suit will need some cleaning and some sewing...

ISABELLE.

Oh, my!

SGANARELLE.

My dear! It's late; where are you going?
An hour ago you carefully explained
You would go straight to sleep, you were so drained.
You even gave me your explicit warning
That I not interrupt you 'til the morning.

ISABELLE.

Well, that is true, but...

SGANARELLE.

Yes?

ISABELLE.

I feel affright,
That you might take this in some darkened light.

SGANARELLE.

I think you'd better tell me.

ISABELLE.

Well, you see,
My sister, Leonor, asked this of me:
She holes herself up there inside my chamber—
She'd die if she found out that I had blamed her!

SGANARELLE.

What is it?

ISABELLE.

See...she's having an affair,
With he we so despise.

SGANARELLE.

Valere?

ISABELLE.

Valere.

I've never seen a maiden so possessed;
And you can guess how badly she's obsessed,
She told me she most certainly will die
If he might disavow or yet deny...
For one long year, out of the sight of others,
The two of them had lived as quiet lovers!

SGANARELLE.

That tramp!

ISABELLE.

And learning of the grievous gloom
Which eats away at her once-hoped-for groom,
She asked if she might give him consolation
As he'd be better moved by her persuasion.
She wants to, from my window, in my voice,
Suggest for him another, tender choice:
To redirect desire from me to her,
And reel him in with artificial lure.

SGANARELLE.

And you would thus abet...

ISABELLE.

Good gracious, no!

I'm so disturbed that she might sink so low!
I told her "Surely you've no self regard,
To love one who'd dispose, dispense, discard!
You throw yourself at him so that you flout
The one whom Heaven kindly picked you out."

SGANARELLE.

Precisely what the foolish man deserves!

ISABELLE.

Thus did we two contest with wits and nerves,
But she so begged and wheedled and cajoled
Each fault I saw she cited as pure gold.

Eventually, I caved to her demands,
But fearing smears or slander in such plans,
I thought a witness ought to be secured
Who might stand for me should I be so slurred.

SGANARELLE.

No, I cannot allow such goings on;
Some bypasser might spy him on my lawn!
However much my brother it would chide,
It might yet bring disgrace upon my bride!
We have to send away this wild coquette...

ISABELLE.

Oh, she would not forgive me or forget...
But you're right; you say how she has to choose:
At least allow me go and break the news.

SGANARELLE.

All right then.

ISABELLE.

Find some quiet place to hide,
While I direct her forcefully outside.

SGANARELLE.

For you, dear, I will temper any wrath;
I'll stand aside and not obstruct her path.
But when she's gone, I'll let my brother know;
Oh, how I've longed to say "I told you so!"

ISABELLE.

My name must stay unspoken; not a peep.
Good night; when she is gone I'll go to sleep.

SGANARELLE.

Good night, my love. Oh, I am simply wild
To tell my brother of this wicked child!

ISABELLE. (*From inside:*)

My heart, my sister, is not made of stone,
But you must face this fate out on your own.
My honor is a thing that I have prized;
Farewell, go on; I'll not be compromised.
(*Coming out, veiled:*) Oh, Heaven, aid a maiden's desperate plot!

SGANARELLE. (*Aside:*)

I'll follow her to catch what might be caught!

ISABELLE. (*Aside:*)

At least this darkness helps to hide my face.

SGANARELLE. (*Aside:*)

The slattern! Wench! She goes right to his place!

Scene Two

(VALERE, ISABELLE, SGANARELLE.)

VALERE. (*Coming out in haste:*)

Tonight! Tonight, I said! We can't delay!

We must somehow...who's there?

ISABELLE.

Valere! No, stay!

I've come to you! It's Isabelle, your love!

SGANARELLE. (*Aside:*)

The wench! She lies to him and God above!

ISABELLE.

Might you yet wish our marriage soon to start...

VALERE.

That is the dear direction of my heart!

SGANARELLE.

The fool!

VALERE.

Come in my darling; do not worry;
Your guardian can spend his foolish fury.
While at your home the dupe must be obeyed,
Where I live he'll not pass my steady blade!

SGANARELLE. (*Alone:*)

I'll not so much as lift a finger to
Detach that fiendish carbuncle from you.
In fact, I think this "dupe" will have it found
That you two are perpetually bound!
And so not to leave stain on her dear sister,
I must see to it he is made her mister!

(*Knocks on the Magistrate's door:*)

What, ho!

Scene Four

(SGANARELLE, MAGISTRATE, NOTARY, ATTENDANT.)

MAGISTRATE.

Who's there?

SGANARELLE.

Ah, there, good Magistrate!

Please hurry, now, the need is truly great.

Please walk this way, and bring along that light.

MAGISTRATE.

But I was just...

SGANARELLE.

This cannot wait!

MAGISTRATE.

All right.

What is it?

SGANARELLE.

In that house are lately fled

Two paramours who must be quickly wed.

The Casanova is the foul Valere...

MAGISTRATE.

Don't worry, sir; we'll tackle this affair!

It happens we've a notary right here!

SGANARELLE.

That's you?

NOTARY.

A notary unto the King!

MAGISTRATE.

An honorable man!

SGANARELLE.

A man to bring!

Through here, sir. Go inside now, nice and quiet.

Those two must wed, however he'll deny it!

You'll be requited for this act today,

Don't take his purse to look the other way.

MAGISTRATE.

You dare suggest a man of my high rank...

SGANARELLE.

Forgive me! I speak freely and too frank.
 I'll go to fetch my brother, if I may;
 Please let your lantern come to light my way.
 (*To himself:*) This ought to make his disposition dour.

(*Knocking at Ariste's door:*)

What ho!

Scene Five

(ARISTE, SGANARELLE.)

ARISTE.

Who's there? My brother? At this hour?

SGANARELLE.

I have a lesson you will not forget.

ARISTE.

Yes?

SGANARELLE.

Where's your ward? Has she not come home yet?

ARISTE.

No, I believe she'll be in rather late.
 She's gone out to a dance.

SGANARELLE.

Oh, on a date?

Well I will show you to your charge's dance.

ARISTE.

What do you say?

SGANARELLE.

Such theories you'd advance!

ARISTE.

What is it, brother you want to express?

SGANARELLE.

Ah, elder brother, you do so impress
 Your lady with your proud permissive thought,
 She wished to spread the word of what she's taught!

ARISTE.

You speak in riddles; what's this inquisition?

SGANARELLE.

Oh, she's gone dancing: in the prone position!
I witnessed her sneak over to Valere's;
I don't suppose they're in there saying prayers!
The dance was not to happen in a hall;
It's at Valere's where that one found the ball!

ARISTE.

Who?

SGANARELLE.

Leonor.

ARISTE.

Such jokes are in bad taste.

SGANARELLE.

You think I joke when you have been disgraced?

ARISTE.

It makes no sense. This is some awful ruse.

SGANARELLE.

Will you not, once you've seen it, know the news?
Such fools, these old men; elegantly dressed,
But (*Pointing at his forehead:*) nothing there...

ARISTE.

Dear brother, you suggest...

SGANARELLE.

Please, don't take my suggestion as your proof!
Come with me and we'll both observe the truth.
You judge from what you see and smell and hear:
The two have been engaged this whole past year!

ARISTE.

I gave her everything that she desired,
And would she by some other man be squired?

SGANARELLE.

Well sir, I fear your eyes must judge your fate.
I've sent a notary and magistrate;
A quiet matrimony ought to handle
This incident from growing to some scandal.
Your liberality's not such, I think,
You'd want to wed her after such a stink.

ARISTE.

I've no desire to pin her to my side,
If she has not the will to be my bride...
And yet, I don't accept—

SGANARELLE.

For goodness sake!
Let's go! A woman's honor is at stake!

Scene Six

(SGANARELLE, ARISTE, MAGISTRATE, NOTARY.)

MAGISTRATE.

There is no need to talk, sirs, of compulsion,
Arm twisting or of any such convulsion
Both gentleman and girl have so agreed,
That wedding is what both do wish and need.
Valere has signed already his intent,
And all they wait on now is your consent.

ARISTE.

The girl...

MAGISTRATE.

Is locked within, and won't concede
To come out 'til you both have signed the deed.

Scene Seven

(VALERE, MAGISTRATE, NOTARY, SGANARELLE, ARISTE.)

VALERE. (*At the window:*)

No, gentlemen, no one shall come inside,
'Til you grant that for which I have applied.
If you say Isabelle and I should wed,
Subscribe your names to that which you have read.

SGANARELLE.

No, worry not; we'll do this dignified.
(*Sotto voce:*) He still thinks Isabelle remains inside!
Just wait till he... !

ARISTE.

But is it Leonor?

SGANARELLE. (*To ARISTE:*)

Shush!

ARISTE.

But...

SGANARELLE.

Be quiet!

ARISTE.

Please, I must implore!

SGANARELLE.

Just hold your peace!

VALERE.

Give due consideration,
That Isabelle has made her declaration.

ARISTE. (*To SGANARELLE:*)

But he said she was...

SGANARELLE.

Do be quiet please!
I'll tell you later. (*To VALERE:*) Brother, here, agrees,
Along with me that we will gladly state,
The one inside with you shall be your mate.

MAGISTRATE.

Those are the very terms the contract's cited,
We've not yet seen the girl to whom he's plighted.

SGANARELLE.

(*Aside:*) Oh, happy farce! Now, brother, you sign first,
There, on the line.

ARISTE.

But this seems so reversed!

SGANARELLE.

Just sign! Why must you make it such a chore?

ARISTE.

Well, is it Isabelle or Leonor?
He talks of one, while you say it's the other
Who to believe? The lover or my brother?

SGANARELLE.

Whichever one she is, you still expect,
A free decision should have our respect?

ARISTE.

Of course.

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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