

Publications Committee

BULLETIN
OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

NO. 259

ISSUED FOUR TIMES A MONTH

GENERAL SERIES No. 29

DECEMBER 15, 1912

Le Legataire Universel

(The Sole Heir)

BY

JEAN FRANCOIS REGNARD

*Translated for The Curtain Club by Stark Young, Adjunct Professor
of General Literature in the University of Texas*

With a Brief Introduction



PUBLISHED BY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
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LE LÉGATAIRE UNIVERSEL

(THE SOLE HEIR)

A comedy in five acts, presented for the first time January 9, 1768.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

Géronte, uncle of Eraste.

Eraste, lover of Isabelle.

Madame Argante, mother of Isabelle.

Isabelle, daughter of Madame Argante.

Lisette, maid of Géronte.

Crispin, valet of Eraste.

M. Cristorel, apothecary.

M. Scruple and M. Gaspard, notaries.

A lackey.

The scene is in Paris, at the house of Géronte.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Jean Francois Regnard was born in Paris, February 8, 1655. His father's death left him possessed of a considerable estate, and gave him the means to indulge an unusually strong taste for travel. He visited Italy, Holland, Denmark, Turkey, Poland, Germany, and other countries; but returned at length to Paris in 1683, and became a treasurer of France. Later he bought a country place and began to amuse himself with hunting and country pastimes, mingling these with an interest in social life and the theater. In 1688 he began his dramatic career. In 1694 the Comedie Française presented his *Attendez moi Sous l'orme*. This comedy was followed by *Le Joueur* (1690); *La Serenade* (1694); *Le Bourgeois de Falaise* (1696); *Le Distrain* (1697); *Democrate* (1700); *Le Retour imprévu* (1700); *Les Folies amoureuses* (1704); *Les Menechmes*, adapted from Plantus (1705); and finally his masterpiece, *Le Légataire Universel* (1708). "*Regnard died September 5, 1709, comme il revenait de la chasse, ayant tué deux beaux perdreaux rouges pour son souper.*"

Regnard is the author of numerous other writings not dramatic, *La Coquette*; *Lucrece*, a parody, *La Foire de Saint Germain*, and so on. It may be said that Regnard, though lacking in the fundamental insight and poise of Molière, is in the French mind commonly associated with him. His excellence lies largely in his sense of dialogue and situation. Voltaire remarked that he who found no pleasure in the comedies of Regnard, *n'est pas digne d'aimer les comedies de Molière*: is not worthy to love the comedies of Molière.

It is interesting to note that Regnard, in spite of the fact that he is highly esteemed in France, his plays published in numerous editions and retained in the repertory of the Comedie Française, is comparatively strange to English readers.

The British Museum catalogue cites two adaptations: *The Intriguing Chambermaid*, a comedy in two acts, H. Fielding, London, 1750; and *Wit's Last Stake*, King, London, 1769, a farce adapted from *Le Légataire Universel*.

So far as I have been able to discover, then, this is the first translation from Regnard into English.

The translator wishes to express his indebtedness to Professor E. J. Villavaso, of the School of Romance Languages of the University of Texas, for his very necessary and very helpful suggestions.

STARK YOUNG.

The University of Texas,
December 28, 1912.

THE SOLE HEIR

ACT I

SCENE I.

LISETTE, CRISPIN.

LISETTE.

Good morrow, Crispin, good morrow.

CRISPIN.

Good morrow, my fair Lisette. My master, always concerned—'tis the zeal of a collateral heir—sends me as soon as you are up, to know how his uncle passed the night.

LISETTE.

Badly.

CRISPIN.

The good man, loaded with swellings and years, struggles this great while against fate, and parries death's fatal thrust in vain; he shall not escape that of the doctor. The doctor is the last on the spot; and this puny old body is dedicated as a victim to his fatal art. 'Tis plain that a half mourning or full black will soon stretch G eronte full length in a coffin. If my master could be made the heir, I should bear the expense of torches with good heart enough.

LISETTE.

I've just given him a remedy as the chemist prescribed. Methought 'twould be the last in his life; he fell down in a fit twice on my hands.

CRISPIN.

You are looking after all parts of him?

LISETTE.

He fares best at my hands; and without boasting any great

knowledge, I may say that I know this business better than a college doctor.

CRISPIN.

Plagued fine talent! You get yourself well paid. I fancy, for all the pains he puts you to.

LISETTE.

He gives me nothing, but I have for my reward the right to speak to him as I please. I may say sharp things, under his very nose; but, truth on't is, that's all the pay I've had these five years. 'Tis the scurviest old stock you ever laid eyes on. I could not tell you how far his meanness goes. He's always finding in his busy head some miserly trick that's fine and new. He has taken now for his doctor an apothecary no taller than my leg, a little straw, that's flat. Monsieur thinks that being little, he will need less money, and that because of his size, one should not pay him so much.

CRISPIN.

If he is short, he will make you good long bills.

LISETTE.

But in his will the favors he bestows ought to repay me for his stinginess. And so I take care to renew my zeal.

CRISPIN.

Is he making his will?

LISETTE.

Before long I hope to see my name shining there.

CRISPIN.

Well wished. I hope to see mine there, too, in letters of gold.

LISETTE.

Very fine, friend, extremely fine. Anyone would say to hear you, that you'd set up to be his heir. Aren't there enough of them already without your getting into the line of aspirants? He has so many heirs, good master G ronde, so monstrous many, that sometimes I am ashamed of it: uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins, first cousins once removed. I counted them the other day, on the

father's side, a hundred and seven males living. You can judge how many females.

CRISPIN.

Yes; but my master aspires to the greatest part. I ought to get my share, too. I am a little kin and I stick to the family.

LISETTE.

You?

CRISPIN.

My first wife was very willing, a lively Breton lass, a great coquette, whom Eraste, whom I serve, found greatly to his taste. I believe, since he was always beloved of the ladies, that we might very well be related on the wives' side; and by that way I'm not so far from being Monsieur G eronte's nephew once removed.

LISETTE.

O foh! You could pass for a country cousin, or a nephew, Britany fashion.

CRISPIN.

But jesting aside, we have great need that Monsieur G eronte take care to make his will. If my master, *primo*, is not named heir, he will make small cheer the rest of his days. *Secundo*, though he may be devilish loving, Madame Argante, before crowning his flame and marrying him to her daughter Isabelle, wishes that a good will, very sure and very faithful, make the said nephew heir of all. But what ought to be more to our taste is that Eraste gives us three hundred francs income if we prosper his expectations. That gift will form the bonds of our marriage. Thus so many reasons are so many means that I employ to prove that it is very necessary for the aforesaid nephew to be named heir; and I say in conclusion that we must conjointly work to arrive at the aforesaid will.

LISETTE.

Devil take it, Crispin, you plead like an angel.

CRISPIN.

I believe it. Does my talent seem strange to you? I shone in that study with honor in plenty, and was three years clerk at an

attorney's. His wife was pretty, and some matters we took to court with a jury of two, behind locked doors.

LISETTE.

The shop was good, eh? Why quit it?

CRISPIN.

The husband a trifle jealous forced me to desert. An attorney is not a very tractable man. About his wife he set me a devil's wrangling. I fought, i' faith, two years and no getting out, but at last was forced to pack.

SCENE II.

ERASTE, CRISPIN, LISETTE.

CRISPIN.

But my master is coming.

ÉRASTE.

Ah, you there, Lisette! Ease me, if you can, of the care that disturbs me. What of my uncle, is he in a state to be seen?

LISETTE.

Ah, sir, since yesterday he is still worse; I thought this night would be his last, and that I should close his eyes for good and all. The letters of reprieve that he takes against death will hardly serve him, let me perish.

ÉRASTE.

Ah, heaven! What's that you say?

LISETTE.

It's the fine truth.

ÉRASTE.

Whatever my hopes may be, I feel that nature stirs mournful sentiments in my heart.

CRISPIN.

I felt the same emotions that other time, when my wife passed the banks of Cocytus to take boat for a visit to the dead. I had

in my heart a pleasure full of charms, as so many husbands would have in a like case: nature rousing sadness had to contend with joy, which, by certain forces and confusions, fought round and round; so that hope, the legitimate grief, love—that's easier felt than said, but what I can say, to tell you truly, is that I was sad and gay at the same time.

ÉRASTE.

I have a sincere regard for my uncle, to yield entirely to his judgment, to please him. Whatever he may say, I agree with him that he is always right.

LISETTE.

The old man must be badly off in his affairs, since he ordered me to go for two notaries.

ÉRASTE.

Two notaries, alas! That rends my heart.

LISETTE.

That's for making a draft with more honor.

ÉRASTE.

Hey, tell me, child, between you and me, may I, without flattering myself, build some hopes?

LISETTE.

They are very well grounded; and for some days he has been having talks with Madam Argante in which they whisper of laws, of marriage. I don't know any more about their project. Your mistress is also concerned in these consultations, for my part, I believe that he wishes to leave you all his goods, and to make you marry Isabelle.

ÉRASTE.

Ah, Lisette, how you smooth my feelings! How perfect is my joy! 'Tis not interest that excites me today, a god much stronger and greater, Love, speaks in my heart. The charming Isabelle is the lovely cause of all my desires, and for the will, makes me vow. . . .

LISETTE.

Love and interest shall both be blest. Would it be right for so fine an estate to become the silly portion of a hundred heirs? Could I look on while they tore into tatters among country louts, down-at-the-heels, rogues, a succession which by and by ought to make you happy, and settle us for life? For you know, Monsieur, . . .

ÉRASTE.

Be sure of it, what I have said I have said: Count on me.

LISETTE.

If your uncle does you the favor he proposes, I may without boasting too much, say I'm partly the cause of it. I tell him every day that there was never a sweeter nephew, or more willing, or more respectful, not for any hope of profit, but through delicate and tender feelings.

CRISPIN.

How well this girl knows your heart. You couldn't reward too strongly such zeal as hers. I'm to marry her soon. Look at her, sir; she's young and pretty! Don't you go treat her as you did the other, no.

LISETTE.

Monsieur G ronte is coming; change your tone. I haven't time to go to the notaries. You, who've been talking too much about your own business, go quick, run, tell them they're to be ready at call. One is named Gaspard, and lives at the corner; the other is a little farther down, his name is Scruple.

CRISPIN.

What a ridiculous name for a notary.

SCENE III.

GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE, a Lackey.

GÉRONTE.

Ah, good morrow, nephew.

ÉRASTE.

I am truly charmed to see you in better health. Please sit down.
(The lackey brings a chair.)

ÉRASTE.

Take this chair away; uncle will be more easy in an arm chair.
(The lackey takes the chair away, brings an arm chair, and goes out.)

SCENE IV.

GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE.

GÉRONTE.

I was racked and torn last night surely, and have just borne a dangerous attack. Another like it, as sure as a gun, would empty the place.

ÉRASTE.

There, you are much better. As Heaven by her favour gives us hope, you ought now to think of repairing the disorders which caused the malady, to set yourself from now on a course of living, to take good broths, sure tonics, to cleanse your stomach with good purgatives. Be sure to spare yourself nothing.

GÉRONTE.

Yes, I should like very well to do what you propose for me; but it costs so much money to take care of oneself, that since you must die anyway, it's worth while to save it. These syringe bearers carry their heads so high that it's only for their weight in gold that their doings may be bought. A man that can fade and die at one blow could save much, doubtless, of his living.

ÉRASTE.

Yes, you are right. 'Tis a tyranny. But I will bear the expense of your illness. Health in the world being the chief good, a man

in his right mind ought to spare nothing for it. You'll heal no doubt of your neglected complaints. Let us try to repair your forces, whatever the cost.

GÉRONTE.

It's all money lost in this case. The house an't worth the repairs. I wish, dear nephew, to put my affairs in order. Did'ee say they had gone to fine me two notaries?

LISETTE.

Yes, sir, and in a little while you'll see them.

GÉRONTE.

And in a little while you'll know my sentiments, too. I wish like a good kinsman to have you know 'em.

ÉRASTE.

I almost surmise that they will be.

GÉRONTE.

I have collateral heirs . . .

LISETTE.

Yes, truly, and many.

GÉRONTE.

Who, with greedy eyes and wolves' teeth, at the bottom of their hearts are devouring ahead of time an inheritance they count on.

ÉRASTE.

Don't confuse me, uncle, pray, with such kinsmen.

GÉRONTE.

I know about that.

ÉRASTE.

Your health is what touches me, and delights me more than all the gold that might fall to my share.

GÉRONTE.

I believe it. I wish to avenge myself on a foolish pack of heirs, and to put them in a rage; to choose an honest person, some one that pleases me, to leave him my gold and make his fortune.

ÉRASTE.

In that you ought to follow your wishes.

LISETTE.

No, I can't think of a more charming pleasure than to see a troupe of disconsolate heirs, embarrassed and long faced, read a long will, where pale, astonished, they are left a smiling good evening. To see in the flesh such profound sadness, I believe I'd come all the way from the other world.

GÉRONTE.

Though I'm already accused and convicted by the ills that I feel, of having lived a long time; though a gall stone cause my cramps, and I suffer the pains of a sharp sciatica, which, in spite of the stick that I carry everywhere, often makes me dissemble a little when I walk, I'm more vigorous than one might imagine; and I see well enough that people are deceived by my looks.

LISETTE.

Some shaving days, I'll vow now ye look no more ill than I do.

GÉRONTE.

Is that so?

LISETTE.

There's a shining twinkle in your eyes.

GÉRONTE.

I have always recognized good in this girl. I wish, however, to think of putting order in my affairs before a sudden death takes away the means. Thou dost know and dost see sometimes Madame Argante?

ÉRASTE.

Yes; in her manners she is very charming.

GÉRONTE.

And her daughter Isabelle, ugh, thou knowest her?

ÉRASTE.

Well, 'tis a good girl, charming from the first.

GÉRONTE.

Thou wilt admit that heaven has framed her soul in the virtues that one should seek in a wife?

ÉRASTE.

I see no object more worthy of one's vows, nor any girl more fit to make a man happy.

GÉRONTE.

I'm going to marry her.

ÉRASTE.

You, uncle?

GÉRONTE.

Myself.

ÉRASTE.

I am delighted at it, I assure you.

LISETTE.

Merciful Father! Alas, ah, heaven help us! Are you going to be the husband of that miserable girl?

GÉRONTE.

Of Isabelle, this day; and by this marriage, I give her at my death all my goods.

ÉRASTE.

You could not do better, and I'm very glad on't. I could only wish I might do as much.

LISETTE.

What, you, old and broken down, feverish, epileptic, paralytic, hectic, asthmatic, dropsical! You wish to light hymen's torch and to make but a jump from the altar to the grave!

GÉRONTE.

I know what I need. I tell you even my health would have me marry and take a companion from whom I can always draw solace in my ills. How does it serve me to have a greedy regiment of heirs, always watching and sleeping at my door: people who, in their hunt for the keys of my strong box, would cast me out of my bed perhaps before I was dead. A wife, on the contrary,

faithful to her duty, would show her zeal by her wifely cares; and reaping the fruits of a chaste love should see me die calmly and without making a noise.

ÉRASTE.

My uncle speaks rightly, and couldn't do better than arrange the necessary solace. An economical and sensible woman could take charge of the whole house.

GÉRONTE (*embracing him*).

Ah, the dear boy. Who'd have thought that he would take it thus, as one may see he does?

ÉRASTE.

Your good alone is dear to me.

GÉRONTE.

Come, thou shalt lose nothing by it, whatever happens. I'll do thee a good turn. Thou'lt not be stripped of thy expectations.

SCENE V.

GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE, a lackey.

GÉRONTE.

Some one is coming.

A LACKEY.

Monsieur, Madam Argante and her daughter are here.

ÉRASTE.

I'll go bring them in.

SCENE VI.

GERONTE, LISETTE, THE LACKEY.

GÉRONTE (*to Lisette*).

My hat, my peruke.

LISETTE.

They are on the way to you. Here they are.

GÉRONTE.

Don't let 'em speak, prithee, of my clyster, nor of my lethargy.

LISETTE.

They've two good noses; in a moment they'll surely smell the rest.

SCENE VII.

MADAME ARGANTE, ISABELLE, GERONTE, ERASTE,
LISETTE, THE LACKEY.

MADAME ARGANTE.

We had news of you this morning that put us in mortal distress. They said you had passed the night very badly.

GÉRONTE.

It's my heirs who noise this about; they'd like now to see me in my sepulchre. I was never better, I swear to you.

ÉRASTE.

My uncle has the look, or at least is not far from it, of a gallant of thirty.

LISETTE (*aside*).

Yes, who'll die soon.

GÉRONTE.

I should be very ill indeed and in more than an agony if eyes so beautiful did not revive my life.

MADAME ARGANTE.

Daughter, you now see before you the man I have destined for your husband.

GÉRONTE.

Yes, Madam, 'tis you (or so I fondly think) who heal my ills better than another Hippocrates. You are like a julep for my heart, my marriage with you is a certain emetic, in short I take you as my last ointment.

ISABELLE.

I do not know, sir, for what you take me, but this choice confounds me, and you amaze me.

MADAME ARGANTE.

Monsieur in marrying you confers upon you a favor that ought to make you forget both his ills and his age; and you'd have no cause to repent.

ISABELLE.

Madam, duty makes me consent; but perhaps, sir, by this strait law, you will not find in me what you are hoping for. I know what I am and my little worth as a remedy for your ills. He is very much mistaken if he pretends, by reading my face, to find in me all his medicines. I know my eyes well; they would never make so fine a cure or take such great effects.

ÉRASTE.

To the power of those eyes I pay greater justice.

GÉRONTE.

In the fire that I feel, if love be propitious, before nine months are up, without saying overmuch, my heirs will have somewhat to reckon with, and people would soon hear my news.

LISETTE.

(Aside) Faith! he'll be doing wonders!

If the devil tempts you and would have you marry, let him seek another object to match you. I agree with you, Madame is lively and pretty. A husband for her must also be lively and smart, well made, a fine air, and not yet twenty-six. You, you are full of years, and long ago. At your age, ought one to speak of marriages? Good lack aday! Employ a notary for better uses; that's a good will, a will, gad, well made, well sealed, which ought to take the place for you of tenderness, of love, of desire, of household, of wife, of contracts, of children, of marriage. I have spoken. I say no more.

GÉRONTE.

Truly that's well done. Who put such an edge on your cackle?

LISETTE.

Reason.

GÉRONTE (*to Isabelle and Madame Argante*).

Don't be hurt by her airs. She speaks her thoughts freely to me sometimes. I allow it because of certain good traits she has.

LISETTE.

I don't know what it is to flatter people.

ÉRASTE.

You are very wrong to speak in that fashion. I should wish to be as monsieur is. He wishes to marry, and is he not right to have an heir in this manner if he can? What, will he refuse a lovely person whom his happy destiny reserves for him and gives to him? Ah, heaven is my witness if I should ever wish a lot more glorious to crown my desires.

ISABELLE.

You counsel me then to conclude the affair?

ÉRASTE.

I believe that truly you could not do better.

ISABELLE.

Your loving counsels and your rare advice, since you wish it, Monsieur, will be followed.

MADAME ARGANTE.

My daughter always knows how to obey when I order.

ÉRASTE.

Yes, I confirm you there, that a young person, despite her repugnance and the pride of her good sense, ought to follow blindly the choice of her parents; and uncle after all is not so old that he ought to renounce marriage forever; and sixty-eight years, is that such a decline, for . . .

GÉRONTE.

I shan't be that till next St. John's.

LISETTE.

He's suffered two strokes of apoplexy, which by good fortune were only two paralyses, and all the doctors who know his com-

plaints have sworn by Galen that when he has taken the waters, he would surely have neither sciatic gout, nor gravel, nor stitches, nor cough, nor cramps.

GÉRONTE.

They have ever assured me that in a very little time, I might of my own accord have some children.

LISETTE.

I'm no more doctor than apothecary, and I'd swear now, I would, to the contrary.

GÉRONTE (*whispers to Lisette*).

Lisette, the remedy's working to the point where . . .

LISETTE.

You ought to burst with it, and not show any signs.

ÉRASTE.

Uncle, what ails you? You change color.

GÉRONTE.

Nephew, I can't hold out any longer. Ah, ah, Madam, I must bid you adieu. A certain pressing duty calls me in a certain place.

MADAME ARGANTE.

For fear of incommoding you, we will withdraw.

GÉRONTE.

Eraste, conduct them. Excuse me, I beg, I cannot remain longer with you.

(*He goes out with his lackey.*)

SCENE VIII.

MADAME ARGANTE, ISABELLE, ERASTE, LISETTE.

LISETTE (*to Isabelle*).

Madame, you see the power of your charms. One glance alone of yours, one faint movement, rouses more humours, loosens more

bile, works more in him at the very first than the medicine he's been taking these six months. O power of love!

MADAME ARGANTE.

Adieu, I will retire.

ÉRASTE.

Madam, grant me the honour of conducting you.

SCENE IX.

LISETTE (*alone*).

Here's a clutter. As for me, I'm going about my business; the good man waits for me, and can do nothing without me.

And for the first step toward a wedding night,
Behold, I vow, an interview aright!

—

ACT II

SCENE I.

MADAME ARGANTE, ISABELLE, ERASTE.

MADAME ARGANTE.

That's detaining us too long, come, let us go.

ÉRASTE.

I cannot quit you nor let you depart unless you soothe me with a ray of hope.

MADAME ARGANTE.

I should like to be able to give you the preference.

ÉRASTE.

What, have you, madam, the cruelty to conclude in my eyes this projected marriage, after having promised me the charming Isabelle? Could I, without dying, see myself parted from her?

MADAME ARGANTE.

When I promised her to you, you gave me your oath that your uncle, in favor of this engagement, would make over to you the

entire amount of his estate; in marrying my daughter he offers to do that for her. Am I wrong?

ÉRASTE (*to Isabelle*).

You, madam, will you consent to it?

ISABELLE.

Surely, Monsieur, he will be my husband. Did you not just tell me yourself that a daughter, despite the extreme repugnance that she finds in herself toward the party presented, ought to follow the will of her parents?

ÉRASTE.

And do you not see that by this trick I flatter his caprice to spoil his projects? There are certain spirits who must be taken by shifts, and whom you never gain by a front attack. My uncle is so made.

(*To Madame Argante*) Could interest lead you to sacrifice so dear a daughter?

MADAME ARGANTE.

But the good it will be to her . . .

ÉRASTE.

Give me your word to break off this marriage, and I promise you, on my word, to turn him this day in such a fashion that things will go as I hope, and he will make a will in my favour.

MADAME ARGANTE.

If he does it, my daughter is yours absolutely. I will write him that his age, that his frail health, is repugnant to marriage, that it would be a speedy cause of his death; that the affair is off, and that he is to think no more on't.

ISABELLE.

I should obey with infinite joy.

ÉRASTE.

What a happy lot mine is! How worthy of envy! But Lisette is coming, and I hear a noise.

SCENE II.

*LISETTE, MADAME ARGANTE, ISABELLE, ERASTE.**ÉRASTE (to Lisette).*

How is my uncle?

LISETTE.

Here he is with me.

MADAME ARGANTE (to Eraste)

I leave you with him. For my part, I'll withdraw. But before my departure, I am going below to write. You, on your side, second my zeal.

ÉRASTE.

The reward that will be mine responds from out my heart.

SCENE III.

*ERASTE, LISETTE.**LISETTE.*

Well, will you have your uncle, at his age and before your very eyes, make a stupid marriage that will rob you of a benefit you ought to have?

ÉRASTE.

Alas, my poor child, I'm in despair about it. But the affair is not consummated yet, and his fire may go up in smoke. The mother changes willingly in my favour, and, with a bit of writing we have arranged, is going to thank my uncle, and make him understand that he is a little too old for a son-in-law.

LISETTE.

I wish to make a part of the plot. Shall it be the will then on which we found all our hopes, and which ought to bind our alliances, and make the happiness of Eraste and of Crispin? We must make our fortune by our wits, and break up entirely the marriage he plans. I have said a word about it to his apothecary; 'tis a little knave that ought to be coming soon, he'll bring him to his senses. I don't mean to loll in a carelessness that ought to be left for fools. Monsieur G ronte is coming now.

SCENE IV.

GERONTE, the lackey, ERASTE, LISETTE.

GÉRONTE.

My colic seized me at an awkward moment truly; I never felt so many ills at once. Were they not justly indignant at my quitting them so brusquely?

ÉRASTE.

Every one knows that sickness excuses all.

LISETTE.

Monsieur has done the honours for you to the last. I should say, however, that in entering upon this matter that you haven't made a very fine start.

ÉRASTE.

My uncle will do better a second time; let it suffice that in marrying, he has made a good choice.

GÉRONTE.

That's true. However, I have some repugnance to think at my age of making an allowance; but since I have promised . . .

LISETTE.

Don't constrain yourself. Nobody is scrupulous about these matters nowadays. Monsieur will acquit you of your promise.

GÉRONTE.

The die is cast. Let us follow my destiny. I should like to contrive some little present which would cost little and would appear new.

ÉRASTE.

Leave the cares of this festivity to me, the clothes and the suppers, too; I can give orders in this style far better than a doctor.

GÉRONTE.

Don't go launch me into such a grand festivity.

LISETTE.

We must have plenty, spread with care, to divert us from your

sad sight. We must hear violins, too; and I wish to dance a cotillion with you.

GÉRONTE.

I was as good for the prize as any other, in my time.

LISETTE (*aside*).

That's saying you're worth very little in ours.

SCENE V.

A LACKEY OF MADAME ARGANTE, GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE, THÉ LACKEY OF GERONTE.

THE LACKEY OF MADAME ARGANTE.

My mistress, who is just leaving, told me to give you this note I have here.

GÉRONTE (*taking the note*).

They are disturbed doubtless about my health. Let's read it. Lisette, go look for my spectacles.

LISETTE.

Is it worth so much bother? Give me the note; I'll decipher it. (*She reads.*)

"Since our interview, Monsieur, I have reflected on the proposed marriage, and I find it is not fitting for either one or the other. You will understand then, please, that in releasing you from your word, I withdraw my own, and that I am your very humble and very obedient servant. Argante."

And lower down,

"Isabelle."

You may now, without being punished, take yourself home and quit the service; here's your dismissal, well signed to.

GÉRONTE.

Nephew, what do you say to that?

ÉRASTE.

I'm a little astonished at it. But without stopping at this silly note, we must force them to keep their word.

GÉRONTE.

I'll take care to follow your advice; and with a sudden pleasure all my sense is ravished. I don't know how it be that in the teeth of my own good, I leap into this great peril. Some fate leads me to this marriage in spite of myself, and not love at all.

LISETTE.

I wouldn't swear so, but I believe you. What the deuce do you think love is, to be in a body half dead and so unfriendly to his fires? Is love going to lodge with fluxions, catarrhs, coughs, and obstructions?

GÉRONTE (*to lackey of Madame Argante*).

Wait a while below, and don't be in haste. I'm going to reply at once to your mistress. (*The lackey of Madame Argante goes out.*)

SCENE VI.

GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE, THE LACKEY OF
GERONTE.

GÉRONTE.

See how promptly I take up my part. At a word here I am, free of this marriage.

LISETTE.

Your name must be cried through the town, Monsieur—that's what I call a manly thing to do.

ÉRASTE.

'Twas prodigious rashness at your age, sickly, feverish, gouty, and worse than that, to take a wife, and on so bright a day to make of your wedding bell a funeral knell.

GÉRONTE.

But now and thou didst praise my project and my flame.

ÉRASTE.

Then you did well and now you do better.

GÉRONTE.

Now that I'm calm, and a wiser mind heals me of the vapors of love and marriage, I wish to put in order the goods I have received from heaven, and to make in your favour a sole legacy, by a good will.

ÉRASTE.

Ah, sir, I beg you, spare my stricken soul this idea. I cannot, without tears, hear you pronounce the word will; it seems to announce to me the fate that will soon follow it, and the unhappiness I cannot survive. I tremble when I think of that cruel moment.

GÉRONTE.

So much the better; that's because of your good feelings. I promise then to name thee my sole heir. I have two other relatives for whom the blood pleads: one is my brother's son, thou knowest his name, a Norman gentleman, rascal enough 'tis said; and t'other is a widow with little of this world's riches, daughter of my sister, and so my niece, who formerly married—in Maine 'twas—although old, a certain baron whose ancestors were his only wealth. I wish, then, in behalf of the sincere affection once borne their father and their mother, to leave each of them twenty thousand crowns.

LISETTE.

Twenty thousand crowns! 'Twould be an exorbitant legacy. A nephew low Norman, a niece from Maine, to buy at home for them lawsuits by the dozen, how they'd love to go to court on an estate like that! Fy, its too much by three-quarters for those two crabs.

GÉRONTE.

I've never seen them. What I can tell you is that both have writ me that they wish to come to Paris shortly to see me, to embrace me, and to go home content. You won't be angry, I trow, if I leave them enough to live well and keep up their station.

ÉRASTE.

Are you not, sir, master of your goods; everything you do, I shall find good.

LISETTE.

For my part, I find this last clause bad, and I oppose this legacy with all my power. But you forget the lackey is waiting.

GÉRONTE.

I'll about it at once, and return in an instant.

LISETTE.

Have you forgot that a paralysis seized your right arm this month gone, and that you can neither write nor sign?

GÉRONTE.

That's true. My nephew will come with me, and I shall dictate a letter in a style that will make Madame Argante burst with spleen, let me perish. Come, Eraste; follow me.

ÉRASTE.

To obey you, sir, is my supreme law.

SCENE VII.

LISETTE alone.

Our affairs are going to take a new face; and fortune, in sooth, mocks us and beckons us.

SCENE VIII.

CRISPIN, LISETTE.

LISETTE.

Ah, you there, Crispin! And where the devil do you come from?

CRISPIN.

I'faith, I've run devilish fast; these notaries are hard to hit. One was not at home and the other was about town. I unearthed them in the place I was told to go, in a garden, at table, in a little retreat, with ladies who seemed pretty enough, foregad! Some little matter of their own was going on there, I fancy. But in an hour at the most they will be here.

LISETTE.

Good. Do you know why G ronte had them here?

CRISPIN.

No.

LISETTE.

To draw up a marriage contract.

CRISPIN.

Oh, the devil! At his age he means to play us such a trick?

LISETTE.

In Isabelle's behalf, an arrow sent by love pierced his poor heart, for all to see; and, riding over his nephew's hopes, he wished in due form to get himself an heir; but heaven by good fortune rules it otherwise. He is thinking now of making a will where your master will be named his heir.

CRISPIN.

For him, as for us, nothing could do better. The news is too good. I must embrace thee for his sake and embrace again, and, i'faith, with all my heart; and what a glow of joy and tenderness in congratulating thee. . . . Love which moves me . . . The news is charming, a treasure in itself. I must embrace thee, dear child, again.

LISETTE.

Be more proper and modest in your transports.

CRISPIN.

Makes excuses for me if my joy carries me too high.

LISETTE.

But since in this world below there is no perfect good, and never anything to the full of our desires, he is putting in a horrid clause.

CRISPIN.

Tell me, child with is't?

LISETTE.

He leaves forty thousand crowns to two kindred away from here, whom he has never seen.

CRISPIN.

Forty thousand crowns of money cold and ready! That's the solid part of the succession. It's ready money that I count on. You've tricked yourself, that will never be, mark me telling you, Monsieur G eronte; you've been too quick to reckon without me. And who are these kindred?

LISETTE.

One is a low Norman, a gentleman, born between Falaise and Caen; the other is a baroness and a widow without dowry, who lives in Maine for the most part, a litigant, if there was ever one, as they've told me often; who out of thirty suits loses twenty-five a year.

CRISPIN.

Since she is such a good target for the suits, we must make her lose this one more.

LISETTE.

One and then the other will be coming on us soon. You must ransack your brain, dear Crispin, as 'twere an arsenal, for some new ruse that will hinder G eronte from making this legacy.

CRISPIN.

Has he ever seen these two kinsmen?

LISETTE.

Never. He knew only by a letter writ to say that they were coming to Paris.

CRISPIN.

Is my face very well known at your house?

LISETTE.

G eronte, as thou knowest, has almost never seen thee; and truth on't is, I'll be sworn now he has no idea of thy face.

CRISPIN.

Good. Does my master know this dangerous project, his uncle's intention, and the wrong that is being done him?

LISETTE.

Only too well. He's raging in his heart, and longs for someone to avert this storm.

CRISPIN.

I'll be that some one, I promise it forsooth. The relations will have none of those possessions; and I would have G ronte hate them so that they may be cut off; and further, that he may curse them, them and their descendants forever, and all the shoots of their posterity.

LISETTE.

Why, you, Crispin, might . . .

CRISPIN.

Come, steady; the price promised to me makes it easy enough: for I am set to marry you, if . . .

LISETTE

Granted that, but in sooth . . .

CRISPIN.

How then?

LISETTE.

You seem to me a trifle free with me.

CRISPIN.

Let's not reproach each other with anything.

LISETTE.

We know your pranks.

CRISPIN.

We're even there; don't I know yours?

LISETTE.

You owe debts on all sides, and have owed a long time.

CRISPIN.

I've honest people for company therewith. 'Tis foolish to disturb yourself on this point. The will of the uncle will lift my debts, and one who never dreams of it is going to pay for me. But some one is coming.

LISETTE.

'Tis G ronTE. Farewell; run, save yourself. Go wait for me downstairs; in a little while I'm going to teach you what you must do and say for your r le.

CRISPIN.

Odso, I know already my r le by heart; men of parts have no need of preceptors.

SCENE IX.

GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE.

G RONTE (holding a letter).

In this note I say what must be said to the mother. I'd like for some one to come tell me the way she takes my little compliment. I fancy she'll be surprised surely.

LISETTE.

By your leave, Sir, charge me with the letter; I promise to put it in their hands myself, and to report to you what she has said to me, and what she did on reading what you writ.

G RONTE.

Will it be fitting for you to be seen there?

 RASTE.

You could not give me greater joy, Sir.

G RONTE.

Tell her to her face that she is not to think of renouncing the marriage that I've made light of . . .

 RASTE.

I know the secret of your intentions.

GÉRONTE.

That I'm going at once to name you my heir, to give you my property.

ÉRASTE.

I know their minds, they'll shrivel up with spleen. Content yourself; I know what is to be said, and will return to tell you of our conference.

GERONTE, LISETTE.

GÉRONTE.

Here's your apothecary, Monsieur Clistorel.

GÉRONTE (to Clistorel).

Ah, God bless you for being here. When I see you, I am livelier and happier.

CLISTOREL, vexed.

Good morning, sir, good morning.

GÉRONTE.

If I judge rightly, you seem vexed. Why?

CLISTOREL.

I've reason to be.

GÉRONTE.

Who has stirred up your wrath like this?

CLISTOREL.

Who vexed me?

GÉRONTE.

Yes.

CLISTOREL.

Your follies.

GÉRONTE.

How?

CLISTOREL.

Fine piece of news, indeed, I've just learned, I'm overjoyed.

GÉRONTE.

Ah, sir, what is it?

CLISTOREL.

Aren't you ashamed at such an age as yours, to be so extravagant as that?

GÉRONTE.

What's the matter then?

CLISTOREL.

In spite of your grey hairs, you should take some grains of hell-bore. They told me in the town, and that it was a sure fact, that you were nursing a plot to marry.

LISETTE.

Why, is that all?

CLISTOREL.

How so? In all one's life, is there a greater blunder?

GÉRONTE.

And since when is this? Why do you exclaim? You whom we saw married this month?

CLISTOREL.

True, that's quite the same. Have you the courage and the male vigour necessary to marriage? You amuse me. And you are right to make some comparison with me. I had fourteen children by my first wife, Madame Clistorel (God rest her soul); and if death shall not cut my labours off, I hope to have as many more by the second.

LISETTE.

That will be very well done.

CLISTOREL.

Your puny body is not made, believe me, for this sort of fencing. I read once in Hippocrates, no matter where, a safe aphorism; none better: Every old man who takes to himself a girl that is lively and too frisky, with his own knife cuts off his days. *Virgo libidinosa serem jugulat.*

LISETTE.

Why, Monsieur Clistorel, do you know Latin? You could make yourself a doctor in a day's time.

CLISTOREL.

I! Heaven preserve me from it! They are all asses, or at least, three-quarters of 'em; they've been up to a hundred tricks in the suit they so foolishly brought against us. I myself, I alone am going to scotch the entire faculty. They wish to oblige all apothecaries make and to put in place themselves their clysters, and that all our boys be assistants only.

LISETTE.

Fy, fy! These doctors are good fellows.

CLISTOREL.

Wouldn't I be a fine sight, with spectacles on, doing like a young apprentice these close functions. That's putting us, at sixty-five, on our A B C. You can see what an insult to the whole body that would have been.

GÉRONTE.

You have done well indeed in this business, to have stuck to it until the end.

CLISTOREL.

I had my mind made up, rather than yield, to eat my shop down to my mortar.

LISETTE.

Their plan, to be sure, was develish ridiculous.

CLISTOREL.

When I set myself to it, I'm more stubborn than a mule.

GÉRONTE.

Well done that! These fellows wish to offend you; but what have I done to you to stir your rage?

CLISTOREL.

What have you done to me? You wish to take a wife, to shrivel

away; and I alone would have all the blame for it. Take a wife, you! go to, you are crazy.

GÉRONTE.

Sir . . .

CLISTOREL.

'Twere better that some one twist your neck.

GÉRONTE.

But, sir . . .

CLISTOREL.

Take my good physic, with good syrups and anodynes, of good catholicon . . .

GÉRONTE.

Sir . . .

CLISTOREL.

Good senna, good polycrest extracted and refined . . .

GÉRONTE.

Sir, one little word . . .

CLISTOREL.

Good tartar emetic, some good strong laxative and diuretic; that's what you must have; but a wife! . . .

GÉRONTE.

But . . .

CLISTOREL.

My shop is closed to you forever . . . If there were need . . .

GÉRONTE.

In an extreme case, the least lenitive, or the least apozem, a drop of honey or decoction . . . I'd have seen him die like an old musketoon. Oh, 'tis a fine lad to take up wedlock!

LISETTE.

But, Monsieur Clistorel, . . .

CLISTOREL.

The charming marriage! The pretty little pet!

LISETTE.

Sir, listen to us.

CLISTOREL.

No, no, I'll have nothing to do with you. Your servant, your servant.

SCENE XII.

GERONTE, LISETTE.

LISETTE.

What the devil's he raging at? Now, I never saw an animal like this. Come to take his measure; he's no taller than his syringe, and screeches like three. These little abortions, all of them have a balky humour.

GÉRONTE.

He won't come any more; his departure annoys me.

LISETTE.

For this one you can have a thousand at once. One of my good friends, from whom we must choose, who has just won his apothecary's degree, has promised me to do your business at a tiny price; and will have for you a special syrup, cassia, senna, rhubarb, and every chance that it will bring more effect and better work than that they sell you for four times as much.

GÉRONTE.

Have him come to me then.

LISETTE.

I'll not fail to.

GÉRONTE.

Let me lie down, Lisette, come with me. This Monsieur Clistorel has stirred me up.

LISETTE.

Be sure to remember when you are rested, to do me a favour in your will.

GÉRONTE.

I'll do you that favor (*low, aside*), provided it costs me nothing.

ACT III

SCENE I.

GERONTE, LISETTE.

GÉRONTE.

Eraste does not come to bring me their reply. What must I foresee in this delay?

LISETTE.

And why, please, should you disturb yourself so much? Suffice that you ought to be happy; you never did anything more heroic than to break up a marriage so tragi-comic.

GÉRONTE.

I'm proud of myself in this matter, and Monsieur Clistorel is very right. 'Twas like throwing myself, head foremost, with a stone about my neck, to the bottom of the river.

LISETTE.

Good! It was a hundred times worse still than that. But at last all was well.

SCENE II.

CRISPIN, as a Country Gentleman, GERONTE, LISETTE.

CRISPIN, without, knocking.

Hoh there, some one, hoh there! Is everybody dead here? Lackey, varlet, maid? I'd best knock, shout; nobody appears. Devil take the house!

LISETTE.

Eh! Who the devil is knocking? (*She opens the door.*) What would you have, sir? What demon is in you? Is this the way to visit a sick man? (*Aside*) God save me, 'tis Crispin, 'tis he, o' my faith.

CRISPIN (*whispers to Lisette*).

You're not in the wrong, my dear child, 'tis I. (*Aloud*) Good morrow, good morrow, girl. I was told in the town that a G ronTE lived here. May one speak with him?

LISETTE.

Why not? There he is.

CRISPIN (*tossing his arms about*).

Odso, I'm glad to hear it. Ah, Monsieur, touch hands. I am your servant, or the devil take me! Touch hands once again! The pleasure transports me more than I can show you.

GÉRONTE.

This man surely intends to tear me limb from limb.

CRISPIN.

You seemed as surprised as can be. I see you hardly recognize me. My features are new to you. Do you know why? Because you've never seen me before.

GÉRONTE.

I believe that.

CRISPIN.

But the late monsieur my father, Alexandre Choupille, Gentleman of Normandy, took to wife a girl who was, as they tell me, your sister, and who brought me into the world in four months. My father was angry at this diligence; but a knowing friend told him in confidence that it is true my mother in having children did not observe enough the order of the times; but that among women the error was not unheard of, and that she was at fault only in the chronology.

GÉRONTE.

A wife, indeed, can't calculate as a man would have done.

CRISPIN.

Now then, this female, in conceiving so promptly, that sometimes I'm ashamed to think of it, in sending me into the world, be it fortune or disgrace, makes me your nephew, since she is your sister.

GÉRONTE.

Mind this, nephew, if by chance you are so, that you are a dunce to talk like this. My sister was sensible, and none can reproach her with having stumbled in a matter of honour.

CRISPIN.

So I think. However, while she was living her virtue was held a little rickety. Whatever it comes to, legitimate or bastard, whether I was sent into the world too soon or too late, I am your nephew, what's more, your heir, coming from Normandy expressly to take up my rights.

GÉRONTE.

Well done, i' faith; and I praise the intention. When are you going back?

CRISPIN.

You would wish to follow me? That depends on the time you have to live, uncle. Be sure I won't depart till I have seen you well railed, well walled up, resting easy in four pine boards.

LISETTE (*aside to Geronte*).

You've a nephew, sir, please you, who speaks his mind pretty freely.

GÉRONTE (*aside to Lisette*).

To tell you the truth, he appals me.

CRISPIN.

I am persuaded by the mood you are in that the inheritance will be most complete, that I'm going to be free with my gold; for they tell me you are a miser, a scoundrel. I know that for a sou, you'd submit with heroic ardour to a flogging in a public place. I've heard, too, that you've acquired in more places than one the title of usurer and skinflint.

GÉRONTE.

You know when you talk thus, nephew, that if I had the use of my two arms still, I'd pitch you out of the window.

CRISPIN.

Me?

GÉRONTE.

Yes, you, and now get out this instant.

CRISPIN.

Ah, faith, you're a fine fellow to talk so. 'Tis you that will get

out. The house belongs to me, and maybe I may suffer you to live there still and to die there.

LISETTE.

Heavens, what a varlet!

GÉRONTE (*aside*).

Where am I?

CRISPIN.

Come, my good friend, take me to my fine apartment, I beg you. Is he a neighbour of thine? I find thee to my taste; and we can talk together tonight in one chamber. Good cheer, a great fire: let the deep cellar yield us full jugs of flowing liquor. Plunder everything. The good man has a strong back, and one may boldly pick him to the bone. Uncle, this evening, I must have a hundred louis advanced on my inheritance; if not, tomorrow morning, with my own hand, I'll set fire to the house.

GÉRONTE (*aside*).

Great gods! Whoever saw such insolence?

LISETTE (*aside to Geronte*).

'Tis no nephew, sir, 'tis a devil. Try gentleness to get him out.

GÉRONTE.

Nephew, 'tis wrong in you to come with so much scorn to torment an uncle in his misery; let me finish my sad life in peace, and you'll be my heir the day of my death.

CRISPIN.

Good. But when's that day coming?

GÉRONTE.

At every step is pitiless death on my track; at the most I have only four days to live.

CRISPIN.

I give you six; but afterward, gadzooks, don't go breaking your word, or I'll have you buried dead or alive. I leave you once again; uncle, keep your promise, or I'll keep mine.

SCENE III.

GERONTE, LISETTE.

LISETTE.

Ah, what a man that is! What a nephew your blood gave you there.

GÉRONTE.

'Tis no nephew of mine; my sister was too wise to bring up a son in that savage style; 'tis a beastly knave, a fool.

LISETTE.

Now to look at him, he's something like you, in his eyes, his features. There's I don't know what crops out; anyhow you can see he belongs to the family.

GÉRONTE.

Body o' me! If he does belong to it, he does it little honour. Ah, the beastly breed of 'em!

LISETTE.

And would you have the heart to leave your estate, such a proud sum, twenty thousand crowns in money, to this fine gentleman?

GÉRONTE.

I leave him my money? I'd rather a hundred times bury it forever.

LISETTE.

Faith, I perceive that Monsieur the nephew, if I may trust the signs, will not have gained much by his journey, and that the poor devil, arrived only today, had as well remained at home.

GÉRONTE.

If 'tis on my property he sets up his kitchen, I assure you he'll die of famine, and will not have a chance to laugh at my expense.

LISETTE.

That's very well done. People must be taught how to live. See how all these greedy nephews are made, who can't hide their perfidious natures. When they don't plague their old uncle, they pre-

tend that he's indebted to them. But Eraste is come back, and we shall see how everything went.

SCENE IV.

ERASTE, GERONTE, LISETTE.

GÉRONTE.

Thou makest me wait long enough! Thou hast deserted me in a great trial. A miserable nephew is fallen on my hands.

ÉRASTE.

He just greeted me below stairs all out of breath, and told me in two words what brought him here.

GÉRONTE.

What dost say to his looks?

ÉRASTE.

I think them astonishing. He blusters, he swears, he would set us afire.

GÉRONTE.

I needed your presence her to repress the heighth of his impertinence; Lisette is witness to it.

LISETTE.

Ah, the wicked varlet, to whom Monsieur wished to leave part of his goods!

GÉRONTE.

I've changed my mind indeed; I give you my word he'll never get a little farthing of what I own.

LISETTE.

I have executed my commission, and everything has been done as you desired. Your letter produced an enchanting effect. At first they showed an indifferent spirit; they wished to cover their play with a false air of scorn; methought they troubled themselves but little; but when I told them today you were setting out to make me the sole heir of all your goods—(for you had had me speak in that style) . . .

GÉRONTE.

Yes, I promised it to you; 'tis my intention.

ÉRASTE.

Both of them showed a surprise they won't recover from these six months.

GÉRONTE.

I can well believe it.

ÉRASTE.

But mark this, it ought to amaze you, and it surprised me greatly; 'tis that Madame Argante, out of love for your family, proposed very frankly to give me her daughter, and to solve thus by a mutual consideration, the bond made between you.

GÉRONTE.

And what answer didst thou give to these fine notions?

ÉRASTE.

That I should not like to step into your shoes without being sure of your sentiments on this point, and without your consent.

GÉRONTE.

J.J. not burden thee yet with marriage. Let my case here serve make thee wise.

LISETTE.

For me, I'd approve of this marriage and this choice. 'Tis as it should be, and I join with it. 'Tis fit for monsieur to follow this desire, not for you, who ought to be renouncing life.

GÉRONTE.

Life! And why? Am I dead, if you please?

LISETTE.

I don't know, sir, just how it is, but everybody thinks, by your sad and sombre looks, that you are only a shadow near the tomb; and that for some reason or other you may have for a different course, you haven't had yourself buried yet.

GÉRONTE.

What with such talk and insolent airs, I'll be losing my patience yet!

LISETTE.

I don't know how to garnish the truth, sir, and say frankly what I think.

SCENE V.

THE LACKEY, GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE.

THE LACKEY.

A lady below, sir, with her suite, who wears heavy mourning, comes to pay you a visit, and calls herself your niece.

GÉRONTE.

Still more kindred!

THE LACKEY.

Shall I show her up?

GÉRONTE.

No, I forbid you to do it.

LISETTE.

Heaven keep you, sir, from using her in that fashion, you ought not to refuse her the door.

(To the lackey) Go bring her in.

SCENE VI.

*GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE.*LISETTE *to Geronte.*

Have a little patience: the niece will show a better temper than the nephew. Among so many relations 'twill be the devil indeed if we don't find one that's reasonable.

SCENE VII.

CRISPIN, as a widow, a page carrying his train; GERONTE,
ERASTE, LISETTE, GERONTE'S LACKEY.

(Crispin makes a curtsy to Geronte's lackey, who opens the door for him. The page goes out.)

(To Geronte) Permit, if you please, this embarrassment to express my joy and my delight. I see an uncle indeed, but an uncle whom I love, and whom I honour indeed more than myself.

LISETTE (*aside to Eraste*).

Sir, 'tis Crispin.

ERASTE (*aside to Lisette*).

'Tis he. I know it well enough; we had a moment's talk below.

GÉRONTE to *Eraste*.

She has gentleness and politeness. Give my niece a chair, somebody, at once.

CRISPIN to *Geronte's Lackey*.

Don't stir, please; respect forbids me.

(*To Geronte, in a tone of respect.*)

An arm chair in my uncle's presence! A tabouret will suffice.

(*The lackey gives Crispin a tabouret.*)

GÉRONTE.

I am happy already in my kinswoman.

ÉRASTE.

She knows indeed how to bear herself, and her figure is charming.

(*The lackey gives an arm chair to Geronte, a chair to Eraste, a tabouret to Lisette, and goes out.*)

SCENE VIII.

GERONTE, CRISPIN as a widow, ERASTE, LISETTE.

CRISPIN.

Fy, fy, you jest, I'm a fright. There was a time when I hadn't

this flesh; but you know the effect of a fruitful marriage, and what it is to have children early. That spoils the figure, and furiously.

LISETTE.

You would pass for a girl yet surely.

CRISPIN.

I have made a sad enough trial of marriage. At twenty my husband left me a mother and a widow. You would fancy that after this early death, and made as one is with some charms, one could have easily found another husband; but the sad memory of the poor dead man consumes me with secret sadness. I've had weary days and harder nights, but the sad sleeplessness of a grieving widowhood do not divert ugly scandals; and I long to mingle with the dead a heart that burns only with its first fires.

ÉRASTE.

Plighted troths may be carried no further. 'Tis a sentiment worthy of an Artemis.

GÉRONTE *to Crispin.*

Your husband leaving you a mother and widow at twenty, did not leave you, I fancy, many children.

CRISPIN *to G ronte.*

Only nine; but, my heart all swollen with grief, two years afterward I was brought to bed of a posthumous child.

LISETTE.

Two years afterward; so that's your fidelity! Posterity won't believe it.

G RONTE.

May one inquire without offense what object pressed you to leave Maine?

CRISPIN.

The desire to see you is my first object, and more, a certain suit that is basely made against me, for certain common brown bread ovens in my territory. I propose first a good declinatory; they go on; I institute formal opposition and without damaging

my rights, I anticipate the appeal. The cause is thus declaimed to bailliwick, and I end by being interlocuted.

LISETTE.

Interlocuted! Heavens! what insult is that? And you have suffered some one to interlocute you? A woman of honour see herself interlocuted!

ÉRASTE.

Why be so piqued by this term? 'Tis a word from the courts.

LISETTE.

Be it what you please; but no judge will ever interlocute me; the word is immodest, and the term shocks me. I don't wish to let anybody interlocute me.

GÉRONTE *to Crispin.*

She's crazy, and is often seized with fits. She does not talk lawsuits the way you do.

CRISPIN.

This process is not the only subject that brings me, and makes me quit Maine so brusquely. Having learned, Monsieur, from people worthy of belief, who have told me of you and whom I believe, that you were a man tainted with more than one vice, a drunkard, a gambler. . . .

ÉRASTE.

How now! What a notion!

CRISPIN.

Who haunts certain places day and night, where honesty is shamed and modesty groans.

GÉRONTE.

Is it to me, if you please, that this discourse is addressed?

CRISPIN.

Yes, uncle, to yourself. Is there nothing in it that wounds you, seeing it is copied after the truth.

GÉRONTE (*aside*).

I don't see where I come in.

CRISPIN.

'Twas avowed that for a long time, you've led with mademoiselle here a life that's shameless and criminal, and that you already have seven children from it.

LISETTE.

With me, Merciful Father. Listen at the liars! What have they to do with it? Is it any business of theirs?

GÉRONTE.

I'll burst with rage!

CRISPIN.

And so, on the report of a thousand honest people, we've gathered your relations together, sir, and to prevent you from their rash way of eating up our property and ruining yourself, we have resolved with one voice to forbid you,

GÉRONTE.

Me, to forbid me?

LISETTE.

Oh, heavens, what a family!

CRISPIN.

We know your life with this woman, and wish to prevent your making a marriage with her some day *in extremis*.

GÉRONTE (*rising*).

Get out of here, madam, and never dream of putting your foot here again! Get out, I tell you, and don't stop . . .

CRISPIN.

What! Strike a widow and assault her. Help! Neighbours! Murder! They are killing me!

GÉRONTE.

There's a fine jade, I'll swear to it!

CRISPIN.

What, do you dare to blaspheme your own blood? 'Tis enough to lock you up.

LISETTE.

To lock up Monsieur?

CRISPIN.

Don't be too hightytighty, or your'll be put in Salpêtrière.

LISETTE.

In Salpêtrière?

CRISPIN.

Yes, my love, and without noise. We know only too well about your doings.

ÉRASTE.

We must come to the bottom of this mystery. Let some one go at once to find a commissioner.

CRISPIN.

A commissioner for me? Am I then game for a commissioner?

ÉRASTE.

We'll see as to that; and we shall know shortly if one may come with such a tumult to insult people in their own houses. You, uncle, go to your chamber. I'll come tell you about it all in a moment.

GÉRONTE.

Ouf! This day will be the last of my life.

LISETTE *to Crispin.*

Wretch! You send an uncle into agony! Poor family at Maine-and Caen- Yes, tell the relations they deserve to be piloried.

SCENE IX.

ÉRASTE, CRISPIN.

ÉRASTE.

Is it true, Crispin? and your sincere zeal . . .

CRISPIN.

Send then, Monsieur, to seek a commissioner. I wait for him without budging.

ÉRASTE.

Just heaven! 'Tis thou. I was not mistaken.

CRISPIN.

Yes, zooks, 'tis I. You've just given me a rude insult.

ÉRASTE.

Your modesty has suffered a great shock.

CRISPIN.

My ardour in your service gave me this outfit; and, as you see, my project succeeded. With certain words, I conjured up a storm. I've taken the part of two relations, and have spoken in their name such hard things that both, i'faith, will be disinherited.

ÉRASTE.

What!

CRISPIN.

If you had seen me doing wonders as a noble gentleman, plume at ear, grey hat, long sword at side, my Low-Norman air . . . 'twould have enchanted you. But in truth this tangle inspires me with unspeakable rapidity, in these trappings, I'm twenty times less afraid. Address and artifice have passed into my heart. How much wit and ruse one has under a dress like this.

ÉRASTE.

At last, my uncle rids himself of his nephew; he makes a will that ought to crown my wishes. Is there a happier mortal in the universe?

SCENE X.

ÉRASTE, CRISPIN, LISETTE.

LISETTE.

Ah, Monsieur, here's a terrible mishap. Monsieur G ronte is dead.

ÉRASTE.

Ah, heavens! Is it possible?

CRISPIN.

What! Monsieur's uncle will be deceased?

LISETTE.

Alas! 'Tis hardly better, the poor man is so low. Reaching his chamber, and hardly dragging his feet, he threw himself on the bed without strength or breath, and, his arms stiffening, suffocation all at once cut off his respiration. Then he fell, despite my assistance, without voice, without feeling, without pulse, without consciousness.

ÉRASTE.

I am in despair. 'Twas this last transport that you put him in, Crispin, that caused his death.

CRISPIN.

I sir? I'm not the cause of his death; and the dead man, frankly, has taken the thing ill. Why should that little discourse give him such a seizure. I aimed at his property, not his life.

ÉRASTE.

Don't despair yet of his life; he falls often into a lethargy that resembles death, and alarms us greatly.

LISETTE.

Ah, sir, he's half dead, and I who know what I'm talking about, I said he's going to die and that he had not another hour.

ÉRASTE.

Just heaven, Crispin, what a sad ending! My uncle will die without making a will, and I shall be bereft by this cruel death of the hope of winning the charming Isabelle! Fortune, I feel the effect of your rage!

LISETTE.

'Tis I that should weep, for I lose more than you.

CRISPIN.

Come, dear children, we must busy our hands and present a front worthy of the tempest; there's no time for melting tears; let's show a courage beyond our ills.

ÉRASTE.

Of what good is courage, what can we do?

CRISPIN.

First, we must run to the strong box with wholesome speed, rip open the cabinets, dismantle the house, and seize the effects. Lisette, keep your mouth shut for a while, if you can; go shut the door to the street, and bring away the keys for fear of invasion.

LISETTE.

Nobody enters without my permission.

CRISPIN.

Do not let the heats of booty and rich pillage carry your boiling courage too far. Above all things keep your wits about you in what you do. Fate conspires in vain against the testament. Before I'll see so much wealth pass into profane hands, I'll evoke the ghost of the dead *Géronte*:

And you will have with you against all odds,
Lisette, Crispin, and hell and all the gods.

ACT IV

SCENE I.

ÉRASTE, CRISPIN.

ÉRASTE, holding Géronte's portfolio.

Ah, poor Crispin, I am losing all hope. My uncle will not regain consciousness. The art and the doctors are superfluous here. The poor man has not an hour longer to live. The entire legacy which he intended to make me, as you see, Crispin, will not fall mine.

CRISPIN.

Lisette and I, sir, to carry out our plans, would be counting, too, on some little legacy.

ÉRASTE.

Though a cruel destiny opposed to our desires sends us on the bolts of his wrath, your pains shall not be fruitless and vain. Forty thousand crowns which I hold in my hands, the sad and fatal débris of a miserable shipwreck, shall be put into a shelter from the storm. There are the notes found on him.

CRISPIN, *trying to take the notes.*

Yet me share your burden with you. This little salve in the meantime may console us for such a heavy blow.

ÉRASTE.

'Tis true, dear Crispin; and yet you know very well that this is hardly a quarter of the estate I should have claimed as heir: houses in Paris, lands, contracts, they offer to my heart a charming solace. Not that the love of gain and the thirst for riches arouse in me unworthy weaknesses; 'tis with a nobler fire my heart is stricken. I might wed Isabelle with such a prize. It is only with this estate, only with these wanderings, that I can obtain the consent of her mother. For lack of the will I lose forever the stake of my life's happiness.

CRISPIN.

I see your points; they are very plausible, but concern the unforeseen and terrible strokes by which man's spirit is confounded, and the bravest valour set at naught. Before showing an old fellow to his last dwelling-place, O death, you should have waited an hour longer; 'twould have put us all in perfect peace, and everything would have passed most fitly.

ÉRASTE.

Must a hope that was justly founded smoke up in barren regrets? Can you not parry this fatal thrust, Crispin, and speedily find a remedy for my ill? A moment since you dreamed of some heroic deed: 'tis in great dangers that a great courage comes out.

CRISPIN.

Yes, only now I was thinking how to mend this loss; but at present I am stranded, I'm high and dry. Any other in such a place would be as sterile. If need be, perchance, to remove by some apt stroke, to juggle away a will that is not favourable to you, perhaps I might by some neat stroke exercise my talent and show my prowess; but to cause one to be found where there is not any, the devil with his crew, reduced to this, would beat his brow in vain; and now, sir, the devil is not a fool.

ÉRASTE.

Would you confound me, and drive me to despair?

SCENE II.

*ÉRASTE, LISETTE, CRISPIN.**LISETTE, to Eraste.*

The notaries, sir, are just coming in below. I have put them in the hall. Come, what will you have done, please?

ÉRASTE.

I see my difficulties growing every hour. My poor child, do what thou wilt about it. Do they know that my uncle has lost consciousness, and that he cannot speak?

LISETTE.

No, not yet, I think.

ÉRASTE.

Crispin.

CRISPIN.

Sir.

ÉRASTE.

Alas!

CRISPIN.

Alas!

ÉRASTE.

Kind heaven!

CRISPIN.

Ha!

ÉRASTE.

What shall we do, tell me?

CRISPIN.

Everything you please.

ÉRASTE.

Why, shall we send them away?

CRISPIN.

Eh! What would you have? What good can we get out of

LISETTE.

I'll tell them they may be off.

ÉRASTE, *stopping Lisette.*

Wait a bit. I'm slapdash down in the mouth. Crispin, thou'lt see me expire before thine eyes.

CRISPIN.

I'll follow you soon, for grief is killing me.

LISETTE.

For me, I'll not be far off. They'll be seeing us all three like a clap of thunder, crashing at once.

CRISPIN.

Wait . . . It's coming to me . . . 'tis a rare trick . . . it might by chance . . . I've a gleam—I'm rambling and see nothing but confusion.

LISETTE.

A pox o' the brute with his vision!

ÉRASTE.

Let us into the scheme that your heart proposes.

LISETTE.

Come, dear Crispin, try to see something.

CRISPIN.

Let me dream them . . . Yes, ah . . . No . . .
If, however . . . Why not? . . . One might . . .

LISETTE.

Don't dream so much then; the notaries downstairs are tired of waiting: everything depends on your diligence.

CRISPIN.

'Tis true; but now I'm brought to bed of a project that will surpass every effort of the human mind. Thou, who boasteth thee so apt and swift in everything, exercise thy imagination in this matter; let us see thy fine wit.

LISETTE.

I leave thee to that business. Who's so sharp in rascality as thou? Love ought to refresh thy faded skill.

CRISPIN.

Peace . . . Silence . . . I'm overgrown with thoughts.
There I am, foregad!

LISETTE.

Good.

CRISPIN.

Seated in an arm chair . . .

LISETTE.

Very well.

CRISPIN.

Don't disturb this enthusiasm of mine. A great fur cap down to my eyes; the blinds quite down . . .

LISETTE.

Wonders of thought!

CRISPIN.

Yes, Monsieur, on this day, as you wish, you'll be the heir. I promise you that. Come, Lisette, come, prick up your zeal. Love guides us and calls us to this project. Go get me some of the clothes of the dead uncle, his dressing gown, and his night cap. The spoils of the dead will be our victory.

LISETTE.

I'll build a trophy out of it to your glory. I fly to serve thee. I'm back on the instant.

SCENE II.

ERASTE, CRISPIN.

ÉRASTE.

You snatched me from the gates of death, Crispin. If your scheme succeeds to the top of your hopes, I will make you happy the rest of your life. I shall be heir; and by the same means, I shall marry the object of my only bliss. Ah, Crispin!

CRISPIN.

Now a secret terror is robbing me of my senses, alarming me, and upsetting me. If justice should come to know this matter—she is a bit brutal, and takes one by the collar. It's necessary to forge the signature, and my frightened hand refuses to join in the project that charms my soul.

ÉRASTE.

Your trouble is ill founded, for two or three months Géronte could not make use of his fingers, and his signature, otherwise so necessary, is not, as you see, requisite in this affair; and you will declare that you cannot sign.

CRISPIN.

Those good reasons win me over. I feel suddenly born again in my courage the ardor I need for so great a piece of work.

SCENE IV.

LISETTE, carrying Géronte's apparel, ERASTE, CRISPIN.

LISETTE, throwing the bundle down.

There they are, our good Géronte's clothes, as you wished.

CRISPIN, *undressing.*

Let's lose no time; some one dress me quickly. Monsieur, put a finger in the pie, please. The gown; hurry, put my arms in there.

Ah, what a poor valet! Each one put on a stocking. There, the kerchief on my neck. Put my hood on quick. The slippers. Very well. The equipage is fantastic!

LISETTE.

Yes, there's our dead man. Let's cheer up. G ronte is not dead since he lives again in this man. See his manner, his features; 'twere a certain cheat.

CRISPIN.

But what if with his clothes his pains are going to seize me?

 RASTE.

Fear nothing, arm yourself resolutely.

CRISPIN.

Troth, already I feel a little emotion: I don't know whether fear is a bit laxative, or this coat has a purgative virtue.

LISETTE.

I am going to put this old furred mantle on you, too—he wore it on treatment days.

CRISPIN.

You may call the notaries when you wish. Here I am in mortuary raiment.

LISETTE.

I'll bring them in a moment.

CRISPIN.

Second me well in all this business.

SCENE V.

ERASTE, CRISPIN.

CRISPIN.

You, sir, please shut down our windows; an indiscreet brightness may expose me. Pull this table forward. Bring up this arm chair. That window is ill closed, it hurts my eyes still. Draw the curtains well, that nothing may betray us.

ÉRASTE.

May a happy ending follow on the trick. If I dare go to this extreme, I am obeying necessity in spite of myself. I hear a noise.

CRISPSN, *throwing himself quickly into the armchair.*

Let us think of the ceremony, and don't give me over, sir, to agony.

ÉRASTE.

A god whose power serves for lover's excuse, will get me out of this tumult.

SCENE VI.

LISETTE, SCRUPLE, GASPARD, ERASTE, CRISPIN.

LISETTE, to the notaries.

Come in, sir, come in. (*To Crispin*) Here are the two notaries with whom you can arrange your affairs.

CRISPIN, to the notaries.

Sirs, I am delighted, though at my last breath, to see you both in perfect health. I should like greatly to be at the age you enjoy; and if I were as well as you are, I should hardly dream of making a will.

SCRUPLE.

That ought not to trouble you a moment; nothing is to be despaired of. This ceremony has never shortenel the life of a testator; on the contrary, sir, the consolation of having made the distribution of one's goods, fills the heart with a sympathetic repose, a certain quietude, both sweet and healing, which, by spreading afterward through all the senses, renews health in many people.

CRISPIN.

May heaven see fit to treat me so. Sirs, sit down. (*To Lisette*) Go shut the door.

GASPARD.

Ordinarily, sir, we see to it these secret actions take place without witnesses. It would be fitting that Monsieur trouble himself to go with Madame into the next chamber.

LISETTE.

I cannot leave Monsieur a single moment.

ÉRASTE.

My uncle will tell us his sentiments on this point.

CRISPIN.

These persons, sir, are wise and discreet. I can trust my secret wishes to them, and show them the excess of my affection.

SCRUPLE.

We shall do everything as you would have it. The title shall be such as it should be, and will be reduced into the ordinary style.

(He dictates to Gaspard, who writes.)

“In the presence of . . . There was present . . . Géronte *et cætera*.”

(To Géronte) Tell us something that you would have.

CRISPIN.

I wish first that my debts be acquitted.

ÉRASTE.

We shall not find many of them made, I believe.

CRISPIN.

I owe four hundred francs to my wine merchant, a rascal who keeps a tavern nearby.

SCRUPLE.

Very good. Where do you wish, sir, to be buried.

CRISPIN.

Troth, sir, it scarcely concerns me. Let me not be put too near some wicked, wrangling lawyer, he would not fail to quarrel with me; every day there would be some new procedure, and I should be forced at last to give up.

ÉRASTE.

Everything will be done, sir, according to your desire. I shall have the care of the procession, the funeral pomp, and will spare nothing for a fitting ceremony.

CRISPIN.

No, nephew, I wish that my interment be made, at little expense, and very modestly. It makes dying too dear; 'twould be shameful. Never in my life did I love expense; I can be buried very well for a crown.

LISETTE, *aside*.

The poor wretch dies as he lived.

GASPARD.

It is for you now to tell us, if you please, the legacies that you wish to be writ in the will.

CRISPIN.

'Tis with that I shall employ myself shortly. I name and institute Eraste, my nephew, whom I love tenderly, for my sole heir, alone, residuary.

ÉRASTE, *pretending to weep*.

O bitter, bitter grief!

CRISPIN.

Leaving him all my goods, furniture, effects, assets, plate, ready money, contracts, houses, notes, disinheriting, in so far as need be, kinsmen, nieces, nephews, born as well as yet to be born, and the same with all bastards, God rest their souls, if any appear on the day of my death.

LISETTE, *affecting grief*.

This discourse racks my soul. Alas, my poor master, must we see you go away forever.

ÉRASTE, *same play*.

The goods you offer me cannot comfort me, if I must buy them with your death.

CRISPIN.

Item, I give and bequeath to Lisette.

LISETTE, *same play*.

Ah!

CRISPIN.

Who for five years has been my servant, if she will marry Crispin in lawful wedlock, not otherwise . . .

LISETTE, *falling as if overcome.*

Ah! ah!

CRISPIN.

See to it, nephew. And to reward the zeal for myself which I have at all times found in her . . .

LISETTE, *pretending to weep.*

Oh, what a good master, merciful heavens, I am going to lose!

CRISPIN.

Two thousand crowns in specie.

LISETTE, *same play.*

Oh! Oh! Ah!

ÉRASTE, *aside.*

Two thousand crowns! I believe the scoundrel is playing us a trick.

LISETTE, *same play.*

I cannot bear it, grief is smothering me. I think I shall die of it.

CRISPIN.

The which two thousand crowns shall be taken and collected from my goods at hand.

LISETTE, *to Crispin.*

Heaven bless you for remembering me, and pay you a hundred fold for a good deed. (*Aside*) Sure he had promised not to forget me.

ÉRASTE, *aside.*

The rascal has played me a trick after his own style. (*Aloud to Crispin*) I believe that will be all you care to say.

CRISPIN.

I have three or four words more to be written. *Item.* I leave and bequeath to Crispin . . .

ÉRASTE, *aside*.

To Crispin! Surely he's losing his wits. What is his scheme now?

CRISPIN.

For good and loyal services . . .

ÉRASTE, *aside*.

Ah, the traitor!

CRISPIN.

Which he has always rendered and is due to render to his master . . .

ÉRASTE.

Uncle, you don't know this Crispin; 'tis an ill valet, drunkard, libertine, deserving very little of what you mean to do for him.

CRISPIN.

I am persuaded, nephew, to the contrary. I know this Crispin a thousand times better than you do. I wish then to bequeath him, in spite of the jealousy of others . . .

ÉRASTE, *aside*.

The dog!

CRISPIN.

Fifteen hundred francs life annuity, wherewith to remember me in his prayers.

ÉRASTE, *aside*.

Ah, what treason!

CRISPIN.

Do you find this present exorbitant, nephew, something all too little?

ÉRASTE.

How! Fifteen hundred francs!

CRISPIN.

Yes; without which clause the present testament will be null, and on good grounds.

ÉRASTE.

Did any one ever hear of such a legacy for a valet, uncle? Have you thought of that?

CRISPIN.

I know what I am doing. I have not such a lean and feeble wit.

ÉRASTE.

But . . .

CRISPIN.

If you vex me, I'll leave him two thousand.

LISETTE, *aside to Eraste.*

Don't oppose him. I know his spirit. He'll do it, sir, as he said, sure enough.

ÉRASTE, *aside to Lisette.*

So be it. I shall not say a word; though, in all my life, I should never have so right a desire to speak.

CRISPIN.

Should I not have some one of my friends to whom I may bequeath a trust?

ÉRASTE, *aside.*

The scoundrel still laughs at my expense. He will leave me nothing more if he continues.

SCRUPLE *to Crispin.*

Is it done?

CRISPIN.

Yes, sir.

ÉRASTE, *aside.*

Thank heaven for it!

GASPARD.

There's the testament happily ended. (*To Crispin*) Will you please to sign?

CRISPIN.

I should desire greatly to do so, but I am prevented by paralysis, which for some months has laid hold on my right arm.

GASPARD, *writing.*

The said testator declares, in this place, that he is unable to sign his name.

CRISPIN.

What a weary fardel 'tis to make a will! There, I am done with it, but I'm all in a sweat.

SCRUPLE, *to Crispin.*

You have no further need of our ministration?

CRISPIN, *to M. Scruple.*

Leave with me, please, the deed that you have just writ.

SCRUPLE.

We cannot, sir; this is a deposition that remains in our hands. I shall return soon to bring you a copy of it myself.

ÉRASTE.

You are very good; my uncle begs leave to reward your trouble and your pains.

GASPARD.

'Tis no pressing matter, sir.

CRISPIN.

Lisette, show them out.

SCENE VII.

ÉRASTE, CRISPIN.

CRISPIN, *putting the table back in place, and chairs.*

Have I kept my word? And when the time comes, do I know how to play the role, and to make a will?

ÉRASTE.

Too well for your own profit. Tell me then, wretch, have you lost your wits to make a will which is so damaging to me? To leave to Lisette such a sum?

CRISPIN.

Faith, 'twas not too much.

ÉRASTE.

Two thousand crowns in money!

CRISPIN.

In such cases each one must be content. Could I have left less to the poor girl?

ÉRASTE.

How then, traitor!

CRISPIN.

She's somewhat in the family. Your uncle, if the scandalous tale is to be believed, has not always been impotent and gouty; and I ought to have left her a little substance to acquit him of her soul and of my dishonour.

ÉRASTE.

And of your dishonour! And of the fifteen hundred francs payable to you annually, which you have bequeathed to yourself, with so much prudence, is that also to acquit him of your dishonour?

CRISPIN.

There's no need to bluster so about it, sir. We might be put into agreement in a flash. Since the testament we've just made, where I instituted you sole heir, has not the honour to obtain your approbation, it should be torn up and thrown into the fire.

ÉRASTE.

Heaven preserve me from that!

CRISPIN.

Without forming any contract, let us leave the thing at the point where your uncle has placed it.

ÉRASTE.

That will be a hundred times worse. I should die of grief at that.

CRISPIN.

There is rising a sharp remorse in the depths of my heart, a certain repentance that lies heavy on my stomach.

ÉRASTE.

Let us go in, Crispin; I tremble, and am persuaded that we are going to find my uncle dead; or that he'll be dying in a moment at least.

CRISPIN.

Alas, it was time, i'faith, to do some writing.

ÉRASTE.

The laurel with which you have just crowned your brow cannot have a price too great or too prompt.

CRISPIN.

You must advance me, please you, a year of this pension that I gave myself. You could not do me a more charming favour.

ÉRASTE.

That shall be done when we have a little more leisure.

SCENE VIII.

LISETTE, ERASTE, CRISPIN.

LISETTE, throwing herself into the arm chair.

Mercy! Oh heaven! I am dying! I am dead!

ÉRASTE, to Lisette.

And what makes you cry like that?

LISETTE.

I faint. Ouf! ouf! fear shuts my mouth!

CRISPIN, to Lisette.

What sudden vertigo has seized you now? Speak then, if you can.

LISETTE.

Géronte . . .

CRISPIN.

Well, G ronste . . .

LISETTE, *rising brusquely.*

Ah! save me!

CRISPIN.

Will you finish your story?

LISETTE.

A great black ghost . . .

 RASTE.

What now? What are you saying?

LISETTE.

Alas, my dear sir, I'm telling you what I have seen. After having conducted the gentlemen to the street, where the news of the good man's death is already spread, where even the hawker tried to bring in, despite of me, some funeral trappings; from the chamber where your uncle lay without an attendant, I seemed at first to hear the door open; and, mounting the stair, I met nose for nose, like a great ghost, G ronste on his feet.

CRISPIN.

Your soul is filled with the fear of a dead man; and betrays you, and makes you see a phantom in your mind's eye.

LISETTE.

'Tis he I tell you, he speaks . . . Ah!

(She turns, sees Crispin, whom she takes for G ronste, rises, and flees into a corner, uttering a cry of fright.)

CRISPIN.

Why this great cry?

LISETTE.

Pardon, child; I took you for him. Indeed, crying, mourning, without turning my eyes, breathless and trembling, I came here to tell that the illness of your uncle is only a lethargy, and he is better of it.

ÉRASTE.

How constantly does hateful fortune with a turn of her wheel mock and delude me!

LISETTE.

Oh, too lovely hope! Schemes so well conceived and better carried out, what are you now?

CRISPIN.

Mark the dead man that fate sends back on us! And the miserly Acheron lets his prey escape him! You will have it so, great gods! My steadfastness is ended. I have lost the cue of it, and I abandon all.

ÉRASTE.

You whom I have just seen so great, so magnanimous, a single reverse makes you weak and pusilanimous. Resume the sentiments that are worthy of you. Show your faith. Some stroke of chance will get us out of it.

CRISPIN.

Are we going to cheat some notary yet?

ÉRASTE.

I am going without a moment's loss to put these notes into the hands of Isabelle: they will have their effect; and we shall get some advantage out of it, which may prosper our marriage. You, go back to my uncle's room, and take good care to call the help he needs. To return soon, I will go quickly, and come to reassure you with my presence here.

SCENE IX.

CRISPIN, LISETTE.

CRISPIN.

There's nothing wrong with my will! I see my pension paid in a moment.

LISETTE.

And my two thousand crowns, the price of my service?

CRISPIN.

Keep justice off, just heaven, I am spent!
 'Tis nothing worth, and all my heart hath rent.
 I fear I made my death-bed testament.

 ACT V

SCENE I.

MADAME ARGANTE, ISABELLE, ERASTE.

MADAME ARGANTE, *to Eraste*.

What is your plot and what are you going to do? Can I be the trustee of these notes? One would suspect me of having ready hands to help your plots, now that your uncle has been able, in spite of his age, to regain the use of his senses. 'Twill be best to carry him his notes without delay.

ÉRASTE.

It was only today, Madame that I knew the noble sentiments that reign in your soul. We do not intend, either you or I, to retain something that does not belong to us. But keep these notes a little while, I beg you. Heaven will inspire me as to what should be done. I take it to witness whether love has not been my principal object. Alas! to deserve the charming Isabelle, I have bur-nished my zeal too high perhaps, but one may pardon these anxious transports. (*To Isabelle*) My excuse, Madame, is writ in your eyes.

ISABELLE, *to Eraste*.

Since I have my mother's approval of my marriage, I may show a sentiment that is sincere. The wealth you might inherit any day has not determined my love for you at all. Your person alone is the possession that delights me; and all the empty brilliancy of fortune cannot dazzle a heart like mine.

ÉRASTE.

If I obtain this heart, I shall wish for nothing more.

MADAME ARGANTE.

All these fine sentiments are very good in a book. Love alone, such as it may be, gives nothing at all to live on, and I tell you that when they are married, people love each other about as well as they are well-off.

ÉRASTE.

My uncle now by his convalescence revives in my heart joy and hope; and I am going to move him to write a will.

MADAME ARGANTE.

But do you not fear his resentment? These embezzled notes, may they not move him against your desires?

ÉRASTE.

And there's the reason that makes me venture to wish to keep them a while yet. To get this packet in his hands again, he will settle everything without too much resistance. There ought to be at such a time, Mademoiselle, some concert among us. There are the notes, which we must take if you will.

ISABELLE.

I?

ÉRASTE.

Do not blush at it; 'tis only to give them back.

ISABELLE.

But I doubt, Monsieur, whether I should accept this commission. I shall be thought privy to these purloined notes; I am still a novice in restitution.

ÉRASTE.

I hear a noise.

SCENE II.

CRISPIN, MADAME ARGANTE, ISABELLE, ERASTE.

ÉRASTE.

'Tis Crispin, I see.

CRISPIN.

Come, sir, come; in a man of courage, 'tis needful, faith, to sustain the fray. Monsieur Géronte approaches.

ÉRASTE.

O heaven! (*To Madame Argante and Isabelle*) For a time allow me to take you to my apartments. 'Tis hard for me yet to offer myself in his sight; let us allow this spleen to subside a bit; and when the time is ripe, quite unanimously, we might work together toward an ending. (*To Crispin*) As for you, stay here; mark the humour he is in; and inform me when 'tis time to appear.

SCENE III.

CRISPIN, alone.

Here we are, thanks to fortune, in a coil. Please God get us out of such a plight.

SCENE IV.

GERONTE, CRISPIN, LISETTE.

GÉRONTE, leaning on Lisette.

I'm not yet over my faintness; I don't know where I am; the daylight hurts me; and my weak brain, exhausted by the shock, is still troubled by sombre vapours. Have I been very long in this lethargy?

LISETTE.

Not so long as we thought. But your malady has unsettled us all, an agitation, a distress, an emotion that is not easy to describe. Ask Crispin, he could tell you.

CRISPIN.

If you knew, Monsieur, what we have done when you felt the effect of your ills, the trouble that I have taken, and the care necessary for managing your affairs as you would have done, you would be astonished; but with an astonishment you would not soon escape, surely.

GÉRONTE.

Where is my nephew then? His absence annoys me.

CRISPIN.

Ah, the poor boy, is no longer alive, I fancy.

GÉRONTE.

What's that you say? What?

CRISPIN.

He was taken so hard when he saw your eyes set in death, that heeding nothing but his bitter grief, he went to throw himself . . .

. . .

GÉRONTE.

Where? In the river?

CRISPIN.

No, Monsieur; on his bed where, bathed in tears, the wretched boy bemoans his sorrows.

GÉRONTE.

Go then and restore him to calm and joy; and tell him, for me, that heaven gives back to him an uncle always full of tenderness for him, who recognizes his good heart, and who wishes today to show him the effects of his recognition.

CRISPIN.

If he is not yet dead, I will bring him to you with all diligence.

SCENE V.

GERONTE, LISETTE.

GÉRONTE.

Then from what I see, Lisette, I have been worse than I think.

LISETTE.

For a whole hour we thought you were dead.

GÉRONTE.

'Tis meet then to indite my last request, and, to make my will, without losing any time. Have the notaries come?

LISETTE.

Surely.

GÉRONTE.

Let one go for them again, and tell them that I wish to have them write at once.

LISETTE.

They will return in a moment.

SCENE V.

ERASTE, GERONTE, CRISPIN, LISETTE.

CRISPIN.

Heaven has given him back to you.

ÉRASTE.

Alas! may I trust that happiness? I see my dear uncle again; and heaven in its mercy, knowing my sorrow, permits me to embrace him. After having believed him dead, I see him before my very eyes.

GÉRONTE.

Alas, dear nephew, I am scarcely better, but I give thanks to heaven for prolonging my life, that I may have my wish to leave you my substance by a good testament.

LISETTE.

That boy, sir, loves you tenderly. If you could have seen the swoons, the cries, with which he heard of your recovery, it would have rent your heart in twain.

CRISPIN.

We've all three had a good part in it.

LISETTE.

At last heaven took pity on our misery.

SCENE VII.

SCRUPLE, GERONTE, ERASTE, LISETTE, CRISPIN.

LISETTE.

But here is some one. (*Aside to Crispin*) 'Tis one of the two notaries.

GÉRONTE.

Good morrow, Monsieur Scruple.

CRISPIN.

Ah! I'm lost.

GÉRONTE.

You have been waiting here some time.

SCRUPLE.

Certes, my dear sir. I am overjoyed that in less than an hour, you enjoy already better health. I knew indeed that having made your testament you would shortly feel some relief, the body is much better when the mind is at ease.

GÉRONTE.

I always prove it so.

SCRUPLE.

Here then is the paper that, according to your plans, I promised to put into your hands.

GÉRONTE.

What paper, if you please? Why? To what end?

SCRUPLE.

'Tis the will you just made.

GÉRONTE.

I made my will?

SCRUPLE.

Yes, no doubt of it, sir.

LISETTE, *aside*.

Crispin, my heart's thumping.

CRISPIN, *aside*.

I'm quaking with fear.

GÉRONTE.

Ah, body o' me! You are dreaming, sir. 'Tis to do that that I need your services here.

SCRUPLE.

I am not in any manner dreaming, sir; you have dictated it with sense and reason. Shall repentance take hold of your spirits so soon? Monsieur was present, as well as madame. They could tell you on that point what they have seen.

ÉRASTE, *aside*.

What's to be said?

LISETTE, *aside*.

Great heavens!

CRISPIN, *aside*.

I'm dumbfounded.

GÉRONTE.

Was Eraste present?

SCRUPLE.

Yes, sir; I swear to you.

GÉRONTE.

Is it true, nephew? Speak, I conjure you.

ÉRASTE.

Ah, do not speak, sir, of a will! 'Tis to wring my heart too bitterly.

GÉRONTE.

Lisette, speak then.

LISETTE.

Crispin, speak for me. I feel in my gullet as if my voice would strangle me.

CRISPIN, *to G ronte*.

I could satisfy you thereupon; no one knows better than I the truth of the case.

G RONTE.

I made my will?

CRISPIN.

One cannot tell you that one has seen you write exactly; but I am very sure that in the place where you are, a man dressed about as you are now, seated in an arm chair with two notaries. has dictated word for word these last bequests. I cannot assure

you that it was you. Why? Because one may be mistaken. But it was you, or I.

SCRUPLE *to G ron*te.

Nothing could be truer and you can take my word for it.

G RONTE.

My illness then must have stricken my memory, it is my lethargy.

CRISPIN.

Yes, 'tis that surely.

LISETTE.

I don't doubt it at all; and to prove the fact, don't you remember that for a certain matter you told me to go at once for the notary?

G RONTE.

Yes.

LISETTE.

That he reached your closet; that he took his quill and ink horn at once, and that you dictated to him as your fancy led you.

G RONTE.

I don't remember it at all.

LISETTE.

'Tis your lethargy.

CRISPIN.

Don't you remember, sir, very clearly that there came also a certain Norman nephew, and a certain baroness with a great tumult and insolent airs, to insult you in your own house?

G RONTE.

Yes.

CRISPIN.

That to revenge yourself for their behavior, you promised to put me in your will, or some good income at least during my life?

G RONTE.

I don't remember it at all.

CRISPIN.

'Tis your lethargy.

GÉRONTE.

I think they are right; I'm afflicted, indeed.

LISETTE.

Don't you remember that Monsieur Clistorel . . .

ÉRASTE.

Why do you repeat this inquiry so much? Monsieur is convinced of everything, of the fault of his memory, of the notary sent for, of the testament written.

GÉRONTE.

It must be true, since everybody says so. Let us see then, what I made you write.

CRISPIN, *aside*.

Ah, here's the devil indeed.

SCRUPLE.

Then I must read it to you. Those persons whose names are below are here before you. Master Matthew Géronte, in his arm chair, being in his right mind as one might know by the action and gesture manifested; though ill in body, having sound judgment; who, having materially reflected that everything in this world is fragile and transitory . . .

CRISPIN.

Ah, what heart of rock, and what soul so black as would not break in quarters to hear these words?

LISETTE.

Alas! I cannot stay my tears.

GÉRONTE.

Seeing them weep, my soul is melted. There, there, be comforted; I'm still alive.

SCRUPLE, *continuing to read*.

"Considering that nothing remains in the same state, and not wishing to die intestate—

CRISPIN.

Intestate!

LISETTE.

Intestate! That word pierces my soul.

SCRUPLE.

A truce to your sighs a moment, madame. "Considering that nothing remains in the same state, and not wishing to die intestate"——

CRISPIN.

Intestate!

LISETTE.

Intestate!

SCRUPLE.

But let me read then ; if you weep all the time I can say nothing. "Has made, dictated, named, set down in writing his aforesaid will, in the following form."

GÉRONTE.

If I remember a single word, I wish I may be hanged, of all this preamble and this inscription.

LISETTE.

'Tis your lethargy.

CRISPIN.

Ah, heaven save us!

SCRUPLE, *reading.*

"I desire first that my debts be acquitted."

GÉRONTE.

I owe none.

SCRUPLE.

Here's the avowal you made on it. "I owe four hundred francs to my wine merchant, a rascal who lives at a tavern nearby."

GÉRONTE.

I owe four hundred francs! 'Tis some rascality.

CRISPIN, *to G ronte.*

Excuse me, sir, 'tis your lethargy. I do not know indeed whether you owe it to him; but he has demanded them of me a thousand times.

G RONTE.

'Tis a thief that must be sent to the galleys.

CRISPIN.

If they were all there, nobody would be sorry.

SCRUPLE, *reading.*

I make my sole and only heir, Eraste, my nephew.

 RASTE.

Can it be? Praise heaven!

SCRUPLE, *reading.*

“Disinheriting in so far as need be, kindred, nieces, nephews, born as well as yet to be born, and the same with all bastards, God rest their souls, if any appear on the day of my death.”

G RONTE.

What? Bastards of mine?

CRISPIN, *to G ronte.*

'Tis a notary's style.

G RONTE.

Yes I wish to name Eraste heir, by that article I see now that I was well able to dictate this will.

SCRUPLE, *reading.*

Item. I give and bequeath, in ready money to Lisette” . . .

LISETTE.

Ah, great gods!

SCRUPLE, *reading.*

“Who acts as my servant, on condition that she marry Crispin in lawful wedlock, two thousand crowns.”

CRISPIN, *to G ronte.*

Monsieur, in sooth, for—not—ever—for indeed—my—mouth—when I think of it—I feel smothered with gratitude. (*To Lisette*). Why don't you speak?

LISETTE, *embracing G ronte.*

Ah, sir . . .

G RONTE.

What's that you say? I am not the authcr of these idiocies. Two thousand crowns in money!

LISETTE.

What! Already, pray, do you repent of having done a pious work? A marriageable girl, exposed to evil, who wishes to make a good and honorable end, you refuse her this little grace?

G RONTE.

What! Six thousand francs! Fifteen or twenty crowns might do.

LISETTE.

Husbands today, Monsieur, are so run after; and what, may one have, alas, for twenty crowns?

G RONTE.

One has what one can get, do you hear my girl? They are all prices. (*To the notary*) Finish, I pray you.

SCRUPLE.

“To Crispin.” (*Crispin slinks off.*)

G RONTE.

To Crispin!

SCRUPLE, *reading.*

“For all the good and loyal services that he renders my nephew in divers actions, and that he may better serve him in future . . . ”

G RONTE.

Where then is this fine discourse heading toward? Let us see.

SCRUPLE, *reading.*

"Fifteen hundred francs annuity, for remembering me in his prayers."

CRISPIN, *falling at G ronste's feet.*

Yes, I promise you, sir, on two knees, even to my last breath, I will pray God for you. There's a truly honest man! To leave me this sum so generously!

G RONTE.

Body o' me! I'll not do it. What will you say to that? (*To the notary*) Sir, I wish to be rid of all these legacies.

SCRUPLE.

What riddance would you have? I write ever what I am ordered to write.

G RONTE.

What! Would I have bequeathed without any reason fifteen hundred francs income to this blasted scoundrel whom Eraste would have kicked out if he had listened to me?

CRISPIN, *still on his knees.*

Do not repent of a meritorious work. Would you deny a generous deed and be miserly even after death?

G RONTE.

Haven't you stolen my notes out of my pockets? I tremble for the ills I see drawing near; I don't dare look to see.

 RASTE, *aside.*

What dreadful embarrassment! (*Aloud to G ronste*) You will seek in vain, they are not there.

G RONTE, *to Eraste.*

Where are they then? Answer.

 RASTE.

A moment since I carried them to Isabelle, by your express order.

G RONTE.

By my order?

ÉRASTE.

Yes, Monsieur.

GÉRONTE.

I don't remember it at all.

CRISPIN.

'Tis your lethargy.

GÉRONTE.

Oh, would that somebody might set me right in that matter! What tricks and cheats! I am weary of so much lethargy. (*To Eraste*) Run to her, tell her that when I made this gift, I had lost my wits, my senses, and my reason.

SCENE VIII.

*MADAME ARGANTE, ISABELLE, GERONTE, ERASTE,
LISETTE, CRISPIN, the Notary.*

ISABELLE, to Geronte.

Do not disturb yourself, I am just bringing them back to you.

GÉRONTE.

O heaven!

ÉRASTE.

But under the laws . . .

GÉRONTE.

And what are these laws?

ÉRASTE.

I humbly pray you to approve the present testament.

GÉRONTE.

But thou dost not think what thou sayest. Shall I leave to this chambermaid such a legacy as that?

CRISPIN.

Think of the interest that heaven returns you; and the larger the legacy is, the greater the merit.

GÉRONTE, *to Crispin.*

And this rogue would have that sum as a portion?

CRISPIN.

I promise you, sir, to make good use of it. What's more, this legacy can do you no harm.

GÉRONTE.

'Tis true they are not like to enjoy it till after my death.

ÉRASTE.

That's not all yet. Look at this beauty; you know what a heart may feel for her; you have proved the power of her glances; enamoured of these charms, I embrace your knees, and ask her of you for my wife.

GÉRONTE.

Ah, sir nephew . . .

ÉRASTE.

I have shown my flame only, when heeding a wiser voice, your heart changed its course.

MADAME ARGANTE.

I believe that you and I could not do better for ourselves.

GÉRONTE.

We shall see; but before concluding the matter, I wish to see my notes all together.

ISABELLE.

There they are. Just as I received them, I return them. (*She presents the portfolio to G ronTE.*)

LISETTE, *seizing the portfolio ahead of G ronTE.*

Ho there! let's agree on the facts before giving back anything.

G RONTE.

If you do not return them to me, I'll have you lose everything.

ÉRASTE, *falling on his knees.*

Sir, you see me embrace your knees. Would you have us all in despair today?

LISETTE, *on her knees.*

Eh! sir.

CRISPIN, *on his knees.*

Eh! sir.

GÉRONTE.

Tenderness overwhelms me. Tell me, you haven't taken anything from the portfolio?

ISABELLE.

No, sir; I swear to you, 'tis all there, and you will find it, even to the least paper.

GÉRONTE.

Well, if 'tis so, I consent to everything to get my notes; I ratify the present will completely, and give full consent to your marriage. My notes?

LISETTE.

There they are.

ÉRASTE, *to G ronte.*

What a gracious action . . .

G RONTE.

I can willingly spare your thanks. Marry both of you; 'twere well done; I consent to it: but above all bear children as soon as possible who can be your heirs in a direct line: the breed of all collateral heirs is too rascally. Detest forever all low Norman nephews, and nieces that the devil brings out of Maine; scourges more dangerous, animals more fatal than wars or plagues ever were.

SCENE IX.

CRISPIN, LISETTE.

CRISPIN.

Let us leave him in error, we are heirs. Lisette, I've crowned my brows with laurel: see to it that you don't put anything else there when we are married.

LISETTE.

I'm rich enough now to behave myself.

CRISPIN, *to the audience.*

Sirs, by heaven's grace, my bark and I arrive;
And for the living make the dead revive;
I name for all my needs a generous heir;
I get me fifteen hundred francs a year,
A wife besides; but small shall be my lot;
I'll have no gains if you applaud me not.

THE END OF THE SOLE HEIR.

