

The Unforeseen Wager

Translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock

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Etext by Dagny

THE UNFORESEEN WAGER

A play in one act based on a play by Sedaine

Translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock
C 1986

Characters:

Lord Belton
Lady Morgana, his wife
Mr. Lovelace, a gentleman
Miss Sophia, a young lady of unknown origin
Anne, Lady Morgana's maid
Trim, Lord Belton's valet
Bellamy
Mrs. Prim, Miss Sophia's governess

Four men, four women

A room with a balcony in the Country Estate of Lord and Lady Belton.

Anne, the maid, is musing to herself. Lady Morgana is sitting at the window, obviously bored.

Anne

We servants complain and we're wrong to do so. True, we have to suffer the caprices, the humors, the rudeness, and often the effects of quarrels about which we know nothing. But, at least it's interesting, never boring. Ah, boredom, boredom. It's a terrible thing, boredom. If it lasts two hours Lady Morgana will die. But, for a woman of wit not to have the wit to amuse oneself—that astonishes me. Perhaps it's not lack of wit, but lack of resources. Long live fools, so they can entertain the rest of us. Ah, here she is—she's left her balcony. Madame has watched the world pass her window.

Morgana

Yes, very wet people, carriages, beggars. What a sad day. The rain is getting worse again.

Anne

I know how bored you are, Madame—but I assure you—time is like—I don't know what.

Morgana

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It gives me the craziest idea. If someone with nice looks were to pass on the road, I think I might ask him to supper—to keep me company.

Anne

A cavalier never had such good fortune. But hasn't Lord Belton finished his hunting?

Morgana

My husband doesn't trouble me.

Anne

Yesterday, you insisted that he go.

Morgana

He was dying to—and I expected visitors—Lady Ormont.

Anne

What—that ugly lady?

Morgana

I don't dislike ugly women.

Anne

Yet, you love pretty ones.

Morgana

I'm joking. I don't hate anybody. Give me that book. Hmmm. Moralizing. I won't read. If my clavichord—I told you to fix my clavichord, but you never think of anything. If it's fixed, I will play.

Anne

But, it is fixed. The repairman came at noon.

Morgana

I will play this evening. That will amuse—my husband. I will knit. No—set up a table, I want to write. Ah, God.

Anne (pulling up a writing table)

Here's one.

Morgana (throwing the pens)

Not a single pen ready to write.

Anne

Here's a nervous state.

Morgana

Don't you think I know it? Close the window. No, I want it open— Let it alone. (opening the window)

Anne

Ah, such a temper. It's a little too much. There's moralizing. Moralizing! I'd better read this book to find out about moralizing. Essay on Man. Singular moral. I'd better read this. (opening the book)

Morgana

Anne, Anne.

Anne

Madame?

Morgana

Call someone. This will be pleasant. Ah, it's a little— It's a good thing my reputation is well fortified. To risk this joke—

(Anne has gone out and returned with a servant.)

Morgana

Go quickly to the park gate. You will see an officer in a red coat. Say to him: Sir, a lady greets you, and begs you to stop a minute. Take him in through the lower court. If he asks my name you will tell him Lady Ormont.

Servant

Lady Ormont?

Morgana

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Yes,—run quickly.
(Exit servant.)

Anne

Lady Ormont?

Morgana

Yes.

Anne

The one so old, so ugly, so fat?

Morgana

Yes. It will be very singular. If my cavalier boasts of his adventure —everyone will laugh at him.

Anne

Do you know this officer?

Morgana

No.

Anne

Does he know you?

Morgana

Only if the servant has no common sense and gives my real name.

Anne

But, Madame, have you considered?

Morgana

I have considered everything. I refuse to dine alone. As far as company in the country is concerned, one takes what one can get.

Anne

But, suppose he's not agreeable company?

Morgana

I'm going to interview him first. Close the windows.

(Anne rings. Morgana takes her pocket handkerchief, looks to see if her hair is not out of place, and if her rouge is all right. Bellamy enters, closes the windows at Anne's direction, then whispers to Anne. Anne shakes her head in disbelief.)

Bellamy

I've seen her, I tell you.

Anne

Well, Madame, here's a mystery to relieve your boredom. There's a woman shut up in your husband's chamber.

Morgana (startled)

What's this all about?

Anne

Speak, speak, tell the whole tale.

Bellamy

Madame— (to Anne) Blabbermouth!

Morgana

I am listening.

Bellamy

Madame, speaking with reverence—

Morgana

Suppress your reverences.

Bellamy

Saving your respect, Madame.

Morgana

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How stupid these people are with their respects and their reverences. What follows?

Bellamy

Madame, I was going down the corridor, when I saw—through the little window that gives on the terrace of your husband's chamber—I saw— Just as I have the honor to see you now—

Morgana

Never mind the honor for the moment. Well, what did you see?

Bellamy

I saw behind the casement of the window—I saw a curtain move— followed by a small hand. I'm not sure whether it was a right or a left hand—yes, it was a right hand which drew the curtain—like so. I looked. I perceived a young woman between sixteen and eighteen. I am not sure whether she was eighteen, but certainly—she was sixteen—

Morgana

And, are you sure of what you say?

Bellamy

Oh, Madame, would I dare?

Morgana

Without a doubt, it's a cleaning woman. Call Trim. Bellamy, you've not spoken to anyone?

Bellamy

Except Miss Anne.

Morgana

If either one of you say a word, I'll dismiss you without a reference. Send for Trim.

(Exit Bellamy.)

Anne (pretending to cry)

I don't believe, Madame, I've ever failed you. I've never revealed a secret.

Morgana

I give you leave to reveal mine.

Anne

Madame, is it possible? Do you believe that—?

Morgana

Ha, ha, you're going to cry. I don't enjoy these little scenes. I beg you to stop or go to your room. It will pass.

(Enter Trim.)

Morgana

Mr. Trim, who is this young wench staying in my husband's chamber?

Trim

A young wench in your husband's chamber?

Morgana

I see that you intend to lie to me. But, I warn you, that would be lacking in respect to me, and I will never pardon the offense.

Trim

Madame, for twenty-seven years, I have had the honor to be Lord Belton's valet, and he has never had any cause to think that I lacked respect—and if the masters wish to interrogate us—for eleven years, Madame—

Morgana

Now, you try to evade the question. But, I order you to answer me exactly. Who is this young woman who is in my husband's—Lord Belton's chamber?

Trim

Oh, Madame! I will be lost. If Lord Belton knows that I have told you —perhaps, he wants to keep it a secret.

Morgana

Well! This secret, you didn't rush to impart to me. My husband will understand that I interrogated you about things I already had learned of—and that you didn't dare to lie to me or disobey me.

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Trim

Ah, Madame, what a wrong you make me guilty of.

Morgana

Never mind. That's my concern. I have enough power over Lord Belton—

Trim

In that case, Madame, since you know everything, if you ask your husband, I am sure that he will tell you—

Morgana

Return to what I am asking you. Leave us, Anne.

(Anne leaves.)

Morgana

Don't be afraid.

Trim

Madame, yesterday morning, Lord Belton said to me: "Trim, take this paper, take this paper and do everything it says in there."

Morgana

What paper?

Trim

I believe I still have it.

Morgana

Read it.

Trim

It is in Lord Belton's hand. This Tuesday morning. Today, at 5:15 in the evening, Trim will say to his wife, get dressed and put on a robe. At 6:30, he will go out with his wife under the pretext of taking a walk. At 7:30 they will be at the small gate of the park. When eight o'clock strikes, it will be agreed with his wife that they will both wait for me. At 8:30—

Morgana

Enough details; give me, give me. (grabbing the paper and reading) Well?

Trim

Lord Belton arrived at ten. My wife was dying of cold. He was late because of a carriage accident. My Lord was in his carriage. Two women got out, one young, the other old. He said to my wife, "Conduct them to my apartment by the servants' stairs." My Lord returned. He hasn't said more than two words to the younger one. He entrusted them to our care.

Morgana

Hey! Where did they spend the night?

Trim

In my wife's room where I set up a bed.

Morgana

And, my husband hasn't paid any attention to her?

Trim

You will excuse me, Madame. He came back this morning, before the hunt; he asked permission to enter, he's very honest, full of friendship for this young person, full of—full of—

Morgana

That is not what I asked you. And you didn't investigate who these women are?

Trim

Madame, I was just following orders. But my wife told me she's very nice.

Morgana

Bring them to me.

Trim

Oh, Madame!

Morgana

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Yes. Ask them to come. Tell them I really want to see them for myself.

Trim

But if—

Morgana

Do what I tell you and fear nothing. Tell Anne to come back.

(Exit Trim.)

Morgana

This is very strange. No, I don't believe— Ah, men are such deceivers. Never mind. I'm going to see this to the end.

(Enter Anne.)

Morgana

I order you to be silent about whatever happens now— (aside) I'm getting angry with my folly, and my officer. If he doesn't show up—

Anne

Yes, Madame.

Morgana

This officer. Keep him in my waiting room. Beg him to wait a little bit—and then return yourself.

(Exit Anne. After a moment, enter Trim, Sophia, and Mrs. Prim.)

Morgana

I'm very sorry, Miss, to disturb your solitude; but it seems my husband had very important reasons for concealing from me the fact that you were in his apartment. I await your explanation of this strange mystery.

Prim

Madame, I can say to you that—

Morgana

This is your woman?

Sophia Yes, Madame, she's my governess.

Morgana

Allow me to ask her to step into my chamber.

Sophia Madame, since my childhood, she's never left me. Let her stay, please.

Morgana (to Trim)

Bring a seat and leave.

(Trim brings a seat for the ladies. Exit Trim. Morgana seats herself.)

Morgana

Sit down. (to the governess) You, too, Miss—from the honesty of your appearance, there's no reason why my husband should hesitate to present you to me.

Sophia Madame, I don't know the reasons that have prevented him. I would have been the first to ask him that favor had I known for an instant I was in your home.

Morgana

You didn't know?

Sophia No, Madame.

Morgana

You increase my curiosity.

Sophia I have no reason not to satisfy it. Lord Belton has never enjoined me to protect any secrets.

Morgana

Has he had the honor of knowing you for a long time?

Sophia Since my childhood. In the convent where I passed my life, I have known him as tutor, parent, and friend.

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Morgana

What's the young lady's name?

Prim

Miss Sophia.

Morgana

No other name?

Prim

No other name.

Morgana

No! And, you tell me, Miss, that you are ignorant of the reasons Lord Belton has brought you here, and concealed you from all eyes?

Sophia (drily)

When one respects someone, one does not press questions on them. And I respect Lord Belton too much to press him to tell me something which he obviously doesn't wish to reveal.

Morgana (ironically)

One cannot have too much discretion!

Sophia And, I have already had the honor to tell you, Madame, that I was unaware I was in your home.

Morgana

You won't let me forget it.

Sophia (rising)

Madame, I will withdraw.

Morgana (rising, in a soft, but firm tone)

Miss, I intend that my husband not prevent me from enjoying the pleasure of your company.

Sophia I desire that, too.

Morgana

Without a doubt his motives were not injurious to you or to me. But, you must admit that this mysterious silence needs all the respect you inspire not to be misunderstood.

Sophia I agree, Madame. And, to confirm you in the idea that I merit the interest you take in me, I will tell you everything I know about your husband's conduct with regard to me. Several months ago—

Morgana

Please sit down.

(All return to their seats.)

Sophia Several months ago, Lord Belton came to my convent. He was accompanied by a gentleman and several of his friends. He presented him to me. He asked me to give his friend permission to appear at the grill. I agreed. The gentleman came. I saw him several times—often. Last Monday, Lord Belton returned to see me, and told me to prepare to leave the convent. In the conversation he had with me, he seemed to warn me to prepare for some drastic change. Several days later—it was yesterday—he returned a little late because the retreat had sounded. He made me leave—not without some sadness. I was in the convent since my childhood. And he brought me here. That, Madame, is all my story. How could I possibly fear anything from the man I respect the most? And, if I could, it would be with you that I will seek refuge.

Anne (entering)

Mr. Lovelace.

Sophia

Mr. Lovelace.

Prim

Mr. Lovelace.

Morgana

In my chamber?

Anne

No, he's just outside.

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Morgana

Tell him to come in. (to Sophia) I can't understand why my husband has deprived me for so long of the pleasure of seeing you. I am going to tell him that I have taken the liberty of anticipating the introduction. I ask you not to worry—not to worry, and to say nothing to him of it.

Sophia

Madame, I will observe the utmost silence.

Morgana (to Anne)

Call Trim.

(Exit Anne. Returns momentarily with Trim.)

Morgana

Trim, pay Miss all the attentions and civilities of which you are capable. You will not tell my husband that Miss has been to my apartment—at least unless he asks you. Miss, I hope that—

Sophia

Madame.

(Morgana and Trim conduct Sophia to the door. As soon as she and Mrs. Prim are gone, Anne goes out and returns with Lovelace. Lovelace sits. Anne exits. After a moment Bellamy enters.)

Lovelace

You live here?

Bellamy

Yes, sir, with Lord Belton.

Lovelace

With Lord Belton? They told me Lady Ormont.

Bellamy

Madame told them to say so.

Lovelace

Told them to say her name was Lady Ormont?

Bellamy

Yes, sir.

Lovelace

Why'd she do that?

Bellamy

I don't know.

Lovelace

And where is her husband?

Bellamy

They say he's hunting.

Lovelace

Isn't he at Monmouth? I expected to meet him here. Is he returning this evening?

Bellamy

Yes, Madame expects him this evening.

Lovelace

But to have told them to say she's Lady Ormont. I don't—

Bellamy

You still have Bendish in your service?

Lovelace

Yes—I left him behind. His horse wasn't able to follow me. But, this is a strange thing—and you don't know the motive?

Bellamy

No, sir. But, don't say anything. Ah, here's Madame.

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(Enter Morgana. Exit Bellamy.)

Morgana

What! My dear baron, you pass before my home without doing me the honor—. Oh, dear. I must ask your pardon. I took you to be one of my husband's relatives, and I begged you to stop for a moment. I intended to reproach you, and instead, I owe you an apology. Really, I am angry with myself for the trouble I have put you to—

Lovelace

Madame—

Morgana

How many excuses I must make you—

Lovelace

I am delighted by your mistake. It gives me the honor of greeting Lady Ormont.

Morgana

Sir, one cannot be more confused than I am. You see how the gentleman resembles the baron—

Anne

Yes, Madame, easily mistaken.

Morgana

It's really astonishing, same shape, same bearing—

(Enter Trim.)

Trim

Madame is served.

Morgana

Sir, stay—perhaps you have not dined? Although, I have not the honor to know you, sir—

Lovelace

Madame—

Morgana

The gentleman will stay.

Lovelace

I don't know, Lady Ormont, if I ought to accept the honor.

Morgana

You must! If only to give me time to efface from your memory the opinion of foolishness that you have surely formed of me.

(Lovelace gives Morgana his hand and goes to the dining room with her, followed by Trim.)

Anne

Now—what comedienne could do it better? Ah, we women have a marvelous talent. She said she couldn't dine alone. I couldn't do it with her tranquility. What graciousness. What becoming confusion. Decidedly, she's irresistible.

(Enter Bellamy.)

Bellamy

Now, for a little discussion.

Anne

Ah, it's you. I was just thinking about you. Why aren't you serving at the table?

Bellamy

It doesn't require a dozen to take care of two turtle-doves.

Anne

And, if Lady Morgana asks for you?

Bellamy

She has Trim. Actually, I wish I had been asked. I could listen.

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Anne

Stop it.

Bellamy

It's because I love you.

Anne

Ah, you love me. I wish I believed it. But, one has to admit you are very singular with all your foolishness.

Bellamy

What's wrong?

Anne (mimicking him)

Madame, with respect. Madame, to speak with reverence. I had the honor to go down the passageway—

Bellamy

So you are the dupe of that. You!

Anne

What do you mean, dupe?

Bellamy

When I spoke like that to Madame.

Anne

Without a doubt.

Bellamy

I was only playing the simpleton.

Anne

What?

Bellamy

I did it deliberately.

Anne

You did it deliberately? Why?

Bellamy

You don't realize how good we make the gentry feel when we give them occasion to say—"Ah, what stupid people they are! Ah, what ineptitude. Ah, what boorishness." They eat it up like cake. It's as if they said to themselves—"Ah, how intelligent I am, what penetration I have—how far I am above all that." Hey! Why deprive them of such innocent pleasure? Me, I give it to them always, and more than they expect—and I benefit from it. What does it cost, really?

Anne

I didn't know you were so clever and adroit.

Bellamy

This is my fifth situation. I lost the first three by having arguments with my masters and winning them—for having shown them that I have more sense than they do. Since then, I've done just the opposite—and that always succeeds; for I've already piled up a considerable sum by being stupid—and I wish to lay it at the feet of a beautiful lady who— (trying to embrace her)

Anne

Stop it. You irritate me.

Bellamy

Well, Anne, I've read, in a reliable book, that the way to make one's fortune is to have neither honor nor bad temper. That's all there is to it.

Anne

A pliable temperament—your fortune is made.

Bellamy

Ah, I will be rich.

Anne

But, you say you read—do you know how to read?

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Bellamy

Yes. But I didn't tell them that when I came here. That went down well. They distrust us less when we're illiterate. And, I have a stupid air when I do my duty—but, what they really like, is that for all that I appear loyal and secretive. Ah, I will be rich. But, before that, o my charming sweet little Annie. (trying again to embrace her)

Anne

Stop it, stop it, stop it. You made me break my needle. Your ruffs will be ready when they get ready.
(Anne throws her knitting on the floor; Bellamy picks it up.)

Bellamy

You have a pretty respect for my ruffs. Well embroidered. But, did you do these for me?

Anne

Give me, give me. You're really afraid to let Madame see you're smart?

Bellamy

Yes, indeed.

Anne

Indeed. But don't trust your success. Lady Morgana sees everything that anyone tries to hide from her. I've been in her service for seven years and I know her. Her conduct is angelic—but she's a demon of trickery. And, her love of intrigue takes her farther than she intends to go, and gets her into silly scrapes. Scrapes that only she can get out of—I don't know how she does it. It annoys me—she not only saves her honor—but she succeeds in making herself look so good. I am not stupid, and she understands me an hour before I speak. As for Lord Belton, who fancies himself the wisest, smartest, most clever, the very first of all men—he is only the humble servant of her whims. And he will swear, by the gods, she doesn't think, act, or speak except by his permission. Thus, my poor Bellamy, put yourself at ease. Don't get aggravated, display all the treasures of your wit, and be sure Madame will never think you anything but a fool! Get it!

Bellamy

And, with a temper like that, hasn't she had the least little affair of the heart—the least?

Anne

Never.

Bellamy

Never. They say My Lord is jealous.

Anne

Because she intends that he be—a little. It puts him in the wrong, and it makes him very generous when he learns his suspicions are groundless. She's the only woman whose honor I'd swear to—you may be sure.

Bellamy

Certainly. But it ought to make a bad situation.

Anne

Ah, Madame is very generous.

Bellamy

Imagine, then, how sweet and agreeable she'll be if she has a little affair in the country. There's never any pleasure or profit with masters who live happily together. Ah, how I yearn to be in Trim's shoes.

Anne

Why?

Bellamy

Why? With that pretty little wench shut up in My Lord's chamber? Now, that is something. I believe it's the prettiest little intrigue I've ever heard of. My Lord is going to show her London. He needs a townhouse—which needs to be furnished. And the trusty valet makes the purchase—and a tidy little profit. My Lady suspects something or some good friend is coming to London hurriedly—but secretly. Ah, Anne, if you have wit, your fortune is made. You will convey intelligence reports—true or false. You can fan the fire—Madame gets angry. She becomes scornful—and avenges herself. Do you suppose that I told My Lady about this for any other reason than to put her in mind to revenge herself?

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Anne

You are a dangerous man!

Bellamy

True. So what? You've worked here for the last seven years. A servant must be very stupid if, after seven years, he cannot manage his master.

Anne

It won't do to play with Lady Morgana. She'd discard me like an old shoe.

Bellamy

Right now, for example, she has a good opportunity. Mr. Lovelace is loveable.

Anne

What are you talking about?

Bellamy

This officer, Mr. Lovelace.

Anne

Do you know him?

Bellamy

Yes. He recognized me right away. I used to see him often in my last situation: he was astonished to see me at Lord Belton's.

Anne

You didn't tell him whose home he was in?

Bellamy

Certainly, I did.

Anne

At the home of Lord Belton?

Bellamy

Yes. At Lady Belton's.

Anne

At Lady Belton's? Ah, what luck. For all her wiles, she's caught. Well, I'm delighted in a way. Her trickery has gotten exactly what it deserves.

Bellamy

Why?

Anne

It won't surprise me if she kills herself from rage. What a fool she was to call herself Lady Ormont. For that's what she has done, everyone will think she's having a wild affair. What! They've already dined.

Bellamy

How time flies.

Anne (hiding her embroidery)

Here comes Madame.

(Enter Lady Morgana and Lovelace.)

Morgana (casting a severe look at Bellamy and Anne)

Yes, sir, women will always find an easy way to govern men. The authority that we use is so perfumed and flowery—the slope is so subtle—our tenacity in getting our way has such a simple, natural air, our patience is so good natured that the empire is taken before you are aware.

Lovelace

Whether I believe it or not, I would gladly cede that empire to you.

Morgana

I receive that as a compliment, but make a reflection. From childhood they close our mouths and impose silence on us right up till our emancipation. This silence causes us to turn our eyes and ears to our profit. Our glance becomes the most acute, our thoughts the most subtle—and the modesty with which we express ourselves almost always gives men a confidence in us from which we easily profit if we are willing to stoop to conquer.

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Lovelace

Ah, Madame, in this debate I wish I had the assistance of my old superior, my regimental commander. He could second me.

Morgana

Really?

Lovelace

Lord Belton.

Morgana

Lord Belton. You know Lord Belton?

Lovelace

Yes, Madame.

(Anne starts to listen attentively.)

Morgana

You're sure you aren't mistaken?

Lovelace

No, Madame. He's a man who would be at this time, yes, he'd be fifty or fifty-two, average height, well turned out, good sportsman, good hunter, great gambler, wise—but easily offended even in small things, knows all the arts, very talented. Knows all the sciences from painting to locksmithing, from astrology to medicine. And an excellent officer besides. A ready wit and a sure friend.

(Anne smiles.)

Morgana

The locksmith! Ah, you do know him.

Lovelace

I didn't know he had land in these parts.

Morgana

Lord Belton, you say?

Lovelace

Perhaps, you know him, too, Madame?

Morgana

Quite well. And, you say he—

Lovelace

He told me that he was a widow and that he was going to remarry.

Morgana

No, sir, he's not a widow.

Lovelace

He often complained that his wife—

Morgana

He complained of his wife?

Lovelace

Had a head a little—

Morgana

A little—?

Lovelace

Yes, that she was a little sick—in the head—absent minded. Not able to remember even a simple thing—sometimes she even forgot her own name.

Morgana

Pure slander! (Anne laughs and Morgana rounds on her) What's the matter with you?

Anne, Madame, I have a toothache.

Morgana

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Go away, then—we have no need of your groaning. (to Lovelace) Now, what did you say Lord Belton had to say about women?

(Anne exits.)

Lovelace

He'd say they were very simple and gave themselves away easily. Women, he'd say— Madame, you're forcing me, I'd never dare—

Morgana

Speak, sir—

Lovelace

Women, he'd say—only have an empire over weak souls. Their prudence is only trickery. Their reason is not logical—quick to seize the superficial, their judgement is unsound. Also they lack sangfroid, and wit—or what wit they have is weak. To be sure it dazzles under the color of their grace, but it passes from them, it evaporates with their youth, and dissipates with their beauty. They prefer— Madame, it is Lord Belton who speaks, not I—I am so far from thinking—

Morgana (icily)

Go on, sir. They prefer—

Lovelace

They prefer to succeed by trickery rather than right and innocence; they prefer secrecy and mystery of all things, dissimulating about everything. They are almost never excited except by passions which involve nothing but love of their own sex and hate of the other. Protect yourself, he'd add— Madame, I—

Morgana

Finish, sir, finish!

Lovelace

Protect yourself from their first glance, never believe their first words—and they cannot deceive you. I've never been deceived by them in the least little thing, and I never will be.— Those were his words.

Morgana

And Lord Belton said this to you?

Lovelace

To me, Madame, and to all the officers who had the honor to mess with him. Furthermore, he entered into details.

Morgana

I am not very interested. And, without doubt, you gentlemen applauded, for you amuse yourselves at the expense of women.

Lovelace

I said nothing, Madame, but if I had had the honor to know you, what an advantage I would have had over him. To prove to him by force of reason, the solidity of judgement—

Morgana (a little angry)

Sir, I realize that I'm abusing your complacency in staying here. You told me that you still had ten leagues to travel and the night—

(Reenter Anne.)

Anne

Lord Belton—I mean Lord Ormont has returned from the hunt—

Morgana

What, already? Oh, heavens, sir—I don't know—I am—

Lovelace

Madame, something appears to disturb you. Am I the cause?

Morgana

I hesitate to ask you to do what I propose. My husband isn't jealous— no, indeed, he is not. And, he has no reason to be. But, he is so delicate about certain matters, and the way I've detained you—

Lovelace

The Unforeseen Wager

I'm at your disposal, Madame.

Morgana

He's coming to give me news of his hunt. He won't stay long. He has a guest to entertain.

Lovelace

And what does Madame wish?

Morgana

Would you stay a little while in my chamber?

Lovelace

Nothing would give me more pleasure.

Morgana

You won't be there long.

Lovelace

As long as you wish.

Morgana

As soon as he leaves, you will be free to go. You won't be bored. You can eavesdrop. I will be delighted for you to listen to us.

(Exit Lovelace.)

Morgana (locking him in)

Ah, my dear Lord Belton, we don't rule any but weaklings! I am furious. That he could have said such a thing. I know he could. He— he—from his own conceit, to be so fatuous. Ah, I will be delighted if I can avenge myself right now. I will prove to him— But, how am I to do it? If I could tell him what I've learned. No, that would involve my officer—and I want him left out of it. If, by a bet— (she looks at the door to her chamber, musing) Lord Belton— (laughing over the idea on which she has hit) No, no—it would be too funny. But, dare I risk it? looking at the key) It will be very strange if this works. (putting the key in her pocket) Anne, get my knitting.

Anne (giving it to her)

Here it is.

Morgana (her mind on something else)

Give me my knitting.

Anne

It's here already, Madame.

Morgana

Ah.

(Enter Lord Belton.)

Morgana

Well, sir, did you get thoroughly wet?

Belton

I love rain. And you, dear, did you have lots of company?

Morgana

Whatever. Your hunt was, doubtless, successful?

Belton

Oh, Madame, perfidious luck. We charged out of the woods. But our dogs got behind. I thought the game might have doubled back, and so I returned. But it didn't work out. It was a hind. A beautiful hind.

Morgana

I am always astonished, Lord Belton, at the wealth of words that only apply to hunting. Women think they speak English and we are truly ignorant. Especially as to terms from the arts you call—

Belton

Mechanical.

Morgana

Mechanical. Well, there's another buzzword.

The Unforeseen Wager

Belton

My dear, a man who is a bit knowledgeable knows them all.

Morgana

What! Of all the mechanical arts?

Belton

Yes, my dear. I don't cite myself for a model. I have had a very complete education! And, although I have no empire to reform, Peter the Great was not more knowledgeable than myself. There's little in the things serving the arts, the sciences, or even the professions, of which I don't at least know the names. I tilted against the Dictionary, as it were. (while talking, Lord Belton is divesting himself of his hunting clothes)

Morgana

I won't joust with you, then. But, for me, when I look at that door and think to myself, that each little piece of wood and iron from which it is constructed has a definite name, and except for the lock, I can't name one—

Belton

If you like, I'll name them all.

Morgana

All! You can't do it.

Belton

I bet I can.

Morgana

Hmmm. That's a silly boast.

Belton

I bet it, Madame. I bet it.

Anne (aside)

Our prisoner is having a good time over this.

Belton

Yes, my dear, I bet it.

Morgana

So be it. Very good—because for several days now, I've needed twenty pounds.

Belton

Darling, why didn't you ask me?

Morgana

No, sir. I don't wish to owe you a small service. I reserve you for important things, and I prefer to take it from you by betting.

Belton

Twenty pounds?

Morgana

Twenty pounds.

Anne

This worries me. Why such a silly bet? Where will it lead?

Belton

So be it. I want to bet, too.

Morgana

And, you will name off every little bit of iron used to make a chamber door—like this one here?

Belton

Yes, Madame.

Morgana

But, you must write them down, for I can never recall them.

Belton

Righto, let's write 'em down. Trim! Miss, (to Anne) please get Trim.

(Anne goes out.)

The Unforeseen Wager

Belton

How is it, m'dear, I find occasion to prove to you, again and again, that men have the advantage over women, in science, in scholarship, in judgement. On the other hand, this divine talent is fitted by nature to match the transcendent charm of your looks.

Morgana

Oh, sir, remember that I am your wife and that a compliment is meaningless when it is out of place. Return to our wager. You are trying, I believe, to make me forget it.

Belton

No, I assure you.

(Anne returns with Trim.)

Morgana

Here is Trim. Now, let's lose no time proving what we have begun. Besides, we have a long journey to make today.

Belton

Today—a journey?

Morgana

I will explain that: our wager, our wager.

Belton

Trim, take a pen and ink, sit at that table and write what I dictate.

Morgana

Trim, remember: you will give twenty pounds to the porter—which I will repay you.

Belton

You haven't won them yet, Madame.

Morgana

We shall see, we shall see—let's begin.

Belton

Madame these details which are to be explained are rather low and ignoble.

Morgana

Say they are jewels—I will find them golden if I obtain what I want. I am now so happy that I intend to help you lose them to me. Don't forget about the lock and the little nails which are attached to it.

Belton

They are not nails, they are screws—held by screws. Write down lock and screws.

Trim

Screws.

Belton

The key-hole, the knob, the peg—

Morgana

Ah, what precision and speed—sir, you frighten me—

Trim

The pegs.

Belton

Wait, Madame, all is not said.

Morgana

Oh, I have lost, sir, I have lost.

Belton

Wait a minute. Peg holes, folding hinges, squares, bolts, hooks—

Morgana

Ah, sir, sir, there goes my twenty pounds.

Belton

The Unforeseen Wager

I don't hesitate, m'dear, I don't hesitate. You will see all—one minute, one minute.

Trim

Hooks.

Morgana

But, you will finish in two words, darling.

Belton

M'dear.

Morgana

Will you take ten pounds for the bet?

Belton

No, no, m'dear. Squares, bolts, hooks—

Trim

I've got them.

Morgana

Ten pounds, sir, ten pounds.

Belton

No, no, m'dear. Ah, you wanted to bet.

Morgana

How about fifteen pounds?

Belton

I won't abate a ha'penny. I lost three pounds last week, and now it's my turn.

Morgana

I salute the flag. I don't even ask if you've forgotten anything.

Belton

Don't believe so. Squares, bolts, hooks—

Morgana

If it had been one of those big doors, you'd have had more trouble.

Belton

I would have said the same. Hooks, bolts—

Morgana

Well, sir, have you named everything?

Belton

Yes, yes, m'dear. I believe so. Squares, hinges.

Morgana

Sir, what surprises me most is the promptness and precision with which you—

Belton

That astonishes you, m'dear—

Morgana

It shouldn't. Now, there's nothing more to do—

Belton

Except pay me, Madame.

Morgana

Pay you? Ah, darling, you are a terrible creditor. If you had lost, I would have been kind, and I would give you credit.

Belton

I don't ask for anything.

Morgana

Trim, fold up the paper, and put it away there in my case.

Belton

Why, m'dear, it's useless.

Morgana

The Unforeseen Wager

Forgive me, darling, I have so much trouble paying attention, and, like most women, have presence of mind only for a moment, and then it's gone.

Belton

You make me laugh. What you just said, I have said a hundred times.

Morgana

Have you sweetheart? I believe you. I hope that you will give me an hour to reflect and make sure you've forgotten nothing?

Belton

Two days, if you like.

Morgana

No, I don't think it will take more time than it will take to tell you the story of my day, and here it is— I am not only bored, but very bored. I was on the balcony, but the rain drove me off. I tried to read, I tried to embroider, then to play some music. Boredom threw me into such a blue funk that all I could do was look at the road. Then I saw a handsome major passing on his horse. I sent a servant to tell him that Lady Ormont invited him to her home.

Belton

Why Lady Ormont?

Morgana

An idea. I didn't want him to know that I am the wife of Lord Belton. Of Lord Belton, who owns lands in these parts. (raising her voice)

Belton

Why?

Morgana

I'm telling you. He accepted my proposition. I saw that my chevalier had a nice bearing—he is one of those men whose honest and kind looks inspire a woman's confidence. He made me the most flattering compliment. He didn't lose a chance to prove to me that if I had yielded to him— He even dared to tell me it's difficult for a man to be natural and brave with a woman—but, perhaps, he had seen in my eyes all the pleasure that his presence gave me. Now, what was it telling you?— Excuse my frankness, but I know the empire that I have over you. We were involved in the most intense conversation when you arrived. And so, I had to lock him in my chamber—from where he can listen to me. If the tale I'm telling you causes him to eavesdrop— Really, when you entered, I proposed this indiscreet bet, little thinking you would accept it. I was wrong, fatigued as you are, to tease you—

(Lord Belton has been undergoing the tortures of hell during this little speech, and Morgana knows it, indeed, she is enjoying his discomfiture.)

Belton

Madame.

Morgana

But, darling, I perceive the stag you were hunting led you a merry chase.

Belton

No, Madame.

Morgana (innocently)

You appear to me to be upset.

Belton

No, Madame, I am not. But, this gentleman must be bored in your chamber.

Anne (aside)

Oh, heavens!

Morgana

Let's not talk about it anymore. I see it disturbs you, and I am— mortified. I wish to be alone.

(Trim and Anne exit, casting uneasy glances at each other.)

The Unforeseen Wager

Belton

I believe it.

Morgana

I desire—

Belton

And I, I desire to enter into your chamber, and meet the man who had the temerity to—

Morgana

Oh, what an imprudence— Permit me, darling, to suggest a compromise.

Belton

A compromise, Madame? I don't see what compromise—

Morgana

If I have lot the bet, give me revenge—

Belton

Madame, it is not a question of joking.

Morgana

I am not joking. I demand my revenge.

Belton

And I, Madame, I demand the key to your chamber—and I beg you to give it to me.

Morgana

The key, sir?

Belton

Yes, the key, the key.

Morgana

And, if I don't have it?

Belton

There's a way to get in: break the door down.

Morgana

Sir, no violence. What you intend will be very easy, if you will listen to me a minute.

Belton

I am listening, Madame.

Morgana

Sit down, sir.

Belton

No, Madame.

Morgana

Before you are carried to extremes which are unworthy of you, and— (laughing) I beg you to pay me the twenty pound bet, because you have lost.

Belton

The devil, Madame, this is too much.

Morgana

Stop, sir—in the bet you forgot to mention a key, a key, a key, a key. You don't pretend it is not made of iron. You named it after a fury and rage that I didn't expect—but not in time. I wanted to make a joke of it, and make you yourself ask for this little old key—but I see too late that I shouldn't have exposed myself to your wild jealousy. Read, sir. (she opens the letter and gives it to him; he takes it with irritation, and an air of indecision, absentmindedness, and confusion) As for that key you ask for, sir—here is the key—open the chamber door yourself—look at everything—justify your suspicions. AND DO ME THE JUSTICE TO THINK THAT WHEN I WANT TO HIDE SOMEONE, I AM NOT SO STUPID AS TO TELL YOU ABOUT IT.

Belton (confused)

Ah, m'dear.

Morgana

What! You hesitate, sir? If you won't open the door, I'm going to open it myself.

The Unforeseen Wager

Belton

Ah, m'dear, m'dear, you beat me into the ground.

Morgana

No, no, what I told you is, without doubt, true.

Belton

Ah, Madame, how guilty I feel.

Morgana

Hey, no, My Lord, you don't—

Belton

M'dear, I fall at your feet.

Morgana

Get up, sir.

Belton

You will forgive me, Morgana?

Morgana

Certainly, darling.

Belton

You don't say it as if you meant it.

Morgana

I promise you, I'm not angry because you were jealous.

Belton

How good you are.

Morgana

It's not goodness, it's good sense.

Belton

Ah, Madame, when one is suspicious— (looking at the paper) By Jove, with what cleverness, with what finesse, I was lured into asking for that key—that cursed key. (reading) Yes, yes, there is the lock, the screw. Devil with the key—cursed key. But, Trim—didn't I mention it?

Trim (peeping in immediately)

No, sir. But I thought you were going to say it.

Belton

Morgana, Morgana, I am enchanted. This will teach me never, never to play games with you. Till the end of my life. I am going to pay you that twenty pounds and pay you with the best will in the world. You will forgive me, m'dear?

Morgana

Yes, dear, yes, dear.

Belton

What a simpleton I was to think, to believe— I am going, Madame. I will return to discharge my debt.

(Exit Belton. Enter Anne.)

Morgana

Anne, see that Lord Belton does not return. (watching after her husband and opening her chamber) Leave, leave— Hurry! Leave, sir.

Lovelace (entering from the now open chamber)

Madame, I am astonished. I am confounded by what I have heard.

Morgana

Well, sir, do you want more proof to be convinced of the advantage that all women have over their husbands? And, if I was more pretty, and more clever—

Lovelace

Impossible.

Morgana

The Unforeseen Wager

Still, sir, I was only employing our least effective methods. What would have happened if I had used scorn, the accents of unbearable sorrow, reproaches, tears, the despair of a woman who thinks herself outraged? You cannot imagine, you haven't the least idea, the power a woman gets from putting her husband in the wrong—just once. Still, I am ashamed of the role I played just now. I will never think of it without blushing. My little idea of revenge took me farther than I ever intended. Really, I'm convinced the desire to prove how smart you are leads a person into doing and saying the stupidest things.

Lovelace

What a way to characterize a joke!

Morgana

Ah, sir, in the presence of a stranger whom I have every reason to believe a gallant man—

Lovelace

And, the most humble of your admirers—

Morgana

I have heaped a little ridicule on my husband, Lord Belton, merely to impress you with my finesse.

Lovelace

Unnecessary. I knew you had it in the first place. And, I knew you were Lady Belton.

Morgana

What! You knew, sir?

Lovelace

That I was in the home of Lady Belton. One of your servants told me.

Morgana

You mean, sir, I was your dupe?

Lovelace

No, Madame, but I wasn't yours.

Morgana

Ah, how this upsets me. And this woman who is so absent minded and who forgets her married name— What, sir, you banter with me?

Lovelace

Madame, I ask your pardon.

Morgana

This turn of events overwhelms me and strengthens my resolution to abandon all forms of trickery. (walking about scornfully) Ah, heavens! I hope, sir, that you will do us the honor to visit us in London this winter. At that time I will ask my husband's pardon in your presence. **Anne**, let the gentleman out by the servants' stairs.

Goodbye, sir.

Lovelace

Adieu, Madame.

(Exit Lovelace with Anne.)

Morgana

I wish you a bon-voyage. (Lovelace is gone) How did he know! Ah, men, men—cringe before us! I am upset. Fortunately, he seems honest. I am in despair, my proceeding is not good. It's frightful before a stranger who is perfectly free to tell whom he pleases. That's what happens if you are wanting in self respect.

(Anne returns.)

Anne

Oh, Madame, I haven't got a drop of blood left in my veins.

Morgana

Why not?

Anne

If your husband had entered?

Morgana

The Unforeseen Wager

Oh, well, so what?

Anne

And if he had seen the gentleman?

Morgana

Then I would have asked him why, if he can keep two women in his apartment, that he's known for fifteen years, I am not permitted to keep a gentleman in mine—a man I've known for fifteen minutes.

Anne

Ah, that's true, I didn't think of that.

Morgana

Anne, you tell Trim to pay off Bellamy tomorrow and send him away.

Anne

Madame, what can he have done? He's a fine boy. It's true he's a little stupid.

Morgana

That's not the trouble. He's not stupid; but he's sly and a troublemaker. I don't like servants who report to Madame what's happening in monsieur's apartment. They do it for their own benefit.

Anne (aside)

See how far his cleverness has gotten him. I'm afraid he won't have my ruffs. (aloud) Madame, I hear your husband's voice.

Morgana

Ah, heavens!

(Enter Lord Belton and Mr. Lovelace.)

Belton (to Lovelace)

Madame? Madame will excuse your appearance. You are in boots and you come from hard riding. Here, m'dear. I present Mr. Lovelace to you—fine gentleman, brave officer, one who will soon retire on a pension. Here's the fifty pounds I owe you. I wanted to pay you myself.

Morgana

Fifty pounds! It was only twenty.

Belton

Fifty, Madame! I wish to make amends. I beg you to accept them—in compensation for my—my—excitability.

Morgana

It's I who am confused.

Belton

I will never cease to remember how you chastised me.

Morgana

And I, too.

Belton

You, Madame. Not at all, you jest. (to Lovelace) My dear friend, you have no idea what's up, but I will explain it to you. It's a thing cleverly done, charming—delightful. You will judge Madame's wit and goodness. May you marry a woman with such excellent qualities. She has them, she has them, rest assured.

Lovelace

I believe I know everything I wish to know about the subject.

Morgana

Sir.

Belton

Madame, stay with Mr. Lovelace a moment. Ah, my friend, what happiness I plan to give myself. I will be back in a minute.

(Exit Lord Belton.)

Morgana

Well sir, doesn't this make things worse? Lord Belton encountered you as you were leaving?

The Unforeseen Wager

Lovelace

No, Madame. I came to call on him. He brought me here himself. When I had the honor to wave to you from the road I was on my way here— because I had business with Lord Belton. You can gauge my surprise when I was hurried in by a little door in the park with an air of mystery. Add to that the change of name. I swear to you that I believed myself destined for great adventures.

Morgana

Hey! What did Lord Belton mean when he said you'd be retiring on a pension?

Lovelace

It's up to him to explain that enigma. And it appears to me to have no more design than to make you—here he is. Heavens, it's Miss Belton.

(Enter Lord Belton, Miss Sophia and Mrs. Prim.)

Belton

Yes—there she is. And, is there anything more loveable? My friend, take love from the hands of friendship. Madame, you didn't know you had this young lady in your house—she's been here since yesterday. I returned too late—and left too early this morning to present her to you. She appears before us very suddenly—she is the daughter of my brother by an indiscretion with a noble lady. He died in my arms on the battlefield and this child was left an orphan. His marriage was only known to me. You approve, of course, the reasons which caused me to hide her from you. My father was so proud and hard—and in the family— I will explain everything to your satisfaction. My dear child, kiss your aunt.

Morgana

With all my heart.

Sophia

And me, Madame, what happiness I feel—

Belton

Madame, I marry her—and I am giving her to Mr. Lovelace. I say give her—it's a true present. He wouldn't have had her if I didn't know how honest he is.

Lovelace

I will have the joy to be your nephew, Madame.

Belton

Yes, my friend—and very soon. I am going to London tomorrow, for there are several details which I must straighten out.

Lovelace

Miss, do you consent to make me happy?

Sophia

You have to ask me from Lady Belton.

Lovelace

Madame, may I hope?

Morgana

Yes, sir. I am delighted. Heaven has never given me a child, and in one instant I have acquired a daughter and a son-in-law. I agree to it.

Sophia

It is as much by inclination as obedience.

Belton

So be it. My niece is charming.

Morgana

I am much deceived if Miss hasn't a lively wit. And I am sure that, without shifts and trickery, she will be able to protect herself from the deceits of others—and to make her husband happy.

Lovelace

If Miss Sophia needs a model, I am sure she will find it in you.

Morgana

The Unforeseen Wager

Yes, sir, yes, sir. Trickery is good for nothing. No trickery, no trickery. One is always one's own dupe.

Belton

Usually me.

Morgana

Oh, Lord Belton, how wrong I've been.

Belton

What?

Morgana

Never mind. It would be difficult to explain. Let's all go to your chambers.

Anne (watching them leave)

Ah, if this adventure could cure her of trickery. But I can tell she doesn't believe a word of that story about Miss Sophia being her niece. But she doesn't say a word. Women, women. The only way you can cure them of trickery is to outwit them. And how does one do that?