

THE PLAY AND THE PROLOGUE

Denis Diderot

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translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock

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CHARACTERS

MADAME DE CHEPY, friend of Madame de Malves

MADAME BERTRAND, the widow of a sea captain

MISS BEAULIEU, Madame de Chepy's chambermaid.

MR. HARDOUIN, a friend of Madame de Chepy

MR. RENARDEAU, a Norman lawyer

MR. POULTIER, First Naval Officer

MR. DE SURMONT, a poet, friend of Mr. Hardouin

BINBIN, Madame Bertrand's child

PICARD, a lackey

FLAMAND, a lackey

SERVANTS AND CHILDREN

The action takes place in Palin in Madame de Malves's home. The time is the middle of the 18th century.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Picard, listen to me. I forbid you to leave here to go to your wife until 8 o'clock. Do you understand?

PICARD: Eight hours! That's very long!

MADAME DE CHEPY: Indeed, it's too much of a hurry to go make yet one more ragamuffin, as if there weren't enough already.

PICARD: (in a low voice) If we're to be kept from the sweet caresses of our wives, what will console us for the harshness of our masters?

MADAME DE CHEPY: And you, Flamand. Remember well what I am going to tell you. Miss La Saint-Jean. Won't she be here in a week?

MISS BEAULIEU: No, Madam, in four days.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Mercy! I don't have a moment to lose. If in the next four days—the time is short—I discover that you have set foot in a cabaret, I'll kick you out. I must have you all under my hand. And I'd better not find you in a condition such that you cannot take a step or say a word. Think that this time it won't be the way it was last Friday. The Opera finished, Madame de Malves and I came down. There we were under the vestibule. We called, we shouted. No one came. One of you is I don't know where. The other one is dead drunk, and but for a gallant man who took pity on us, I don't know what would have become of us.

PICARD: Madame is that all?

MADAME DE CHEPY: You, Picard—go to the upholster, the decorator, the musicians, be back in a wink. And if you can bring me back all those people. You, Flamand—what time is it?

FLAMAND: It is noon.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Noon! He won't be up yet. Run to his place. Get going!

FLAMAND: Who's he?

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MADAME DE CHEPY: Oh. How stupid that is. Mr. Hardouin. Tell him to come right away, that I am waiting for him, and that it is about an important matter.

(Exit Picard and Flamand)

MADAME DE CHEPY: Beaulieu, by chance do you know how to read?

MISS BEAULIEU: Yes, Madame.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Have you ever acted in a play?

MISS BEAULIEU: Several times. It's the folly in my province.

MADAME DE CHEPY: You could recite a little?

MISS BEAULIEU: A little.

MADAME DE CHEPY: In what play did you act?

MISS BEAULIEU: In the Bourgeois Gentleman, The Pupil Cenie, The Married Philosopher.

MADAME DE CHEPY: And what did you play in that?

MISS BEAULIEU: Finette.

MADAME DE CHEPY: You remember your part there? The part where Finette—

MISS BEAULIEU: — Gave the women's apology?

MADAME DE CHEPY: Precisely.

MISS BEAULIEU: I think so.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Say it.

MISS BEAULIEU: So be it. But such as we are with all our defects we rule men, even the most fashionable and we are the rock where wisdom and pride run aground. You can only oppose us with powerless weapons. You have reasons, we have charms. The crusty philosopher in his gloomy mood vainly clamors against us. Neither his frowning airs, his wrinkle, nor his shouts can save him from our homicidal eyes. Relying on his science and his maxims he thinks he's protected from our seductions. A beauty appears, smiles at him, and BOOM! At the first assault she takes the fort.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Why, not bad. Not bad at all.

MISS BEAULIEU: Does Madame propose to put on a play?

MADAME DE CHEPY: Exactly.

MISS BEAULIEU: Dare I ask you the title, Madame?

MADAME DE CHEPY: The title? I don't know. It's not ready.

MISS BEAULIEU: Apparently, it's being made?

MADAME DE CHEPY: No. I'm seeking an author.

MISS BEAULIEU: Madame will be embarrassed to choose. She has five or six around her.

MADAME DE CHEPY: If you knew how many of these animals are peevish. Each of them will have his defect.

MISS BEAULIEU: But I've heard it said that it's a difficult thing to write a play.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Oh, the way they used to make them.

(Picard returns limping)

MADAME DE CHEPY: And you return without bringing me anybody?

PICARD: (rubbing his leg) Ah. Ow! Ow!

MADAME DE CHEPY: (limping, too) Ow! Ow! Indeed, it's a question of that. And my workers?

PICARD: I didn't see them. There are 4 steps at the upholsterer's; I took them 4 at a time, my ankle twisted and I gave myself a good sprain. Ow! Ow!

MADAME DE CHEPY: Plague on the fool and his sprain. Let Valdajou be made to come and let him look at it. (exit Picard) These annoyances happen only to me. Let him sprain himself today so long as he doesn't break his leg in four days.

MISS BEAULIEU: But, it seems to me, since Madame doesn't have a play and doesn't even know if she will have one.

MADAME DE CHEPY: It seems to you! It seems to me you'd better shut up. I don't like anyone to reason with me. I always know what I am doing.

MISS BEAULIEU: (low) And what you are saying.

FLAMAND (entering drunk with a kerchief around his head) Madame, I'm coming, that is—I think, from Mr.

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Hardouin's. Yes, Mr. Hardouin's. There—at the corner of the street—of the street where Madame said—. He lives devilishly high up, and his stairway was devilishly hard to clamber up. A little narrow stairway. (swaying drunkenly) At every step you touch the wall and the banister. I thought I'd never get there. Yet—I got there. "Say, Miss, this door doesn't it belong to Mr.—whatzizname?" "Who, sir," answered a pretty little neighbor. Pretty, b'gad, very pretty. "A gentleman who makes bottles." "You mean poems?" "Yeah, poems, bottles—who cares?" "Yes, that's it but rap hard. He came in late and I think he's sleeping."

MADAME DE CHEPY: Cursed brute, arch brute—will you finish your prating? Is he coming? Isn't he coming?

FLAMAND: But, MADAME, he's not awake yet. First I have to wake him up. I prepared to give a great kick, and now the head appeared and the door opened and I was thrown in and bowled over. And then the bottle maker or verse maker who had rushed from his bed in his underwear, foaming with rage, swearing, cursing—gracefully. All the same remaining a nice chap. He helped me up. "My friend, you're not injured. Let's have a look at your head."

MADAME DE CHEPY: Finish, finish, finish! What did he say to you? What did you say to him?

FLAMAND: Cannot Madame put her questions one at a time? I said to him that Madame, Madame—what's—what's your name?

MADAME DE CHEPY: Get out you villainous drunk!

FLAMAND: Me, Flamand, a drunk? Because I met a colleague, the one who got the last child of my wife? Yes, of my wife. He's cozy with her. And then there was another colleague. Crony Lehayé. How can two cronies be resisted?

MADAME DE CHEPY: I will kick them all out, that's decided.

FLAMAND: If Madame is so difficult, she'll never keep anybody.

MADAME DE CHEPY: The one lames himself, the other one gets drunk and breaks his crown. When one is unfortunate anything can happen!

(Enter Hardouin)

FLAMAND: Hey, Madame, there he is. I recognize him. It's very lucky, my word.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Miss if you are not so good as to give him your arm he'll never leave here.

HARDOUIN: If my door hadn't opened he'd be dead.

FLAMAND: Come Miss, obey your mistress. Gimme your arm. How round it is, how firm.

HARDOUIN: He's got a hard head and a tender heart.

FLAMAND: Madame, since Miss does whatever you tell her—

HARDOUIN: Be off, be off! Insolent!

HARDOUIN: Did that lackey come on your behalf?

MADAME DE CHEPY: Yes.

HARDOUIN: No fault of his if I guessed it. He didn't know who he was, where he came from or what he wanted.

MADAME DE CHEPY: How can you rely on clowns like these?

HARDOUIN: He did me wrong. I was sleeping so nicely, and I needed it so badly. It was nearly five when I returned, after the most boring and tiring journey. Imagine, the reading of a detestable play, like they all are, the saddest company. A dull supper which never ended, a costly card game where I lost everything and endured the bad humor of the winners angry at not winning more.

MADAME DE CHEPY: That's well done: why didn't you come here?

HARDOUIN: Here I am. And all my misfortunes are soon forgotten if I can be of some use to you. What is involved?

MADAME DE CHEPY: Doing me the most important service. You know Madame de Malves?

HARDOUIN: Not personally. But, by unanimous consent, she is accorded to have a clever wit, a sweet gaiety, taste, knowledge of the fine arts, a great experience of the world, and sure and exquisite judgement.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Those are qualities that she has for all the world and on which I set a high value, assuredly. But I esteem here even more for those she keeps in reserve for her friends.

HARDOUIN: I live with someone who calls her a tender mother, excellent wife and very good friend.

MADAME DE CHEPY: It's been six or seven years since we've been connected and I owe her the best part

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of my life's happiness. It was from her that I got good advice when I needed consolation in my troubles, which made her sometimes forget her own. And it's sweet satisfaction one has in confiding one's moments of pleasure to someone who knows how to listen to them with interest. Well, this is directly concerning the day of her birthday party.

HARDOUIN: I understand you. And you must have a diversion, a proverb and a short play.

MADAME DE CHEPY: That's it, my dear Hardouin.

HARDOUIN: I am in despair to refuse you outright; but outright all the same— First, because I am excessively tired and I don't have a single idea, no, not one. Secondly, because luckily or unluckily, I have one of those heads which cannot be commanded. I'd like to serve you only I cannot.

MADAME DE CHEPY: We're not saying that we want a masterpiece from you!

HARDOUIN: But, Madame, at the very least you are asking for something that will please you. And that does not appear easy to me. Something that will please the person you wish to celebrate, and that is very difficult; something that will please her company which is not composed of indulgent people and something that will please me, and I am almost never satisfied with what I do.

MADAME DE CHEPY: All that is only chimeras of your laziness or the pretexts of your bad will. You will persuade me, perhaps, that you greatly fear my judgement? I admit my friend has a very delicate sentiment and exquisite tact, but she's fair; she is more touched by a happy word than injured by a bad scene. And if she were to find you a little vapid—what does that matter to you? After having been ill satisfied with yourself many times you will be quits by being unjust to yourself once more.

HARDOUIN: Besides, Madame, my wit is not unengaged. You know Madame Servin? I believe she is your friend.

MADAME DE CHEPY: I meet her in society; I see her at her home; we embrace but we don't like each other.

HARDOUIN: Her inconsiderate do-gooding has caused her a very ridiculous problem. And you know what ridicule is for her. She discovered I was allied with her adversary. It's absolutely necessary that I get her out of that. I've even taken the liberty of giving her a meeting here by my servant.

MADAME DE CHEPY: My poor Hardouin. Each must take his role in the world. That of advocate is to settle law suits. Yours, to make charming plays. Would you like to know what's going to happen to you? You are going to get embroiled with the lady for whom you are the negotiator, with her adversary, and with me if you refuse me.

HARDOUIN: For a thing so frivolous? That's something I'll never fear.

MADAME DE CHEPY: But it seems to me it's for me to judge whether a thing is frivolous or not. It takes on the interest that I take in it.

HARDOUIN: Meaning that if it pleases you to take ten times, a hundred times the interest in it more than it is worth?

MADAME DE CHEPY: I'll be a little judicious, perhaps—but you won't be disobliging. Come, my dear, promise me.

HARDOUIN: I don't know—

MADAME DE CHEPY: Make my play—

HARDOUIN: Really, I don't know—

MADAME DE CHEPY: The role of suppliant doesn't become me. And that of sweetness is too hard for me. Take care. I'm going to get angry.

HARDOUIN: No, Madame, you won't get angry.

MADAME DE CHEPY: And as for me, I tell you sir, that I am angry, very angry that you treat me as you would not treat that fat stuck-up country girl who orders you about with an impertinence she would hardly get away with if she were young and pretty. With that little simperer who is no one in particular, but who wastes all that, who doesn't have a gesture she hasn't learned, and who doesn't utter an unpretentious word, and who is satisfied with her own person as she is discontent with others. With that little trinket of affectation who has no nerves but fibers which she calls hairs. One is quite astonished to listen to her utter big words which she's harvested in the society of savants and pedants and that she repeats wrongly and inappropriately like a parrot badly trained. With Miss, yes, with Miss who's right here, who sometimes at my toilet provides you with

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distractions which would, if I chose shock me, but which I perpetually laugh at.

MISS BEAULIEU: Me, Madame!

MADAME DE CHEPY: Yes, you! It mustn't offend you. This beautiful attachment does you so much honor.

HARDOUIN: It's true, Madame, that I find Miss very honest, very decent, very well brought up.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Very loveable.

HARDOUIN: Very loveable—why not? Whatever the situation may be it's neither a privilege nor an exclusion of that title, which I sometimes give her in joking. But I respect her enough and myself enough not to take it seriously, which would be offensive.

MADAME DE CHEPY: (ironically) Miss, I beg you, beseech you, try hard to intercede for me with this gentleman.

(Exit Madame de Chepy)

HARDOUIN: She won't be denied. For my part, I am also a little annoyed. These women that she just tore up value her a lot without scorning her. Do you want me to write this play?

MISS BEAULIEU: Indeed, I would be strangely vain if I dared to flatter myself I could obtain from you what you so roughly refused Madame.

HARDOUIN: Explain yourself openly. Would it please you?

MISS BEAULIEU: You know better. But Madame might be mortified by it. Who knows if this won't separate me from her service? It won't happen tomorrow, but little by little the delicious Miss Beaulieu will become gauche, clumsy, dull. I won't listen to her say that long. I will leave and I won't leave without sorrow for I am very attached to Madame. Not counting that your complacency won't be secret and could only be badly interpreted. There, sir. The best thing is to persist in your refusal or to give in to Madame's desires.

HARDOUIN: Of the two choices, the first is the only one which agrees with me. I am beset with all types of difficulties. I have them on my own account, I have them on other's accounts. Not a minute's rest. If someone knocks on my door I am afraid to open it. If I go out, I do so with my hat pulled down over my eyes. If someone importunes me with a visit, I grow faint. There are a multitude awaiting the success of a play that I must read to the Academy. Isn't it more worthwhile that I occupy myself with that than waste my time? This society nonsense— Either what I do is bad and not worth the trouble of creating it, or if it is passable, the pitifulness of the actors make it dull.

MISS BEAULIEU: It seems Hardouin doesn't have a high idea of our talent.

HARDOUIN: If you like, Miss, for let me tell you the truth. I've seen the most vaunted society actors and I swear to you the best couldn't get in a provincial troupe, and would appear badly at Nicolet's. That would be sad.

MISS BEAULIEU: Now, I, too, on my side am annoyed. Do you know I meddle in acting?

HARDOUIN: So much the worse, Miss. (low) Hold on to your hat.

MISS BEAULIEU: Didn't you tell me you'd make the play if I wanted it? I don't know if a poet is a very honest man, but I always heard it said that an honest man keeps his word. I intend to convince you that the author often blames it on the actors when he ought to blame himself. I intend for you to hear yourself hissed and that you will hear us applauded.

HARDOUIN: Miss throws down the gauntlet. I have to take it up. I promised to make the play and I will do it.

MADAME DE CHEPY: (reentering) Miss, Miss, have you succeeded? I think I've given you time and leisure.

HARDOUIN: Yes, Madame, she's succeeded and I will make the play.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Miss, I am infinitely obliged to you and I thank you.

(Exit Madame De Chepy)

MISS BEAULIEU: You see. There she is. And I am sure I don't have a month to remain here. I wish all parties, plays and poets were at the bottom of the river!

(Exit Miss Beaulieu)

HARDOUIN: (alone) What the devil to do? Let's see, let's meditate a moment. That would be pleasant enough but trite. They are all, they've all been used. Ah, if only Moliere were to return with his genius, he would indeed have trouble to obtain the approval of people that he had shown to be so difficult. To ask of me one of those buffooneries such as were put on at the Hotel de Conde or The Palace Royale, isn't that to say to me,

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"Hurry, hurry, have the wit and the delicacy of Lanjou, the verve and originality of Colle." And that's what I let myself in for! Nothing but that! I am a fool. So long as I live I'll only be a fool. And my hotheadedness will trap me like a fool. But what could I do? No, that doesn't go to the heart of it. And if I were to put on stage this little story? Even less. It is sad and doesn't suit the people and then I have only two or three days, one to write and to copy it out, one to teach it, and one to play it, without rehearsal. So it will get done, God knows how. They imagine that a play blows up like a soap bubble.

LACKEY: (entering) Sir there's a man with a bent back, elbows and knees look like a crescent, he resembles a tailor like two drops of water.

HARDOUIN: To the devil with him.

LACKEY: There's another one who's in a temper and grumbles between his teeth; he seems like a creditor who hasn't yet got his money back.

HARDOUIN: To the Devil! To the Devil!

LACKEY: There's a third, thin and dried up, who turns his eyes around the apartment as if he were going to strip it of the furniture.

HARDOUIN: The devil with him. And, you, too! What are you doing there stationed like a guard? Have you conspired with the others to drive me mad?

LACKEY: It's on behalf of Madame Servin who begs you not to forget her business.

HARDOUIN: I thought of it.

LACKEY: She's a woman.

HARDOUIN: A woman?

LACKEY: Wrapped in 20 ells of crepe. I would wager she's a widow.

HARDOUIN: Pretty?

LACKEY: Sad, but worth consoling.

HARDOUIN: How old?

LACKEY: Between twenty and thirty.

HARDOUIN: Show her in.

LACKEY: There's still another strangely dressed fellow, in yellow socks, black shoes, dimity vest, and grey suit. He passed by your house and was sent here.

HARDOUIN: That's my Norman lawyer. Tell him to wait and show in the widow.

(Exit lackey, enter Madame Bertrand.)

MADAME BERTRAND: Excuse me, sir. Let me sit down. I am very tired, I've been to the four corners of Paris today and I think I've seen the whole world.

HARDOUIN: Rest yourself, Madame. (aside) She's quite nice. (aloud) Madame I don't have the honour of knowing you, but do me the honor of telling me what brings you here? You are not mistaken. My name is Hardouin.

MADAME BERTRAND: It's you yourself I seek. They told me you were here and I came here.

HARDOUIN: (aside) Small feet and hands. (aloud) Madame, you would be better off in this large armchair.

MADAME BERTRAND: I am fine. Sir, do you have the time and the patience to listen to me?

HARDOUIN: Speak, Madame, speak.

MADAME BERTRAND: You see the most unfortunate creature.

HARDOUIN: Assuredly, you deserve another fate. And with a face like yours there's no misfortune that cannot be stopped.

MADAME BERTRAND: That's what you are going to prove to me. Have you ever heard of Captain Bertrand?

HARDOUIN: Who commanded The Dragon, and who put all his cargo in the sloop and let himself sink with his vessel?

MADAME BERTRAND: He was my spouse; he had twenty years service.

HARDOUIN: He was a brave man. And I've never seen anything more interesting than his widow. But what can I do for her?

MADAME BERTRAND: Much.

HARDOUIN: I suspect so, and wish to.

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MADAME BERTRAND: He left me without a fortune and with a child. I asked for a pension which they had the cheek to refuse me.

HARDOUIN: And that seems shabby to you? Madame the state is in deficit.

MADAME BERTRAND: I am convinced of that but I would like a reversion on the head of my son.

HARDOUIN: To be honest with you, Madame, your request and the Minister's refusal seem equally just to me.

MADAME BERTRAND: If I don't get it, what will become of my poor child?

HARDOUIN: You are young, you are pretty.

MADAME BERTRAND: With all that I don't know whether I'll live or die. I've done everything I could to get support for my business. I've uselessly employed princes, dukes, archbishops, bishops, priests, honest women.

HARDOUIN: The other sort might have been more useful.

MADAME BERTRAND: Shall I admit it to you? I didn't neglect them.

HARDOUIN: The thing is, all these folks do not know how to solicit.

MADAME BERTRAND: And you know?

HARDOUIN: Quite well; there are principles to everything. First of all, it's necessary to become deeply interested in the thing.

MADAME BERTRAND: And you will take that interest in mine?

HARDOUIN: Why not, Madame? Nothing seems easier to me. They have souls of bronze. You have to know how to soften up such souls.

MADAME BERTRAND: And this talent—who possesses it?

HARDOUIN: You do, Madame.

MADAME BERTRAND: Who will undertake to employ it for others?

HARDOUIN: I will. But that's not all. And this last point is the great point. The point without which there can be no success. It's to render personal the grace that you request. You are hardly heard even by your friend when you don't speak by yourself.

MADAME BERTRAND: And the one on whom my business depends is yours?

HARDOUIN: Oh! You are right. It's Poultier and I'd almost dare to answer for your success.

MADAME BERTRAND: You will be so kind as to speak to him?

HARDOUIN: Assuredly.

MADAME BERTRAND: God be praised! They didn't deceive me when they told me that I would find in you a friend of all unfortunates.

HARDOUIN: Today, or in a few days it is the birthday party of the mistress of the house. He's in Paris, he's a friend of her husband, and he'll have to be very busy not to come.

MADAME BERTRAND: And you will speak to him? You will personalize my business?

HARDOUIN: I'll only undertake it on that condition. Didn't you say you had a child?

MADAME BERTRAND: He's the first and only one.

HARDOUIN: How old is he?

MADAME BERTRAND: Nearly six.

HARDOUIN: That cannot be a disadvantage.

MADAME BERTRAND: You would think it was six months ago but since that time, I've wept so much, suffered so much; I'm so tired, so changed.

HARDOUIN: It doesn't show.

MADAME BERTRAND: He was returning from China. I can't get China out of my mind.

HARDOUIN: We'll get it out of there.

MADAME BERTRAND: I can count on you?

HARDOUIN: You can, but think carefully of the condition I mentioned. Without it, I can't answer for anything.

MADAME BERTRAND: You are a man of good will; it only needs a voice. Do, say what you please; I give you carte blanche.

(Madame Bertrand leaves, and then Renardeau enters)

HARDOUIN: And then to create a play in the midst of all this. (to Renardeau) A thousand pardons, dear

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Renardeau, to make you wait.

RENARDEAU: I forgive you. My word, she's charming.

HARDOUIN: You've still got eyes.

RENARDEAU: That's all I have left. Well, what's involved?

HARDOUIN: I don't know how I can laugh for I am profoundly desolated.

RENARDEAU: Your play flopped?

HARDOUIN: It's worse than that.

RENARDEAU: What the Devil—

HARDOUIN: I had a sister that I loved like crazy. A little bigoted, but for all that the best creature, the best sister, there ever was in the world. I've lost her.

RENARDEAU: And they're disputing the inheritance with you?

HARDOUIN: It's worse than that.

RENARDEAU: What the Devil?

HARDOUIN: It's been disposed of without my consent. She was living with a friend, that woman, accustomed to playing mistress in the house has given everything away, all gone, all sold, beds, mirrors, linen, crockery, furniture, kitchen utensils. There was nothing left for me; not more than you could hold in your hand.

RENARDEAU: Was it considerable?

HARDOUIN: Enough. I don't know what attitude to take, to lose her wealth when one is not better off than I am seems hard to me. To attack the old friend of a sister seems to me indecent. What do you advise me?

RENARDEAU: What do I advise you? To do nothing.

HARDOUIN: That's easy to say.

RENARDEAU: Do nothing, I tell you. Do you know what your situation is? Exactly the same as I had with your old friend Madame Severin which has lasted ten years and for which I've made fifty trips to Paris and for which I'll have to go fifty more times. It's costing me in unnecessary expenses almost 200 crowns and it will cost me 200 more thanks to the powerful protectors of the lady. It may never be heard or, after a judgement, if I obtain one, I will never get a quarter of my expenses back from it. Do you understand?

HARDOUIN: So you absolutely do not want me to sue?

RENARDEAU: No. By all the devils. And may they take your friend Madame Severin and the friend of your sister.

HARDOUIN: So, if it was to do over again, you wouldn't sue?

RENARDEAU: No. What are you dreaming about?

HARDOUIN: A good idea has come to me. If in gratitude for the service you're doing me by dissuading me from engaging in a bad business, I were to finish yours? Do you know that it wouldn't be impossible for me at all?

RENARDEAU: I consent with all my heart. And if you need a formal document authorizing you to terminate it, and to engage myself to ratify all you are pleased to settle without qualification just get me some ink and paper and I'll prepare and sign it.

HARDOUIN: There's all you need on that table, my dear Renardeau. I will do my best, don't doubt it, but in any event, no reproaches.

RENARDEAU: Don't fear that.

HARDOUIN: (aside) Ah! ah! ah! If the Norman lawyer knew I have in my pocket the lady's authority. Now this is very well. But the play I promised. Oh, well. One must resign oneself to one's fate and mine is to promise what I will not do, and to do what I have not promised.

RENARDEAU: (after having written) There it is—I've subscribed Isaacher Renardeau.

HARDOUIN: I don't doubt this will do marvelously.

RENARDEAU: But still you have to read the title in consequence of which you operate. That's in the rules.

HARDOUIN: Have I ever followed the rules?

RENARDEAU: You haven't been very wise. The Rules, my friend, the Rules! as for the rest, all I want to obtain is to decently furnish this little lodging which gives on the river and on the forest. That ought to inspire you to the most beautiful verse in the world; a place you should have occupied for ten years and that you will never occupy—and that I may be quits with Madame Severin, for myself, for my wife, for my children, and theirs having part in the lawsuit.— By the way, I saw a carrying chair in the courtyard. The only remaining furniture

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from the latest Madame Desforges my relative who stopped walking long before dying. Stipulate, in addition, the carrying chair. My wife is beginning to fail in her legs and that would be a gift to make her. Don't forget the carrying chair.

HARDOUIN: I'll think about it.

RENARDEAU: My friend, you are distracted.

HARDOUIN: My friend, I am worn out by this cursed country. Life is evaporating. You don't know what will become of it, and I've decided to live and die in Gisors.

RENARDEAU: You will come live in Gisors?

HARDOUIN: In Gisors: it's there that glory, rest and happiness await me.

RENARDEAU: You'll come die in Gisors?

HARDOUIN: In Gisors.

RENARDEAU: And as for me I tell you heads like yours never know what they will do and that you will live and die wherever it pleases your evil genius to lead you. Don't make plans.

HARDOUIN: My word, I've made so many that haven't been carried out that that would be wiser. But one makes plans the way one wiggles in one's chair: when you're badly seated.

RENARDEAU: When will you see the lady?

HARDOUIN: Today.

RENARDEAU: She's tricky. Take care she doesn't get wind of our conspiracy.

HARDOUIN: Will you come to her place? You are a lawyer and a Norman lawyer at that.

RENARDEAU: Perhaps. I am sometimes free. And when will I see you?

HARDOUIN: During the day.

RENARDEAU: Where?

HARDOUIN: Here.

RENARDEAU: Goodbye. Don't sue, understand. And get as much as you can out of the lady. I have three children and she has only one daughter, that old madwoman, who's ugly and nasty as a sick monkey and deaf as a post. She's rich and I am not. Goodbye.

(Exit Renardeau)

HARDOUIN: Goodbye.

RENARDEAU: (from the distance) And don't forget the carrying chair.

HARDOUIN: And the carrying chair. (after a pause) Well, here I am finally alone and I can ponder this play.

LACKEY: (entering) As to this one, I don't know who he is.

HARDOUIN: Another one? This is persecution.

LACKEY: He entered abruptly. I asked what he wanted—no reply. I took him by the sleeve. He looked at me and continued to pace up and down. His eye is a little haggard. He talks to himself and he breaks into bursts of laughter. As for the rest, he's very polite. If he isn't crazy, he's a poet.

HARDOUIN: I can't take any more of it. In spite of your prediction, Renardeau, you will see me in Gisors.

LACKEY: Shall I let him in?

HARDOUIN: If he was some poor devil of an author in need of advice and who came to find it here, from the depths of the Faubourg Saint Jacques, or from Picpus. A man of genius who needs bread—for that can happen. Show him in.

(Exit lackey, then enter Surmont)

HARDOUIN: Eh! It's you my friend.

SURMONT: May one ask what you are doing here?

HARDOUIN: I'm going crazy here. And you? Why'd you come here?

SURMONT: I've no clue. They called me. Quick, quick, quick—and I came.

HARDOUIN: God be praised! There's my play done. You are unaware what they wanted of you! As for me, I am going to tell you. It's a few days until the birthday party of a friend. They want to celebrate it and they are going to ask you for a skit, a proverb and a little diversion—which you will do, right?

SURMONT: And why not you?

HARDOUIN: Why? Because it seems to me Madame de Chepy, friend of the mistress of the house was not indifferent to you, and that it would be really bad for me to ravish from you such a fine opportunity to pay her

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court.

SURMONT: And so it's to oblige me?

HARDOUIN: Doubtless. There. That's how the thing will fall out. You'll do the skit, the proverb and the play just as you please.

SURMONT: I don't know much about that sort of thing.

HARDOUIN: So much the better. What I would do would resemble everything else; what you will do will be unique.

SURMONT: There'll be great wits and fashionable people there. I'd much prefer to remain in cognito.

HARDOUIN: I am hoping to put you at your ease. If you succeed, the success will be accounted yours. If you fail, the failure will be mine.

SURMONT: Nothing could be more obliging.

HARDOUIN: But pay for the service I am doing you with a small confidence. Isn't it true that with all her fancies, her caprices, her abruptness, Madame de Chepy—

SURMONT: I'll go along with whatever you want. I will even thank you, if you insist.

HARDOUIN: I demand nothing. I know how to be obliging without ostentation, and without interest—go on, leave.

SURMONT: Shall I see Madame de Chepy—?

HARDOUIN: No, no. Just write her an honest letter that she can interpret as she likes and leave, I tell you. Just make it really gay, really crazy, and seem completely spontaneous.

SURMONT: But still, I ought to know about the heroes of the day.

HARDOUIN: Praise, praise. Praise is always well received.

SURMONT: Is she young?

HARDOUIN: No.

SURMONT: Old?

HARDOUIN: No. She has all the charms age has not destroyed. You can fall with all your might on all the vices, on all the ridiculous things without going over our heads. You can expand at your ease on the qualities of wit and of heart without a word being lost. Dwell especially on the customs of frankness, discretion, dignity, decency, etc, etc.

SURMONT: Perhaps I know her. Wouldn't she by chance be a woman I saw once at Madame de Chepy's during her illness called Madame de—

HARDOUIN: She or someone else. What's that matter? Leave. Wait. Here write the letter for Madame de Chepy and I will send it to her.

** (At this point either there is a brief intermission or we watch Surmont write the letter and then leave. A short curtain would be preferable. TRANSLATOR) **

HARDOUIN: (alone, to a male servant) Take this letter to Madame de Chepy. (exit Servant) Oof! I can breathe. I am eased of an enormous weight. I feel myself light as a bird, and I can give myself happily to the affairs of my widow and my Norman attorney. Since my first clerk of the Navy hasn't come, I must send to his home or go there.

MISS BEAULIEU: (entering with a bundle of flowers in her hand) I told you so. Madame is in a stinking mood. I thought I would never finish doing her hair. And you sir, where are you at?

HARDOUIN: It's done.

MISS BEAULIEU: Very fine. I've just come on her behalf to dismiss you and to inform you she wants absolutely nothing from you. Shall I tell you the rest?

HARDOUIN: Tell me, Miss.

MISS BEAULIEU: She added that she won't have any trouble finding as bad a poet and even less to find a more honest man.

HARDOUIN: Miss, you will have the goodness to reply to her on my behalf that I would have had the great pleasure of conforming to her last orders but they arrive too late. As to the rest, it is easier to burn a play than to write one.

MISS BEAULIEU: Really, it's done?

HARDOUIN: No, it's being done. What's this enormous bouquet? It's pretty, very pretty. But all these roses

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are not worth the cluster of lillies or the buds they are hiding from me.

MISS BEAULIEU: If we need rhymes we also need bouquets and we all went to pillage the gardens of Mr. Poultier. He's never sure of his time and his affairs could keep him at Versailles on the day of Madame de Malves' party so he came to pay his homage in advance.

HARDOUIN: He's here?

MISS BEAULIEU: I think I hear him coming.

(Exit Miss Beaulieu)

HARDOUIN: Mr. Poultier, Mr. Poultier, it's Hardouin, it's I who call you. A word if you please.

(Enter Poultier)

POULTIER: You are an unworthy person and I ought not to notice you. Isn't it two years already that you promised me week after week to come dine with us? It's true you told me not to count on it. But anger aside, what do you want of me?

HARDOUIN: Would you have a quarter of an hour to grant me?

POULTIER: An hour if you like.

HARDOUIN: (to a lackey) Tell whoever may come, with no exceptions— I'm not here. (exit lackey)

POULTIER: That seems to signify a grave affair.

HARDOUIN: Very grave. Do you still have friendship for me?

POULTIER: Yes, traitor. Despite all your faults. Can one help oneself?

HARDOUIN: If I threw myself at your knees, and I were to implore your aid in the most important circumstance in my life would you grant it to me?

POULTIER: Would you be needing my purse?

HARDOUIN: No.

POULTIER: Do you want to start some business?

HARDOUIN: No.

POULTIER: Speak, ask, and be sure if the thing is not impossible it will be done.

HARDOUIN: I don't know where to begin.

POULTIER: With me! Go straight to the point!

HARDOUIN: Do you know Madame Bertrand?

POULTIER: That devil of a widow who for the last six months has been holding the town and court by our heels and who has made us more enemies in one day than ten other women have made us in ten years? Three or four more clients like her and we would have to abandon the office. What's she want, a pension? She's been offered one. What do you want? For us to increase it? It will be increased.

HARDOUIN: That's not it. She consents that it be reduced, provided it be made inheritable on the head of her son.

POULTIER: That cannot be done, that cannot be done. It's never been done, it ought not to be done and it will not be done. Look here, my friend, you have some sense. The consequences of this favor. Do you want to throw into our arms a hundred other widows for whom Madame Bertrand will have made the path? Must every reign continue to be in debt successively? Do you realize that the cost of these past expenses will exceed current expenditures? We want to balance the budget and this is not the way. But what interest can you have in this woman powerful enough to make you shut your eyes to the public weal?

HARDOUIN: What interest do I have! The greatest. Have you looked at Madame Bertrand?

POULTIER: Right. She's very nice.

HARDOUIN: Do you know it's ten years since I found her so?

POULTIER: Ten years! You ought to have enough of it by now.

HARDOUIN: Let's stop joking. You are a very gallant man, incapable of compromising the reputation of a woman and making a friend die of sadness. These sea faring folk are not very likable anyway and subject to long absences.

POULTIER: And these long absences would be very boring if their wives were crazy for their husbands.

HARDOUIN: Madame Bertrand esteemed the heroic Captain Bertrand very much, but her head wasn't turned and the child for whom she solicits this inheritable pension, this child—

POULTIER: You are its father?

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HARDOUIN: I believe so.

POULTIER: And why the devil did you have a child?

HARDOUIN: Truly, I tried not to.

POULTIER: All the same that alters the case a little.

HARDOUIN: I am not rich. You know my manner of thinking and feeling. Tell me, if this woman were to die do you think I could bear the expenses for the education of this child; or must I decide to forget it, to abandon it? Would you do it?

POULTIER: No, but is it for the state to repair individual stupidities?

HARDOUIN: Ah! If the state hadn't committed so many more injustices than I am proposing to you. If it had not, and never would grant pensions to the widows whose husbands died to satisfy the laws of Naval honor, do you think the state would be ruined by it? Permit me to tell you, my friend, you are of too strict a probity. You fear adding a drop of water to an ocean. If my request were the first folly of the ministry I wouldn't speak to you of it.

POULTIER: And you would do well.

HARDOUIN: But prostitutes, procurers, singers, dancers, actors, a crowd of cowards, rogues, infamous persons, vicious characters of all types squeeze the the public exchequer—and the wife of a heroic man.

POULTIER: There are many others as worthy of Captain Bertrand who leave indigent widows and children.

HARDOUIN: And what do I care about children I didn't create and those widows having no friend to solicit favor for them?

POULTIER: We'll have to see.

HARDOUIN: I think everything has been seen and you shan't leave here unless I have your word.

POULTIER: What good would that do you? Doesn't it require the Minister's consent? But he has esteem and friendship for you.

HARDOUIN: And you will confide to him?

POULTIER: We'll have to. That shocks you, I suppose?

HARDOUIN: A little. The secret doesn't belong to me. It belongs to someone else and that someone else is a woman.

POULTIER: Whose husband is no more. You are a child. Do you know how your affair will end? I will tell you everything. They will smile. I will propose reducing the pension on condition of rendering it inheritable. They'll consent to it. Instead of reducing it, we'll double it; the order will be signed without being read—and it will be all over.

HARDOUIN: You are charming; your kindness reduces me to tears. Come, let me embrace you. And will our patent be a long time waiting?

POULTIER: An hour, an hour and a half, perhaps. I am going to work with the Minister. There's a lot of business, but only those that I wish—yours will be first and in a short while I could come myself to inform you of success.

HARDOUIN: I don't know how to tell you how much I am obliged to you.

POULTIER: Don't thank me too much. My conscience has never been more at ease. Here indeed is a fine reward for a man who has spent three quarters of his life amusing and instructing us. To whom the Minister has not yet given the least sign of attention, and who but for the munificence of a foreign Queen— Goodbye. I might, I think remind you of your promise, but I don't want the shadow of self interest to obscure what you regard as an act of charity. Will I find you here later?

HARDOUIN: Assuredly, if I have the least hope of seeing you. Mr. Poultier, another word—

POULTIER: What is it? Isn't everything agreed?

HARDOUIN: Hold on. This confiding in the Minister.

POULTIER: Is distasteful to you, I conceive, but it is indispensable.

HARDOUIN: You think so.

(Poultier leaves)

HARDOUIN: (alone) And that's what has to be done when one wishes to get something. I had only to say to Poultier, "This woman is nothing to me. I didn't know her until yesterday. I met her in company in the home of persons who are interested in her. They know I know you. They thought I might be able to do something for her. I

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promised to speak to you about it. I am speaking to you about it. For the rest, do about it as you think best. I want nothing which is unjust or which will compromise you." Poultier would have replied to me coldly. "This cannot be done" and we would have continued to talk of other matters. But would Madame Bertrand approve of the means I used? If perchance she was a bit scrupulous? I obliged her, but in my way, which, perhaps, might not be her way, indeed! Besides, wasn't it all explained? Didn't I lay out my principles to her? Didn't I ask her? Didn't she authorize me to make her affair personal? What more could have I done? If Poultier could send for me, or rather bring me the patent before the return of the widow. Lovely folly that takes me! I came here to make a play for Madame De Chepy who is counting on keeping me secluded all day and perhaps all night. She indeed chose her moment. By the way, I should send to Surmont to learn where he's at. I wouldn't want the party to be lacking. (signaling a lackey) Go to Mr. De Surmont's. Tell him I'll wait all day for what he promised me, and that if the role of Miss Beaulieu is ready he should send it to her because her memory is no good. Can you remember this?

LACKEY: Perfectly.

HARDOUIN: Repeat it to me.

LACKEY: Go to Mr. De Surmont's and tell him you are waiting for him at your home for what he knows about, and that if the role of Miss Beaulieu is ready to send it—to you, to her, right away.

HARDOUIN: To you, to her? Which of the two?

LACKEY: Send it to you.

HARDOUIN: No, dummy, no. He's to send it to her and not at my place. I'll wait for him here. Him, Surmont.

LACKEY: Saving your respect, I thought you didn't say that.

HARDOUIN: This will make me jump in hoops. Go! (the lackey leaves) They make one fool error and to rectify it they make another. But here's my widow. She's a little sooner than I wished.

MADAME BERTRAND: (entering) Sir, you are going to say that those who have an affair are really troublesome, but if I am bothering you, don't get angry, I will return at another time.

HARDOUIN: No, Madame, unfortunate and amiable women never come at a bad time to one who is beneficent and has taste.

MADAME BERTRAND: For amiable women that may be true, but it is impossible for me to be of your opinion about the unfortunate. Despite the mask of politeness covering them, if you knew how many times I read on their faces, "Always, this widow! What's she come here to do? I am worn out and she imagines that one has one thing in one's head and it's her thing." Hardly offering me a chair they hurl themselves rapidly before me, not from politeness, but so as not to give me time to come forward. They stop me at the door and say to me between the double doors, "I thought about your affair, I won't lose sight of it, you may count on everything that depends on me." "But sir." "Madame, I am desolated not to be able to stop with you longer but I am overwhelmed with business." I make my curtsy, he returns it and I've sometimes heard the master say to his lackey. "I've banned that woman. Why was she allowed to pass? If she comes up again, I am not here. Do you understand?"

HARDOUIN: You are speaking to me of people without soul and without eyes.

MADAME BERTRAND: All that is plain, but it's nothing, except that I've found people worse than those I've just spoken about. They dare to put a price on the favors that are solicited. That's horrible.

HARDOUIN: Despite the little delicacy they have, I conceive them more easily.

MADAME BERTRAND: Truly, sir, you are almost the only honest benefactor I've met.

HARDOUIN: Alas, Madame, there's little need for me to blush from your praise.

MADAME BERTRAND: No, sir, without flattery, as you were depicted to me, so I've found you.

HARDOUIN: You've spoken to my friends and friendship is subject to blindness and over rating. If they were true, or rather if they knew me as I know myself, here's what they would have said. "Hardouin is officious. Presenting him with an occasion for doing good is obliging to him. And if he had the happiness to be of use to a woman to whom he felt an inclination he'd be so afraid of withering a charity that that would suffice to reduce him to a very long silence."

MADAME BERTRAND: Sir, do I dare pose a question to you?

HARDOUIN: You want to ask if I've seen Mr. Poultier, the First Secretary of the Minister? Yes, Madame, I've seen him.

MADAME BERTRAND: Well, sir?

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HARDOUIN: Your affair suffers from some difficulties, but I do not think it at all, why, not at all desperate.

MADAME BERTRAND: What! Sir!

HARDOUIN: Madame, let's wait and not flatter ourselves in any way. Instead of cradling ourselves in a hope which will leave us in chagrin, let us prepare for an agreeable surprise.

LACKEY: (entering) This is on behalf of Mr. Poultier. He told me to remit this package to you, and to advise you he will be here in a moment. (exit lackey)

HARDOUIN: Our fate is in there.

MADAME BERTRAND: I am trembling.

HARDOUIN: And me, too. Shall I open it?

MADAME BERTRAND: Open, open quickly.

HARDOUIN: It's the patent for your pension, signed by the Minister. It's for a thousand pounds.

MADAME BERTRAND: That's double what they offered me.

HARDOUIN: Yes, I've read it, and inheritable by your son.

MADAME BERTRAND: My strength fails me. Allow me to sit. Sir, a glass of water. I feel ill.

HARDOUIN: (to a lackey) A glass of water for Madame.

(Meanwhile, Hardouin unlaces her, pulls her handkerchief and puts her a little in disorder)

MADAME BERTRAND: At last, I have enough to stay alive on. My child, my poor child won't lack either education or bread. And it's to you, sir, that I owe this. Pardon, sir, I cannot speak. The volume of my feelings obstructs my speech; I am silent, but look at me, sir, look and judge.

(Madame Bertrand doesn't notice her disorder)

HARDOUIN: Never in your life have you been so touching or so beautiful. Ah, whoever sees you in this moment is happy! I almost said he is to be envied for having served you.

MADAME BERTRAND: Do you allow me to wait here for Mr. Poultier?

HARDOUIN: You must do better. That child will grow up! Who knows if some day he won't need the favor of the Minister and the good offices of the First Secretary? My advice would be for you to go find him and to present him to Mr. Poultier.

MADAME BERTRAND: Sir, you are right. From your cool head which allows you to think of everything, it is easy to see that the practice of beneficence is familiar to you. I'll run find my child. How I'm going to kiss him. If I don't reappear in a quarter of an hour it will be because I am dead of joy.

HARDOUIN: (offering her his arm) Allow me, Madame.

MADAME BERTRAND: No, sir, I feel myself much better.

HARDOUIN: (To lackey) Give your arm to Madame. Right to her door.

(Exit Madame Bertrand and lackey)

HARDOUIN: (alone) As for me, a good man, as they say! I am not: I was born fundamentally hard, evil, perverse. I am touched almost to tears by the tenderness of this woman for her child, by her sensibility, by her gratitude. I even have an inclination for her, and despite myself I persist in this plan, perhaps to desolate her. Hardouin, you are an arrant monster. That's wrong. It's very wrong. Absolutely, I must undo this nasty trick and renounce the evil that I decided to do. Oh! no! But this will be the last in my life. (Poultier enters) My friend, someone besides myself is going to thank you and I perhaps will be thanking someone other than you. But soon you are going to receive the true reward of a beneficent man. You are going to enjoy the most beautiful of all spectacles: that of a charming woman transported by her joy. You are going to see tears flow—of thanks, and joy. She was trembling like a leaf at the opening of your package; she fell ill at the reading of her patent; she wanted to thank me and she couldn't find an utterance. Here she's coming with her child. Allow me to retire. These tremors are very sweet, but I find them too violent for me. I'll almost be ill of it for the rest of the day.

(Exit Hardouin, and enter Madame Bertrand and Binbin her child)

MADAME BERTRAND: (hurling herself at Mr. Poultier's knees) Sir, allow my son to embrace your knees.

POULTIER: Madame, you are making fun of me. That is not done. I will not suffer it.

MADAME BERTRAND: Without you what would have become of me and this poor child?

(Mr. Poultier takes the child in his arms, sits in an armchair and places him on his knees)

POULTIER: He's his father. It's unmistakable. Whoever sees one sees the other.

MADAME BERTRAND: I hope, sir, he'll have the same probity and courage; but he doesn't look like him at

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all.

POULTIER: We might both be right. Those are his eyes. Same color, same vivacity, same shape.

MADAME BERTRAND: Why, no, sir. Mr. Bertrand had blue eyes and my son's eyes are black. Mr. Bertrand had small and sunken eyes, and my son has large ones. Almost goggle eyed.

POULTIER: And the hair, the face, the mouth, the complexion, and the nose.

MADAME BERTRAND: My husband had chestnut brown hair, a straight, square face, an enormously large mouth, thick lips and smoky complexion. My son has none of that. Sir, look at him, his hair is light brown, his face large and wide; small mouth, thin lips. As for the nose, Mr. Bertrand's was pug and my son's is almost aquiline.

POULTIER: It's his sweet and lively look.

MADAME BERTRAND: His father's was severe and hard.

POULTIER: How many follies he'll have.

MADAME BERTRAND: Thanks to you, I hope he will be well brought up. And thanks to his happy nature, I hope he will be wise. Isn't it true, Binbin, that you will be wise?

BINBIN: Yes, mommy.

POULTIER: How much trouble he'll give us! How he'll make his mother shed tears!

MADAME BERTRAND: Is it true, my son?

BINBIN: No, mommy. Sir, I love my mommy with all my heart. And I assure you that I will never make her cry.

POULTIER: What jealous storms, slanderers, enemies. I foresee them.

MADAME BERTRAND: Jealousies. I wish him to have them since he will deserve them. As to enemies and slanderers, I will console him because he doesn't deserve them.

POULTIER: How passionate this one will be to say all the things it is wiser not to say!

MADAME BERTRAND: As to that defect, I agree. It is indeed a bit like that of his father.

POULTIER: And let him beware the letter de cachet, the Bastille, or Vincennes! Good day, Madame, I am happy to have been good for something. Perhaps, little one, one day you will recall what I said to you today. I salute you.

HARDOUIN: (returning, to Poultier as he leaves) Won't you sup with us?

POULTIER: I don't know if I can promise.

HARDOUIN: Stay. I have to extricate myself with Madame de Chepy. and from some other quarrels which might amuse you.

POULTIER: I don't doubt it; you are excellent when you are in the wrong. But these rebels plague us and I have to go.

HARDOUIN: To see their patriarch. (Poultier makes a gesture with his head) What man is that?

POULTIER: As they say, an acuto-quackero.

(Poultier exits)

MADAME BERTRAND: I cannot get over it. Either he never saw my husband or he takes him for someone else. Sir, you will pardon me for a question?

HARDOUIN: Whatever it may be.

MADAME BERTRAND: You are going to think ill of me. Your friend Mr. Poultier has an excellent heart, but is he sound in the head?

HARDOUIN: Very sound. What can make you doubt it?

MADAME BERTRAND: What just happened between us.

HARDOUIN: He must have been distracted. It's a fault of his office and not his own. You wanted to express your gratitude: he didn't hear you because he places little importance on the services he performs. He's satiated with that pleasure.

MADAME BERTRAND: It's because the thing was most unusual. Hardly had I entered when, without even looking at me, without noticing whether I was seated or standing all his attention was directed toward my son.

HARDOUIN: It's because he loves children. As for me, I am for the mothers.

MADAME BERTRAND: Then he set out to cast his horoscope and predicted the most troubled life for him; and the most unhappy, with jealousies, enemies, I don't know what. Quarrels with the court, the city, the

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magistrates, in short, The Bastille and Vincennes.

HARDOUIN: It surprises me less than you.

MADAME BERTRAND: Is he an astrologer?

HARDOUIN: No, but a great physionomist.

MADAME BERTRAND: The best of it was he insisted to me that the child resembled his father like two drops of water. And he doesn't have the least trait!

HARDOUIN: But pardon me, Madame, it's a thing which struck me like him. Do you know the shape of my face and that of your son are almost alike?

MADAME BERTRAND: What's that prove? You don't resemble Mr. Bertrand at all.

HARDOUIN: I am surprised that you don't guess it.

MADAME BERTRAND: Is it that he had some bizarre suspicion about the lively interest you've deigned to take in my fate and that of my child? In acting for us, does he suspect you of having worked for your son?

HARDOUIN: He doesn't suspect it. He's convinced of it.

MADAME BERTRAND: Sir, try to unravel this enigma for me.

HARDOUIN: Well, it's not very obscure. You recall what was said between us when I undertook your affair? Didn't I tell you that the way to succeed was to make the thing personal? Didn't you agree to it? Didn't you expressly allow me to do so? And what interest is more ardent and more personal than that of a father for his son!

MADAME BERTRAND: What do I hear? So your friend thinks that I am, that you are?

HARDOUIN: I confess that it does me a little too much honor, Madame. But where is the great inconvenience in that?

MADAME BERTRAND: You are worthless, infamous—a scoundrel! And did you think me so vile as to accept a pension at that price? You are mistaken. I will learn to live on bread and water; I will learn to die of hunger if necessary. But I will go to the Minister. I will tread this infamous patent under my feet in front of him. I will demand justice from him on an unworthy slanderer and I will obtain it.

HARDOUIN: It seems to me that the lady is making a lot of fuss over a small thing: she's not thinking that it is only Poultier the Minister and his wife who know about it, and I can answer for the discretion of the first two.

MADAME BERTRAND: I've found many evil people: this is the most evil of all. I am ruined! I am dishonored!

HARDOUIN: Putting the thing at its worst, the evil is done. And it can no longer be remedied. The more you yell about it, the more the scandal will spread. Wouldn't it be wiser to harvest the fruit peacefully than to give the whole town food for laughter? Think, Madame, that the ridicule will not be equally shared.

MADAME BERTRAND: That composure puts me in a fury and if I didn't bethink myself, I would scratch your eyes out.

HARDOUIN: Ah! Madame, with those two pretty hands?

(Madame Bertrand, disconsolate collapses in an armchair)

RENARDEAU: (entering) What's this? On one side, a man abashed, on the other a woman in despair. Friend, is this a breaking up?

HARDOUIN: No.

RENARDEAU: She's too amiable and you are too young for this to be a dissatisfied person.

MADAME BERTRAND: You are impertinent! You are a jerk! And that man there is a scoundrel with whom I do not advise you to get mixed up with.

(She relapses into her armchair)

RENARDEAU: She's in a mood! And our business?

HARDOUIN: Done.

RENARDEAU: And you set this woman straight?

HARDOUIN: Ten thousand francs and all the expenses of the lawsuit— paid.

RENARDEAU: I should have been able to bring my demand whenever I pleased. The law is explicit. But ten thousand francs, that's fair. And the carrying chair?

HARDOUIN: And the carrying chair.

RENARDEAU: You indeed lost your sister?

HARDOUIN: Me, lose my sister? Who told you that story?

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RENARDEAU: By God, it was you.

HARDOUIN: My sister is full of life.

RENARDEAU: What? You said that her friend—

HARDOUIN: Fairy tales, fairy tales.

RENARDEAU: Does one tell fairy tales to an old Norman lawyer!

HARDOUIN: And one who is sometimes sharp.

RENARDEAU: You are a trickster, an outright trickster. I bet when I gave you my power of attorney, you already had the lady's power of attorney in your pocket.

HARDOUIN: So you guessed that?

RENARDEAU: Madame, join with me and let's strangle him.

MADAME BERTRAND: Twice!

RENARDEAU: Ah, if I had known. I'm losing ten thousand francs. But we will see. There's a loophole, a loophole and a half. There's a way to appeal, a way to rescind.

HARDOUIN: In favor of innocents.

(Renardeau hurls himself into another chair)

(Madame de Chepy enters)

MADAME BERTRAND: Since the gentleman gives his audiences in my home will he have the goodness to admit me, and tell me if he is really satisfied with the way he obliges his friends?

MADAME BERTRAND: Now there are three of us. If we were six, we could make a crucifixion.

HARDOUIN: Not infinitely, Madame, and that doesn't encourage one to do good. But let's come to the point. Of what does Madame de Chepy complain?

MADAME DE CHEPY: She complains that Mr. Hardouin permits her to number him amongst her friends; that she arrived ill in Paris and for six weeks, and that he hardly deigned once to inform himself of her health and that he chose precisely this time to shut himself up in the country, and to wear out body and soul. To do what? Perhaps to be a malcontent?

HARDOUIN: Perhaps two. Another and myself.

MADAME DE CHEPY: It's not Mr. Hardouin who seeks me; it's Madame de Chepy who runs after him, by means of emissaries. Finally she succeeds in unearthing him. She's installed in the home of a charming woman who esteems and loves her. She desires to show her gratitude for all her attentions with a little party. She has recourse to her old friend Mr. Hardouin, and what he has done for 20 others who are nothing to him, to others that he hardly knows, who perhaps he even scorns—that he refuses to do for Madame de Chepy. Sir, Madame, what do you think of it?

RENARDEAU: Is that all? As if he cost you 10,000 francs like me?

MADAME BERTRAND: And if he cost you your reputation, like me? I find them both amusing, the one with her play, the other with his 10,000 francs.

HARDOUIN: Very nice, Madame. But if the play were done?

MADAME DE CHEPY: Yes, yes, but if it isn't? And when will it be? When it's useless to me. At the moment nothing is prepared and my actors are lost.

HARDOUIN: That's not my fault.

MADAME DE CHEPY: And the enraged mood, and the migraine this has given me? I suppose that's mine?

HARDOUIN: I was born to do nothing that pleases me, to do everything that pleases others, and to satisfy no one. No, no one, not even myself.

MADAME BERTRAND: Because it's not that he doesn't act to help, but helping his own way, under pain of being greatly tormented so as to beget only ingrates.

RENARDEAU: That's well said.

MADAME DE CHEPY: Nothing could be truer!

(Miss Beaulieu enters, holding her part in her hand)

HARDOUIN: I bet that we have another malcontent coming.

MISS BEAULIEU: Could you tell me who is the impertinent who wrote this?

(Surmont enters)

HARDOUIN: There he is.

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SURMONT: It's finished. I am bringing it to you. It's gay, it's crazy and for one of these society skits I hope it's not bad. Here are our actors apparently. I find them devilishly sad. Gentleman, Ladies, if I have made you wait, I ask you a thousand pardons.

HARDOUIN: Will you shut up? Wasn't this to be a well kept inognito?

SURMONT: My word, I no longer think so. Gentlemen, Ladies. I worked without a break, it was impossible for me to work any faster. Still this trifle was a sketch in my portfolio. They copied the parts as fast as I wrote them. (to the Widow) Madame, here's yours. Here's yours, it will suit you marvelously, and you are in the costume I would have wanted. You are a young and pretty widow who pretends sadness for the loss of an executed husband that she didn't love—

MADAME BERTRAND: And, you, you are a— Leave me alone!

SURMONT: (to Renardeau) You, sir, are an old attorney—

RENARDEAU: Norman. Ridiculous and duped.

SURMONT: Exactly, exactly. I didn't think of making you a Norman. But it's a happy idea and I will use it.

RENARDEAU: Sir, couldn't you spare me playing the same role twice in one day? For I find once is too much.

SURMONT: (to Miss Beaulieu) Ah, Miss, I hope you are pleased by your part. For I made you tricky, silent, discreet, as you are.

MISS BEAULIEU: But you didn't need to forget that I was honest and decent!

SURMONT: (to Hardouin) Speak, friend. Did I kill myself to make a play they won't perform?

HARDOUIN: I'm afraid so.

SURMONT: This is horrible, abominable.

HARDOUIN: Perhaps it is bad.

SURMONT: Good or bad it's done. It must be played or I will print it under your name.

HARDOUIN: That would be a bloody trick.

RENARDEAU: Doesn't this make a nice muddle? There are five of us here and not one he's not embroiled with.

(A lackey enters and presents a letter to Mr. Hardouin. He reads it and tears it up angrily.)

MADAME DE CHEPY: I bet it's from Madame Severin and that my prophecy has come true, I am enchanted.

RENARDEAU: And my carrying chair?

HARDOUIN: You shall have it; but on condition that the attorney from Gisors sits in this big armchair and judges us all.

RENARDEAU: I consent. Miss, I appoint you the she-Bailiff. Call the parties.

MISS BEAULIEU: Madame, come forward. What are your injuries? Of what do you complain?

MADAME BERTRAND: Of that gentleman there who proclaimed himself the father of my child!

RENARDEAU: Is he?

MADAME BERTRAND: No. And by this means and under this usurped title, he solicited a pension for this child.

RENARDEAU: Did he obtain it?

MADAME BERTRAND: Yes.

RENARDEAU: We condemn the aforesaid lady to return it in the same manner.

MISS BEAULIEU: (to Madame de Chepy) Your turn, Madame

RENARDEAU: I know the story. Sent back to back, except to return in time and place. You, Sir, you created a play that will not be performed. We condemn the one who requested it to an indemnity of six crowns. applicable to the cabalists of the theatre of the Comedy Francaise without counting the salary of the head of the clappers at the first performance of the one you create and that is performed. At this time it's necessary that I be judge and party. We pardon defendant Hardouin on the condition of putting us in possession of a certain carrying chair within a week, and we condemn him within two months to retire to Gisors, to do nothing there or to do whatever seems good to him.

MISS BEAULIEU: And me, then Your Honor? Will there be no stain on my alarmed modesty from the reading of a villainous part?

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RENARDEAU: We condemn the defendant Surmont, indecent poet, to behave in the future. And for the present to take Miss's hand without shaking it and to present her to the friend of her mistress so as to obtain some mercy if he expects to obtain any.

ALL: Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!

MISS BEAULIEU: (at the same time) Peace! Peace! Peace!

(Little children are hidden in the wings)

SURMONT: Come, Miss, the Judge has spoken. We must obey justice.

MISS BEAULIEU: No, sir, no, sir. I don't trust you. You are going to utter some indecencies that will make me blush and will hurt Madame de Malves who doesn't like that fashion.

SURMONT: Fear nothing. Are your children there?

MISS BEAULIEU: Yes.

(Madame de Malves appears.)

SURMONT: Madame, you are always good and we thought you would be more so today. I've undertaken to inform you of news and to ask two graces of you. The first of the news is to obtain pardon for Miss for hiding from her mistress that she was not married.

MISS BEAULIEU: But, sir, I am not any more.

SURMONT: You say she must marry the father. Right. If there were only one. But these young ladies place themselves in the fashion. Each one of our children has its father. No more fathers than children. Neither more nor less. The other grace is to present these children to you. Although your whole life may be a party for your friends, it doesn't often happen that an honest girl leads in her suite a troop of children. Permit ours to enter. Miss, have you blushed enough without knowing why? Bring in your little ones, Madame consents.

(Enter little children with bouquets)

MISS BEAULIEU: Madame, allow innocents to offer you—

SURMONT: —the homage of malice.

MISS BEAULIEU: Haven't you embroiled me to the point I don't know where I am?

SURMONT: I would not have suspected you of losing your head so easily. Come, little ones, present your bouquets. (as the children offer bouquets, low to Miss Beaulieu) Miss, amongst these children, isn't there one you love better than the others? Show him to me so I can kiss him.

(The children begin to sing couplets. Poultier enters. Madame Bertrand interrupts the singing.)

MADAME BERTRAND: It's Mr. Poultier? It's him. Sir, I am an honest woman. But for my sad affair, I would never have seen your perfidious friend. I didn't know him until today. Don't believe anything he has told you.

RENARDEAU: (low) So much the worse for her.

POULTIER: (to Hardouin) And that child? Speak up! That child?

MADAME BERTRAND: The cruel man! Will he speak?

HARDOUIN: The child? He's charming, but in conscience, I must restore him to Captain Bertrand.

POULTIER: The traitor! How I have been duped.

MADAME BERTRAND: And with me, when you held my child on your knees!

POULTIER: Very ridiculous. Who is it wouldn't have given it? He had tears in his eyes. No more trust in one who knows how to feign with such verisimilitude.

HARDOUIN: Mr. Lawyer from Gisors, defend me.

RENARDEAU: You should have seen his hypocritical face, you should have heard his pathetic speech, when he was afflicted by the death of his sister!

MADAME BERTRAND: (to Poultier) Here I am vindicated in your mind, But the Minister? But his wife?

HARDOUIN: (to Madame Bertrand) And you believe in this confidence?

POULTIER: Why not?

HARDOUIN: Because you didn't.

POULTIER: The rogue. The worthless scoundrel. I thought I was amusing myself with him and it is he who was making fun of me!

MADAME DE CHEPY: Is he good? Is he bad?

MISS BEAULIEU: Each in turn.

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HARDOUIN: Like the whole world.

MADAME BERTRAND: (to Poultier) And I have nothing to blush for?

POULTIER: No, no, Madame. But I came to share your joy and I fear to have troubled it.

SURMONT: We were singing a few couplets in honor of Madame de Malves. And we are going to repeat them.

(They repeat the verses and the play ends)

CURTAIN