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by Jean-Francois Regnard, translated by Frank J. Morlock
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THE FOLLIES OF LOVE

BY JEAN-FRANCOIS REGARD

Translated and Adapted by

Frank J. Morlock
C 1987

CHARACTERS:

Albert
Worthy
Arabella
Jenny
Scratch

ACT I.

Scene: Outside a country house at the end of the 17th century. Dawn.

(Jenny enters following Arabella.)

Jenny

Why, when every one else is sleeping, what demon, if you please, tugs you by the ear and makes you go up and out so early?

Arabella

Peace, shut up, speak low--you know my plan. Worthy has come back.

Jenny

Worthy?

Arabella (romantically)

>From France!

Jenny

How do you know that, Madame, I beg to ask?

Arabella

I believed he'd make an appearance hereabouts--more with my heart than my eyes.

Jenny

I am only astonished that you've avoided the watchful Uncle Albert. My word, here is a guide more excellent than love.

Arabella

I was at my window waiting for the day. Then, someone came. Seeing the door open, I seized the opportunity offered by the occasion--more to take the air than to flatter my hopes that Mr. Worthy would be attracted here just to see me.

Jenny

There's no need for you to worry. It's understandable that the poor boy would fall all over himself to see you. He comes tonight, and at daybreak, you wait for him--just to flatter his love. You lose little time. But, what, if by chance, Albert, your tutor, who is jealous by nature, should find us? What would you say to him?

Arabella (with determination)

I intend to free myself from the jealous fool. I have languished too long under his cruel domain. I'm taking off the mask, so he can see how little regard I have for him, and how I intend to live from now on--and how much I hate him!

Jenny

May heaven assist you in this praiseworthy plan! As for me, I'd rather serve the devil--yes, the devil. At least when he held his Sabbath, I would have some rest. But, in my state, evening, morning, day or night--I have no peace. I'll have a breakdown soon. He scolds and grinds his teeth the live long day. "Do this, do that, come, go, go upstairs, go downstairs--close the door and window. Prevent, if you can, anyone from appearing." He stops, he worries, he runs around without knowing where. All night he prowls like a frenzied wolf. He doesn't permit us to close our eyes. As for him, when he sleeps, one eye's shut, the other's watching. He never laughed in his life. He's jealous, stupid, brutal to the extreme, miserly, hard, peevish. I'd prefer to beg for my bread, from door to door, than to serve a master like this any longer. In short, I don't like him.

Arabella

Henceforth, Jenny, all our troubles are over. How my Worthy differs from the portrait you paint. From my most tender years, nursed by his own mother, our hearts were leagued in sympathy. And love grew by the most charming means, finally united again by mutual oaths. Although

suffering from this frightful constraint for some time, which annoys and overwhelms me, I am a woman who will take violent action! Dressed like a man--a knight errant, I will free myself from Albert and his harsh tyranny. I am going to run away and seek adventures.

Jenny

Oh, there are adventures enough to be found without going so far away. I can warn you that you will find enough of them.

Arabella

You don't know my character yet. When one puts a yoke on my contrary disposition, constraint only wakens my desires. I have lived in the world in the midst of pleasure. Presently, Worthy is ready to marry me. Many wild ideas pass through my head. I have the heart, the wit, the sense,--the right! In short, you will soon see the little traits of my character. But, why is the door open?

Jenny

Fie. Your old Cereberus is on the prowl. What will he ask? He prowls everywhere. He stands sentinel all night--and at daybreak he goes scouting. If, by good luck, he could be trapped into some ambush--a little spoke put in his wheel, with some compromising story--and blackmailed-- But, peace, I hear a noise: someone's coming--let's listen.

(Arabella and Jenny draw back as Albert enters.)

Albert

I've circled the house, all night long, and found everybody asleep. This will foil the efforts of my enemies. I've even patrolled outside. Thank heaven, everything is all right. A secret terror disquiets me, despite my efforts. I've seen a certain inquisitive person prowling around here, from a distance, who seems to me to be examining the place. For nearly six months, my cowardly complacency has endangered my prudent action, and to let Arabella breathe easily disquiets my soul, so I must shut her up. You don't make girls wise by softness. I am going to bar the windows--with bars as big as my hand--to foil all human efforts. But, I hear some noise! I see an object which walks and turns about in the half light. Who goes there? . . . Nobody answers. This affected silence bodes no good.

Jenny

I tremble.

Albert

It's Jenny. Arabella is with her.

Arabella

So, it's you, sir, playing sentinel?

Albert

Yes, yes, it's me, it's me. But at this time of day, what are you doing in this place, if you please?

Arabella

Neither Jenny nor I sleep in the morning, so we came here to be under the trees and to see the sun rise and take the air.

Jenny (trying to be helpful)

Yes.

Albert

You are to watch the dawn and take the air from your window. You are conspiring here to betray me.

Jenny (aside)

That wouldn't be a bad idea!

Albert

What do you say?

Jenny

Not a word.

Albert

Prudent, circumspect girls who are not up to some intrigue sleep tranquilly in their bed--and don't take the air so early--be it hot or cold.

Jenny

And how, if you please, do you expect us to rest when all night one hears nothing but coming, going, opening, closing, crying, tossing, scratching, running, sneezing, coughing? When, by great luck, I fall asleep--a frightful jangling of keys starts me awake. I try to go back to sleep, but cannot. A Wandering Jew who does evil with the greatest pleasure, a mischievous imp vomited by hell to earth, to make an eternal war with sleeping men begins his uproar and annoys us all.

Albert

And what is this imp and Wandering Jew?

Jenny

You.

Albert

Me?

Jenny

Yes, you. I believe that these rude manners come from some spirit who is in need of prayers. And to better understand whether this angry thing was soul or body, that made this Sabbath, one evening, I took a cord with two ends firmly attached upstairs. It had the effect I hoped. So soon as all were retired to sleep, I waited in person without noise or light, on guard in a corner. I wasn't long waiting. So pity-pat down the spirit came, noisily tumbling over the cord. He measured the stairs with his nose. Suddenly, I heard him cry: "Help, I

am dead." As these cries increased--at which I laughed very much--I ran and found you spread out--with an apostrophe in place of your face. Your nose gave proof that you were a body and not a spirit.

Albert

Ah, miserable scoundrel, adherent of the devil! It was you who played that abominable trick. You wished to kill me with this cursed act!

Jenny (innocently)

No, it was only to trap the ghost.

Albert

I don't know what prevents me from beating you up!

Arabella

Sir, easy.

Albert

You, too, my pretty, could earn some slaps. Shut up, if you please. To punish her audacity, I will drive her from my house. How do you like that?

Jenny (crying)

Just heaven, what a sentence. Sir--

Albert (adamant)

No, out of the nest, if you please.

Jenny (laughing)

Ah, my word, sir, you flatter yourself if you think that leaving your sad company will make me suffer the least pang. A school boy leaving his tutor, a woman a long time celibate who leaves her relatives to get married--a slave who leaves the hands of his masters, an old prisoner who breaks his chains after thirty years, an heir who sees his uncle give up the ghost, a husband when the plague takes his plaguey wife--doesn't have half the pleasure I take in receiving from you this happy discharge.

Albert

Leaving me would please you?

Jenny

The greatest pleasure I will have in my life.

Albert

Really! If that is so, I've changed my mind. I do not intend to give you this pleasure. You will stay here to do penance. And you will, without arguing, go in, and be diligent.

(Arabella reenters and curtsies. As Jenny starts to go, Albert stops her.)

Albert

You stay--I wish to speak to you without witnesses. (aside) I'll have to butter her up--I need her services. (aloud) Come on--let's make peace and live sensibly. At bottom I love you--and more than you think.

Jenny

And I also love you more than you think.

Albert

A pretty amour, truly to break my nose. But, I pardon all, and promise you that you will enjoy my bounty--if you serve me on occasion.

Jenny

Let's see. What service is in question?

Albert

You've known for a long time, that as regards Arabella, I have, as one ought, a soul a--bit tender. But for the precautions I take for her the wench would soon take the bit in her teeth. She's always spent her life in high society with the lady from London--Mrs. Worthy--who took care of her until she was fifteen. That lady, having died, a relation begged me to take care of her, and confided her to me. Since then love has stolen into my heart. I have a plan to make her my wife.

Jenny

Your wife! Fie!

Albert

What do you mean by that tone?

Jenny

Fie, I tell you.

Albert

What?

Jenny

Hey, fie! Fie--I tell you. You are too intelligent to commit such a stupidity--and I tell you to your grey beard.

Albert

I never had children by my late wife--and I wish to finish what I've begun--to have heirs whose happy birth will ruin the hopes of all my collaterals.

Jenny

My word, sir, make as many as you please. You won't have any posterity left behind, and it is I who tell you so.

Albert

And why is that?

Jenny

How do I know?

Albert

Who has given you the privilege of soothsaying? Say, speak, respond!

Jenny

My God--I said nothing except what's reasonable, and you know it! I understand myself and that's sufficient.

Albert

Don't trouble yourself. It's my business--and none of yours!

Jenny

Ah, you're right.

Albert

Look, you know that around here, one cannot take a step without falling into some ambush. The snares that surround my soul alarm me. I have a prize ewe lamb surrounded by care--but the ravishing wolves are prowling in hopes of carrying her off. I must protect her from their cruel fangs--and so as not to fear their cruel fury, I intend to close all parts of the sheep pen, to carefully surround my house with iron bars, and to let in only a few people--and that by day. I have need of your help at this juncture, so that the fencing will go as I intend.

Jenny

Who, me?

Albert

I don't wish this invention to appear to be the result of my precaution. Arabella would be alarmed--with reason, to see my care result in her being locked in--that might cause her to become cold to me. But, with clever girls, one must gild the pill adroitly, and make her understand that all that is being done is only to protect her--and that last night a number of bandits got into a nearby house and left only the walls standing.

Jenny

But, sir, do you think with this trick--and many others of the same type that you employ--do you believe that you will make her love you?

Albert

That's not your worry; suffice that I wish it.

Jenny

Go on, at your age, to wish to taste of marriage a second time. Crazier still, to be amorous of a fifteen year old, and yet crazier to plan to cage her up. I count three extravagances in this plan--likely to be funereal in its consequence--and the least of them leads straight to Bedlam.

Albert

I have excellent reasons for my conduct.

Jenny

Thanks to the effects of celestial bounty, I have my virtue intact. But, if I had a husband or a lover of your mind, they'd have horns all over their heads, by God! If you choose me to take on this trouble, I tell you plainly, your hope is vain. I don't intend to meddle in your cowardly plans. The case is too villainous, and I wash my hands of it.

Albert

Do you know that after having employed persuasion, I also know how to employ intimidation?

Jenny

Storm, swear, howl--go into a fit, you will only hear me repeat again, that a jealous man is a frightful thing--a thing one would cheerfully see buried a hundred feet underground. There is nothing more hideous--not Satan, Lucifer, and the many other gentleman-inhabitants of hell. They are much more handsome, charming, love-killers--less cruel and less insupportable--than certain jealous creatures such as one sees about here. You understand me--I have spoken and I will retire. Goodbye.

(Exit Jenny.)

Albert

All the world is busy here plotting to betray me. One would conclude they have no greater joy. Jenny's worth nothing, but from fear of worse, I'll keep her. I will not let what people say, or their criticism prevent me from accomplishing the plan my heart is bent on realizing.

(Enter Scratch.)

Scratch (aside)

My master, Mr. Worthy, who is waiting for me at the nearby inn, has sent me on before to sound the terrain. (seeing Albert) There, I take it, is our man. I must dissemble.

Albert

What are you doing here, by yourself and before my door?

Scratch

Good day, sir.

Albert (sourly)

Good day.

Scratch

I--are you well?

Albert (grumpily)

Yes.

Scratch

Truly, that rejoices my heart.

Albert

Rejoice or not rejoice--what brings you here? And who are you?

Scratch

I would find it hard to say. I have so many jobs that I might call myself a universal man. I have wandered the universe; the world is my country. From lack of income, I lived by industry--as many others do. According to the circumstances, sometimes an honest man, sometimes a confidence man. I served unwillingly in the Navy--and realizing my heart inclined to rapine after having spent eighteen months privateering. I carried a musket in Flanders and Germany; I was wounded in the wars with France.

Albert

There are some fine jobs. (aside) From tip to toe, this fellow seems to me to have the air of a rogue. (aloud) What are you doing here? Speak!

Scratch

I will retire.

Albert (holding him)

No, no, you must speak.

Scratch (aside)

I don't know what to say to him.

Albert

You seem to me to have the air of one of those rogues who prowl around to rob houses at night.

Scratch

You don't know me, sir. I have other things on my mind. While Fortune prevents me from having wealth, it has given me marvelous secrets for curing ills. I amuse myself by seeking medicinal herbs around here.

Albert (surprised)

Medicinal herbs?

Scratch

Yes, sir. All my life, I've made a profession of chemistry. As sure as you see me, there are no diseases I cannot cure--stone, coughs, vertigo, hysteria, heart disease, cancer. I've even been accused of using magic. The only thing I lack is a degree to make me the happiest physician living.

Albert

Your clothes are not those of a physician.

Scratch

Clothes don't make the science. And if I were not reduced to be a valet, and if I had not had a fight with the squire of my parish-- (mysteriously) But, one day you will see innocence triumph.

Albert

You say you have--?

Scratch

See the slander! One day, finding myself on a long journey, traveling third class, and twilight falling--I saw a certain coach stuck in the mud in a ditch, and a man in need of help. So I approached. And, to ease the weight which oppressed him (the coach was on top of him), I removed the packages he was carrying. The chief of police got mixed up in it, and held me responsible for the lost packages--for an act of charity! That's why my friends advised me to leave the country.

Albert

Always prudent, in cases like that.

Scratch

I went to the wars, where I accomplished miracles. The Ardennes saw me withstand enemy fire. And, battling one day against the enemy, one day all by myself--at Milan--I almost paid with my life. Do you know, sir, I was in Cremona?

Albert

I believe you. But, after all your famous exploits, what do you want from me?

Scratch

What do I want?

Albert (peremptorily)

Yes.

Scratch

Nothing. I believe one doesn't have to have any special reason to take a walk, and doing so offends nobody.

Albert

Yes, but don't stay too long. Your servant, sir.

Scratch

Servant! Before leaving, tell me, if you please, sire, to whom does this country house belong?

Albert

It belongs to its owner.

Scratch

Oh, to be sure. You answer so cleverly, that one cannot abandon your conversation easily. We ought to go to the village together to find a place to stay. We'll be there soon.

Albert

If you hurry.

Scratch (aside)

This chap doesn't like conversation and answers my questions with a single word. (aloud) I will leave after asking the time.

Albert

Your question is funny. You think I'm here like the dial on a clock to display the time to passersby. Go learn it elsewhere. Don't weigh down my ear any longer. Your appearance tires me as much as your conversation. Goodbye. Good day!

(Exit Albert.)

Scratch (alone)

This fellow has quite the aspect of a bear. My word, this beginning bewilders me. The old man appears to me to be a bit subject to anger. To bring everything to fruition we may have to fight. So much the better--that's where I shine, and I love to fence. But, I see my master, Mr. Worthy.

(Enter Worthy.)

Worthy

Well, Scratch, what news? Dear Scratch, did you see the beauty in these parts? Have you seen the tutor and do you see some ray of hope for my love someday?

Scratch

To tell you the truth, it wasn't worth the trouble to race here breathlessly from Milan. You could have spared me the trouble of coming. Oh, that battle on Mount Cenis was no joke. Do you remember how maliciously my cursed mule threw me in a ravine, and I was almost a quarter of an hour rolling to the bottom?

Worthy

Don't jest. Speak in a different way.

Scratch

As you wish, a clearer phrase. I will tell you, sir, that I have seen the jealous one--who received me in a manner that makes a cold wind seem mild. We'll need a cannon to take the place.

Worthy

We'll come in the end to what he said and what he did. I won't leave these parts until I am in possession of the object of my vows. Love will vanquish the resistance of this brute.

Scratch

If we had some money for expenses, I'd have hope enough for success. Money is the sinew of love as well as war.

Worthy

Don't worry. Arabella has thirty thousand crowns when she marries. If she had nothing, I would still love her a hundred times better than a rich girl with money enough to turn your head. From her earliest years, raised by my mother, her image has been graven in my heart and nothing can efface it. Our two hearts, which seem made for each other, first tasted this happy news just before my mother died. Because of this disaster, Albert, this old jealous fool that hell should confound--separated her from me, with the consent of Arabella's relatives. I didn't know him, and she, I believe, like me, had never heard of his name. People told me that he was a very troubled spirit--defiant, hard, brutal.

Scratch

They told you right. We must learn, first off, if we can introduce ourselves into this fortress by cleverness or must use force--whether it is better to make an open siege or form plans for a blockade.

Worthy

You always employ military terms. You've been to the wars.

Scratch

In all affairs, the mind must always be used before resorting to brute force. Today's not the first time I've seen combat. I deserted twice from the militia. When one intends, you see, for a siege to succeed, one must prevent anything from entering, know the surroundings, learn its weaknesses and its strengths. When one is well informed about what's happening, one digs a trench, bombards the place, overthrows a rampart--makes a breach--advances in good order--and gives the assault. One strangles, massacres, kills, steals, and pillages. It's almost the same when one takes a young woman. Right, sir?

Worthy

In this matter, Jenny, the maid, is in our interests.

Scratch

So much the better. The more intelligence one has of the city, the more hope one has of success. One must take it noiselessly--without drums. All night help comes. Make her signals, so she'll understand.

Worthy

Come, let's discover ways to take it. And, so as not to arouse suspicions, let's avoid remaining around here too long.

Scratch

As chief engineer and master of artillery, I am going to see where I ought to place my batteries--to punch a hole in Albert and oblige him to surrender the place quickly or withstand our assault.

CURTAIN

ACT II.

Scene: Same as Act I, later that day.

Albert (alone)

A secret confided--said an excellent man who's name and country, I am ignorant of--is the thing which ought to be most carefully watched--and in these times, the most difficult to protect. Now, while I don't wish to argue with this facile philosopher, guarding a young girl is much more difficult. I made the locksmith enter through the garden--he must be promptly employed in my plan. I intend to make Arabella and Jenny go out--from fear this would move their hearts and overwhelm them. I've got to call them, so that the workman can act at leisure. When I've satisfied my prudence in this matter--they will have to resolve to be patient. Hola! Someone! Come under these thick trees and take the air with me for several minutes.

(Enter Jenny and Arabella.)

Jenny

Here's unseasonable fruit. What favorable demon causes you to greet her so softly and your humor to be so tractable? By your astonishing command, we can go out today for the first time in six months.

Albert

We have to change places sometimes. Sometimes, in life, the most charming resort bores us.

Arabella

If I'm with you, regardless of the climate, the air will be no softer or better for me. I don't know why, but now I sigh when I am near you; I cannot breathe.

Albert

My heart swoons with pleasure at such talk. You need a husband to calm these sighs.

Arabella

Girls dissimulate often enough, and pretend to scruples at the name of a husband, masking their true desires, often saying they love no one except the convent. As for me, the power of truth presses me and I can find in it neither crime nor weakness. I have a sincere heart, and I tell you, without pretence, that I want to be married, and sooner than later.

Jenny

Well said. What's the use, in the spring of youth, to wish to escape the yoke of marriage, and to leave the number of the living? There were husbands long before convents, and I hold the role of spouse is

the most ancient, and the most currently fashionable and used--and the most to be followed in all methods. That's what I say!

Albert

You both speak in the same spirit--and my views conform to yours. I intend to marry. Rich as I am--they're always proposing a suitable and advantageous match for me--but I always reply that another love holds me, and that my heart prepossessed by your rare beauty sighs for you alone, and that on your side, you adore only me.

Arabella

How's that?

Albert

Yes, sweetly, I have declared the love which possesses me for you.

Arabella

What did you say, if you please?

Albert

That, at the bottom of your heart, you nourish a sincere passion for me.

Arabella

Where's your discretion, truly?

Albert

Beautiful Arabella, one cannot be happy and remain silent.

Arabella

You ought not to make such an avowal, and so loud.

Albert

And why not, my child?

Arabella (waspishly)

Because nothing is more false, and one cannot lie with more impudence.

Albert

Then, you don't love me?

Arabella (sweetly)

No, but in recompense, I hate you unto death.

Albert (surprised)

For what?

Arabella

Who knows why? One loves without reason, and without reason, one hates.

Jenny

If the admission is not tender, at least it is sincere.

Albert

After what I have done, basilisk, to please you!

Jenny

Don't get carried away! Observe tranquilly if love has made you a charming object. Your features are worn away--hers are loveable and fresh. She has a well made wit and you a crabbed temper. She's not sixteen, and you are very old. She bears herself well, and you walk with a cane. She has all her teeth, which makes her pretty, and you have only one. Still, she excites you--and you ought to be carried off at the first cough to whatever misfortune down there would please you.

Albert

I've taken useless trouble to please her. I will therefore merit her hate, by God. And to secure her dangerous charms, I am going to lead her to a place far from fops, where by her arrogance, she will have leisure to be penitent. Come quickly, let's go.

Arabella

Where are you going?

Albert

You will know soon enough. March on--no talking. (perceiving Worthy, who has just entered) What an irritating turn of events at this time. To the devil with him and his stupid face.

(Worthy, who was entering like someone out for a stroll, sees Albert and greets him. Scratch enters behind Worthy.)

Albert

Sir, do you wish something from me?

Jenny (low, to Arabella)

It's Worthy.

Arabella (low)

Peace! I see him more clearly than you.

(Worthy continues to bow to Albert.)

Albert

Sir, what's the use of these fine manners? Speak, I am tired of bowing and scraping.

Worthy

A stranger in these parts, and pleased to see you. In paying you my respects, I fulfill my duty. My coach is broken down near your mansion, and after having done my best to repair it, I came to breathe the delicious air--attracted by the--freshness.

Albert

You deceive yourself, sir. The air around here is decidedly bad for

your health. I owe it to myself to tell you that you will become very ill if you stay here for a long time. It is dangerous and mortal to wayfarers.

Arabella

Alas, nothing is more true. Since I've breathed this air, I languish night and day in a cruel martyrdom.

Scratch

Just give me the same wine as our innkeeper broke open today, and I will stand my ground defying fever, apoplexy, and a hundred years of age to the end of my life.

Worthy (to Arabella)

It's hard to believe that with so much beauty, and such air, that you're not healthy.

Albert

Whether she looks well or ill, find another place to take the air.

Worthy

This object--that heaven has taken care in making--this view where my eye is pleased to rest, enchants my sight--and never has nature displayed her attentions with so much finery. My heart is in love with what it sees here.

Albert

Yes, the country is beautiful. Everybody says so, but you'll spend the end of your day better elsewhere. By now, your coach must be fixed. There's no need for your presence here. Leave, you ought to be gone already.

Worthy

I will leave momentarily. Tell me, I beg you--

Albert

Since you chatter so emotionally, I am going to listen to you attentively. (to Jenny and Arabella) Go in, go in.

Jenny

Sir--

Albert

Eh! Go in, I tell you.

Worthy

I'd rather retire than be the cause of Madame suffering the least inconvenience on my account.

Arabella

No, sir, stay till tomorrow. Postpone going on your way, and we will put you in good company. The roads are unlucky and filthy.

Albert

So much ceremony! Come, quickly--go in.

Jenny

Yes, yes, I'm going in. But, before these gentlemen, I tell you plainly to stop the humiliations you impose on us. We haven't seen even the shadow of a hat for six months in this new fangled cloister. Any man who comes around here is interdicted. Everything in this house is subject to inspection. Sometimes we think the world has come to an end. No one comes her except they be of the female sex. Judge if a girl in this situation has cause to complain.

Albert (putting his hand over her mouth and forcing her inside)

Ah, I will tear out your viper's tongue.

(Exit Jenny and Arabella.)

Albert (aside)

I don't want to go back in so soon. Their complaints and their tears might move me, perhaps. (aloud) What's the problem? Speak! But, above all, be brief.

Worthy

I am truly annoyed that, on account of me, your daughter has received such unworthy treatment.

Albert

What do you mean, my daughter?

Worthy

Is she your wife then?

Albert

She soon will be.

Worthy

My soul is ravished. You couldn't form a better plan. And you do well to get that viper in hand. All husbands ought to do as you do. Women today are such coquettes.

Albert

I intend to rule the roost, and not follow the manners of these times.

Scratch

Oh, may you do better! I am so crazy about women and I am delighted when good souls make use of a little authority from time to time.

Albert (aside)

This boy pleases me; he speaks sensibly.

Worthy

As for me, I see nothing blamable. For a man, without ever being bothered by suspicions, to be lulled by the promise of a woman, to

count tranquilly on her frail virtue--believing that God has made a woman faithful--for him alone--is to be a fool. It's necessary to be watchful at all times. When she scolds, cry louder still--and despite all the precautions which love causes a man to take--the more refined he is--the bigger the dupe.

Albert

We are a little devious about these matters--which could easily trap me. Each day I invent some crafty way of defeating their trickery and finesse. My word, you'd be wasting your time. Gentlemen, the defenders of women, debonair husbands, soft courtiers, powdered blondes--and all those who are searching the town for a woman whose husband gives them easy access--tell everybody I'm a brute, a jealous husband. In the depth of my heart, I laugh at them.

Worthy

Because you are jealous, does that mean you are prevented from having a tender and sensitive heart? Without being a little jealous one cannot be a lover. They say a jealous man who quarrels without cease is more a tyrant than a lover to a beautiful woman. Ceaselessly, agitated by fury or boredom, he takes pleasure in the malady of another. Insupportable to all, odious to himself, everybody to deceive him pretends to be extremely pleased, but wishes that it was permitted to smother him like a raging monster escaped from hell.--That's the way one ordinarily speaks in the world. But, for me, I take the contrary position, and say that it's a gallant man who shows so much love through his jealous transports and sees himself come to life when yielding to his penchant. In life, one spices up love with a little jealousy.

Albert

Decidedly, you charm me with your wit, sir. I wish it were all written down to explain to sots who blame my manner.

Scratch

Let us go in, sir. There, to satisfy you, I will write it all down without charge.

Albert (stopping him)

I am much obliged to you--I will remember it well. I believe you have nothing more to say to me. There's your road, sir, good day. I retire. May heaven maintain you in these fine sentiments and not leave you in these parts for very long.

(Enter Jenny.)

Jenny

Help, neighbors! What a terrible accident. What a sad adventure. Ah, heaven, is it possible? The poor Squire Albert--what will become of you? The blow is mortal. I cannot recall it.

Albert

What's happened?

Jenny

The most terrible disgrace.

Albert

But still, it's better to know what has happened.

Jenny

Arabella--

Worthy

Well, Arabella--?

Jenny

In this instant--quite suddenly--Arabella has gone mad.

Albert

Arabella is crazy?

Worthy

Ah, heaven.

Albert

This is unbelievable.

Jenny

Ah, sir, this misfortune is only too true. When, by your express order, she had vowed to knit, this cursed locksmith came to irritate us. So she vowed that these bars and grills to which the locksmith condemns the window-- At the same time, I swear her eyes rolled and her suddenly stricken spirit evaporated. She talks extravagantly. She runs, she creeps, she sings, she dances--she dresses, then she changes her clothes suddenly--with whatever happens to be at hand, just now, from your wardrobe, she took your large robe and skull-cap. Then, taking her guitar, she sings different tunes in strange jargon. In fact, she's a hundred times worse than I was able to explain. One can't help crying--and laughing, too.

Worthy

What do I hear? Just heaven.

Albert

What a deadly misfortune.

Jenny (to Albert, accusingly)

You are the sole author of this sad misfortune. That's what comes of shutting a wench up.

Albert

Cursed precaution and unfortunate bars.

Jenny

I intended to shut her in her chamber for a moment. It caused howlings

hard to describe. She battered the wall with her head from rage. I said to open everything. No one can stop her. But, I see her coming. Alas, she changes her manner and dress every moment.

(Enter Arabella, dressed as Scaramouche with a guitar.)

Arabella (singing)

All night long,
A mean old tomcat
Sits watching me on the sly.
Oh, he's crazy.
Couldn't he just
Be made to break his neck?

Worthy

In spite of her illness, Scratch--what a--!

Scratch

I love her more this way than another who is quite sane.

Arabella (singing)

Couldn't he just
Be made to break his neck?

(speaking) You're in the same line of work? Musicians, listen: I am as you, a musician. Vain, very spoiled--but I work for very little money. A child of do, re, me, fa,--and so on. I'm irritated. From one part of the world to the other, they speak of my talent. In a certain duo which I find excellent--'cause it's mine. I wish you'd both tell me frankly what you think of it.

Albert (alarmed)

Ah, my dear Jenny! She's lost her reason.

Jenny

Who knows better than I? Didn't I tell you so, didn't I tell you that?

(Arabella sings a little prelude.)

Scratch

I like that, sir. Her madness is a little racy.

Albert (concerned)

Her eyes are troubled, and her face is haggard.

Arabella (presenting her hand to Albert, then roughly pulling it away, while letting Worthy kiss the other)

I love artists! Touch it! Touch it! The tune you will hear is in A minor. It's my favorite. Music is lively, bizarre, petulant, and very enjoyable. The movement is light, new, quick and forceful. It sent me looking, a few days ago to soothe the melancholy humor of a man confined to bed with paralysis for whom I sang a certain dance. Three wise doctors came to his house, the nurse, the patient, and an old apothecary who came to exercise his grave ministry without respect for

his profession took me by the hand and danced till dawn.

Scratch (having conceived the idea for Worthy to grab Arabella's hand and dance off with her)

Behold a faculty to dance in the round and exit this street all in step. That'd be nice, sir.

Worthy

What, wretch, you can laugh, seeing her in this frightful disorder?

Arabella

Wait, soft--my musical demon disturbs me, seizes me; I dithyramb. The hairs on my head stand up in horror. Don't bother the God that puts me in this fury. I feel that my excitement will reveal itself in tones. (tossing about and spitting in Albert's face) Pouah! I had a deity in my throat, or rather in the duo which is in question. You will see excitement best--and passion. I succeed better in the one and the other. Here's your part--and you, yours. (giving a paper with music to Albert and a letter to Worthy, then tosses about and prepares to sing)

Scratch

Let's stand back a bit. I'm afraid of the gods.

Jenny

We'll soon be having a fine chivaree.

Albert

Arabella, my child, your error is extreme. I am Squire Albert, who cherishes you, who loves you--

Arabella

My God, you're going to sing!

Albert

Oh, very well. I will sing, and if it's your wish, I will dance, too.

Worthy (opening his paper)

A letter, Scratch.

Scratch

Ah heaven, what an adventure. The music maestro learns the scale.

Arabella

There, mark your time--to take part, you start there. Quickly, come on--one, two, three. (beating time on Albert's head and stamping her feet angrily) Go, go, barbaric musician. Ignorant by nature. Leave off baaing. What raucous frog in the midst of his weedy pond gave you your first singing lesson? Do you give a concert or are you braying or croaking?

Albert

I told you already, with no intent to annoy, I do not have the honor to be a musician.

Arabella

Why then, stupid know-nothing, do you come to interrupt a concert when your very presence causes a bad turn of events and discord? Did one ever see a donkey try to play clarinet and mix his songs with those of the tender nightingale? Never did a black crow of ill omen trouble the strains of an agreeable warbler--and never in the woods did a sinister owl sing in concert. You are nothing but a sot and never will be anything else in your whole life.

Scratch

My master will sing his part nicely. I am his guarantee.

Arabella

>From this night forth, he must demonstrate his knowledge in a serenade. He must make song, quick, lively, and tender--which will carry me off!

Jenny (to Scratch)

Do you understand?

Scratch

I begin to understand. It's what they call a fugue.

Arabella

Right.

Scratch

A fugue--in music is a powerful morsel which costs a lot. (aside) We don't have much--

Arabella

We will take care of that. Let nothing else concern you.

Worthy

You will see I am a good performer. And I know how to sing like an open book.

Arabella (leaving, singing)

An old tomcat--

Albert

Jenny, follow her--see if it is possible to find some remedy for this terrible misfortune.

Jenny

My poor mistress! Ah, my heart is so overcome. I believe that I am going to become mad, too.

(Arabella exits, followed by Jenny and Albert.)

Worthy (standing aside, opening the letter)

They've gone in. Let's read. "You will be surprised by the part I am

taking, but the slavery in which I find myself becomes harder each day, and I believe it permits me to dare anything. You, on your part, try to deliver me from the tyranny of a man I hate as much as I love you." What do you say, I beg you, about all you've seen of this madness?

Scratch

I admire the resources of feminine wit when it is ignited by the imp of love.

Worthy

Scratch, this night, without more delay, we must devise some brilliant scheme which will allow us to free her from such a hard yoke.

Scratch

You intend to carry her off?

Worthy

That would be the quickest and safest way.

Scratch

Agreed. But, doing you a good turn, I fear that--

Worthy

What do you fear?

Scratch

Justice. The law.

Worthy

We've got to marry her.

Scratch

That's understood. You will be married, and I will be hanged.

Worthy

I've got an idea for a plan--you know Lovelace?

Scratch

Certainly.

Worthy

We can take refuge with such a friend. His country house is not far off. It's with Lovelace, that I intend to choose an exile in leaving these parts. There, braving the scorn and rage of the jealous would-be husband--we will prepare, in this place, and we will manage to marry, and make love--

(Enter Albert.)

Albert

Oh, sir, forgive the boredom which possesses me; I came back to find some remedy. This is your man?

Worthy

Yes, he is.

Albert

Please tell him to employ himself in aiding me today.

Worthy

And what can he do for you? Speak!

Albert

He deigned, earlier, to inform me of his medical knowledge. He has a thousand secret cures for many illnesses. Perhaps, he has one for weak-mindedness?

Scratch

Yes, yes, I have more than one--of those salutary effects. But you treated me in a manner, rather--

Albert

Ah, sir--

Scratch

To refuse to give a chap the time of day--

Albert

Forgive my error.

Scratch

Nowhere in my life did anyone ever treat me so--not even in Barbary.

Albert (piteously)

Oh, can you see a thing, so charming, put an end to her days, without giving aid? (to Worthy) Sir, speak for me.

Worthy

Scratch, I beg you, try to cure the evil this pretty lady is suffering from.

Scratch

For you, once again, I sacrifice my resentment. Yes, I will cure her--and radically.

Albert

What--you can--?

Scratch

Go in. I am going to search my book for the most appropriate cure. You will soon see me in operation.

Albert

I cannot express my feeling of obligation. May it be more safe than my fortune or my life.

(Exit Albert.)

Scratch

Go, I know nothing, and she won't be cured.

Worthy

What made you say that? What happy fate made you become a physician in his eyes?

Scratch

Word of honor, I know nothing about it. What I can tell you, is that as soon as I saw him, after he intercepted me, to disguise my plan and hide myself the better, I told him I was looking for some medicinal herbs hereabouts, and that I had admirable secret cures for all sorts of ills, and, in short, could cure, the incurable. And that's exactly how he made his mistake.

Worth

We must profit by it now. In my heart, I feel the rebirth of hope and joy. Come, let's consider--and see by what means we can succeed in our noble project and bring forth your brilliant medicinal art and secret remedies.

Scratch

Me? I'm ready for anything. But, it's useless to undertake a project without the first ingredient. We have no money. Who will give us any?

Worthy (showing the letter)

Love will provide for us.

Scratch

Love will provide it? It seems as though billet doux have become bills of exchanges. Strange.

CURTAIN

ACT III.

Scene: Same as Act II, later that day towards dusk.

(Enter Worthy.)

Worthy

I keep returning and going over all I intend to do. How can a witty girl, so reasonable and sensible, when love seizes her, be able to display her genius and her passion at the very same time? For my part, I owe it all the consideration love can think of. Scratch is prepared

for all he must do. Some help with money will be necessary for us.

(Enter Albert.)

Albert

I cannot stay in this place a single moment. I come, I go, I run about. Everything increases my torment. Near her, my wit is troubled like hers. Her access of madness redoubles every moment. (seeing Worthy) Ah, sir, am I sufficiently numbered amongst those who are considered your friends that I can rely on the aid you have promised me? Will this man who boasted to me of his talents use his experience? In the state I am in, I ought to consent to anything; when one loves completely one takes all risks.

Worthy

I take it as a pleasure to do you this good turn. At all times one ought to do good deeds. Today's patient made me pity her too much for me not to show you signs of friendship. The man in question will be here soon. I wanted to test him and understand his knowledge of this malady. But he spoke to me in terms so precise, explaining to me the cause and effect, that in all truth, I believe he knows more than anyone else.

Albert

Sir, what service can equal yours? Heaven itself, effortlessly, sent this person here--expressly to oblige me.

Worthy

I won't guarantee this profound science. You know that these people come from all over like Gypsies, carrying treasured remedies for all sorts of ills. It's much, if they don't claim to have resuscitated the dead; but if one can judge what he can do from what he told me--this is the man for your business. He only wants to wait till sundown. If you wish it, you may test him. Thus, I discharge my duty as a friend.

Albert

Sir, I am persuaded of his merit. Everyday we see how this sort of man learns secrets from traveling the world over.

(Enter Jenny.)

Jenny

Ah, heaven! You are about to witness another perfect folly. If it continues, you'll have to tie her up.

(Enter Arabella, her hair is completely grey, her clothes disheveled.)

Arabella

Good day, sweet friends, God protect ye, my children! Well, what is it? How do you spend your time? May heaven send you health for a long time, and keep you strong and happy. Sorrow's no good and frets the spirit. You have to enjoy yourself, and it's I who say it.

Worthy

In spite of her age, I find her charming. One can still look for the return of youth.

Arabella

Ho! You look at me--you are amazed to find me so young with grey hair. I feel better than all of you: I take four meals a day, and I read without glasses. I drink rum, or whatever is available, stale or fresh. I drink it to the last drop--and I never mix it with water. I genteelly empty my two bottles.

Jenny

Plague!

Arabella

Yes, truly, some more champagne--without any delay. You can see all my teeth in my mouth. Do you see, I'll be ninety-eight come Easter?

Jenny

Her youth is the last straw.

Arabella

There's more still. But I am of a green old age. At the age I'm at, I still don't allow myself any servants--besides, they'd charge me too much. But, do you see, my friend, do you want me to tell you? People today, they're shoddy goods--they're not worth anything, and I wouldn't bend over to pick up the lot of them.

Worthy

Is she often overcome with these vapors?

Albert

Alas, never. She must be bewitched.

Arabella

At my age, I am still worth my weight in gold. My children have done me wrong. I don't look half my age. If I hadn't been married at thirteen--to tell you the truth, marriage and childbearing puts an end to youth. Such great peril. I never can remember having been a child. To tell you the truth, I was pretty enough. At twenty-seven I had fourteen children.

Jenny

What fertility! Fourteen!

Arabella

Yes, all swarming. And all boys. I've never had any girls. And you see others turn out like ours. But (winking) they're rogues who'll turn out badly. These evil ones wanted to see me in a hospital. Would you believe that after the death of their late father, they squabbled with me over my dower rights? A dower earned so legitimately.

Albert

Alas, can one push mental aberration further?

Jenny (aside)

My word, the little baggage plays her role charmingly.

Arabella

I will need a hundred crowns. Lend them me, sir, to pay for expenses and to bribe the judge in my unfortunate case.

Albert

You dream, my child,--but to satisfy you, I will advance expenses and make your case my business.

Arabella

If I don't have money today, I'll be in despair.

Albert

But think, child--

Arabella

You're an honest man. Don't refuse to give me that sum.

Albert

I intend to humor her.

Worthy

You're wise to do so. You shouldn't contradict her directly.

Jenny

If you resist her, she's the type of girl to go throw herself out the window.

Albert

I agree.

Jenny

I remember that you recently received about a hundred crowns. What risks is there in falling in with her wishes?

Albert

It's true that, right now, I could take them away from her. (to Arabella) Here. Here's the money--go. May these hundred crowns give great success to your law suit.

Arabella

Now I am sure of succeeding in our business. (taking the purse) But this aid was quite necessary. Give my lawyer this money, Jenny. I believe he will be diligent in serving me.

Jenny

He will lack nothing.

Worthy

You may be sure, Madame, that I wish to serve you with all my soul.

Arabella

I will go back and return in more decent clothes--to go with you to solicit the judge in this urgent matter and demand justice. Goodbye. May, one day, heaven reward you for this service to a widow who is to be pitied, who has many sorrows, who is set on by rogues.

(Exit Arabella.)

Jenny (to Worthy)

Here's something to speed your business, sir.

Worthy

I will take care of the case. I know what to do.

Albert (to Jenny)

Be careful of the money.

Jenny

Don't be concerned. I am sure, body for body, it is in good hands.

(Exit Jenny.)

Albert

You see how this folly grows. Your man doesn't come, and I'm getting worried.

Worthy

I don't know what's keeping him. He ought to be here. But, relax, I see him coming.

(Enter Scratch.)

Albert

Ah! Sir, come. We both await your arrival with impatience.

Scratch

A wise philosopher said elegantly: In all things make haste slowly. I've been doing research for some time to determine if the malady whose remedy we are seeking resides in the upper or lower regions. Hippocrates says yes, but Galen says no. It seems to me, time spent reconciling these gentlemen isn't wasted.

Albert

Have you discovered, sir, from whence her malady proceeds?

Scratch

I've discovered it--clear as crystal.

Albert

So much the better. You must know that the beautiful patient is continuously developing some new crisis in her illness. In these

remote parts, there are no doctors. This gentleman has counseled me to put her in your hands.

Scratch

Without doubt, she'd be better in his. But, I hope to expend my efforts usefully.

Albert

You have cured these diseases before?

Scratch

Me? Have I cured them? Ah, truly, so I believe. There's a bit of magic in my art. With three words, that I was taught by a Jew in Arabia, I cured a child in the Congo, a kid who really had quite a case of vertigo. I leave it to doctors to practice their science on diseases which pain the body. The object of my specialty is more noble. It cures all ills which attack the mind. I wish you were to become manic now--atrabalious, mad, even hypochondriacal. So as to have the pleasure of rendering you as wise as I am by tomorrow--and healthy in body, too.

Albert

Sir, I am obliged to you for such great zeal.

Scratch

Without wasting time, let's go to the beautiful patient.

Albert (stopping him)

No, sir, if you please, there's no need. I am going to take the trouble to bring her to you.

(Exit Albert.)

Worthy

Everything's going well. Fortune interests herself in our cause. In your absence Arabella, by means of a beautiful ruse, has figured out how to extract these hundred crowns from Albert.

Scratch (amazed)

How'd she do that?

Worthy

You'll learn everything in time. Now, we must find a way to save Arabella, and be off, without losing a moment. We'll only be able to separate her from this wretch for a single instant. Albert won't leave her, and even follows her about, so we don't know what to do.

Scratch

Rely on me. I'll manage it! You have wit, I am not stupid--and the pretended patient understands the merest hint.

Worthy

I am thinking of a way that's very crazy--but who cares? The play will

be better because it will be stronger. We must convince Albert that with certain words--as you already told him--you can cure her of this illness--but someone else must take the frenzy. I will offer myself, so as to be ready for all emergencies. Let me alone after that.

Scratch

But, how do you hope to get Arabella to take part in this plan, without knowing about it?

Worthy

I will instruct her in all, I give you my word. But, think only of playing your role well. When Arabella comes back, keep the old man busy to give me time to explain everything to her. A few words are all the instruction she'll need. Albert is late--ah, but I see him leaving the house.

(Enter Albert.)

Albert

God conduct the ship and send it to safe harbor.-- Oh, gentlemen, her folly increases every moment. A military delusion now torments her. She's turned her ball dress into a uniform, she's taken up armor,--a dragoon's helmet and a large scimitar. She speaks only of blood and combat. My money must serve to raise an army. She wants to draft me.

(Enter Jenny and Arabella. Arabella is in a fantastic military outfit.)

Arabella

Death--long live war! I cannot remain useless around here. My outfit is ready. Ah, Marquis, it's fortunate I find you in this place. I've come to say goodbye to you. I've found money to finance my campaign--and this very night I leave for Germany!

Albert

Heavens--what mental aberration!

Arabella

By God, officers are wrong to obtain money from the dirty hands of usurers. Better to intrigue--better to inflate the roster. This fellow (pointing to Albert) loaned me his money. I hold him to be the greatest rogue, the worst Jew, the worst dog that one can find in such affairs. I wish someone would bring me his ears.-- Now, I'm ready to go serve the king. Nothing's left to do, except for you to go with me.

Worthy

Wherever you go, I will go. (to Albert) It's prudent to humor her.

Arabella

I quit forever the standard of love. Under its banner, I could go far, someday. I have a thousand endearing qualities--wit, manners. I know the secret of humbling the proudest woman. But for what? What do you want of me? I am not made for women. Glory is what I want. This

inhuman Glory, with its brilliant flesh enslaves me. The poor sex can die of love and boredom before I'll do anything for them.-- No more delay--I go where Glory calls. Lead my horse, the time is propitious. Post, run!

Scratch

I won't leave her. I'm ready to follow her into the midst of combat.

(Albert surprises Worthy speaking to Arabella.)

Worthy

I examined her eyes. From what I see, some violent access takes hold of her, and will be followed by drowsiness. Order an armchair brought here quickly.

Arabella

Delay me from reaching the field of battle? From tearing victory from our enemies? Let widows mourn--let lovers cry! Children, follow me, raise your spirits. I see your courage shine in your faces. Let all here feel the horror and the carnage. Fix bayonets! Firmly--good. The rogues don't dare face us. Ah--cowards, you flee-- No--no quarter--flee. (faints)

Scratch

In a short while, the blood will flow properly again.

Albert (beside himself)

Her wit's gone, without hope of return.

Scratch

Everything's ready. In my opinion, her illness is nothing more than a repressed humor, an irritated spirit, which is trying to free itself. Some demon of love has seized her mind.

Albert

What--the poor girl is possessed?

Scratch

This violent demon from which we must save her is very strong and could take her from us. If I only had a subject in whom I could make this spirit of madness enter, I could quite answer for it.

Albert

Jenny is a perfect subject. No need to search further. She'll serve our turn.

Jenny

I kiss your hands--and give you my word, I'll do not such thing. I am already crazy enough.

Worthy

Hurry up. Her illness augments every minute.

Scratch

Curses. This isn't a child's game. One cannot proceed too carefully. When a demon gets in a man's body, I can get it out easily enough. But, in the body of a female, it's quite another matter.

Worthy

To learn today the extent of his skill, I intend to deliver myself to his care. I begin to doubt the effect. I think he's planning to mock you and me. I intend to embarrass him.

Scratch

Me? I'll show you, and put you in a state where you cannot talk. Put yourself beside her. A knee on the ground, and stay put there. Always keep your gaze fixed on her beautiful eyes--your hand joined straight to hers. (to Albert) Do you permit him to give her his hand, so the force of attraction will be very strong?

Albert

Yes, I consent to everything.

Scratch

So much the better. You'll see a surprising effect shortly. (Scratch makes several passes over the lovers with a wand) Microc--Salaam--Hippocrata.

Arabella

Heaven--what heavy cloud is lifting from my eyes?

Worthy

What somber vapor is obscuring things around here?

Arabella

What a calm replacing trouble has come over my spirit.

Worthy

What confused tumult redoubles in my feelings? What profound abyss opens under my feet? What dragon pursues me? Ah, traitor, you will die--I intend to purge the world of a monster like you.

(Worthy chases Albert about, sword in hand.)

Scratch (coming between them)

Ah, sir, avoid his furious rage. Save yourself, save yourself. Let me draw some blood and poison from his side. (holding Worthy) From the violent access with which he's transported, I can see I've given him too strong a dose.

Worthy

I intend to sacrifice him to my just fury.

Scratch

Don't you have some strong liquor or spirits to calm this fury? He's going to escape me.

Albert (drawing his key)

Yes, I have what he needs. Jenny, take my key, go, run upstairs, take the viol--

Jenny

I'm afraid I'm too upset to do it properly. You'd better go instead.

Scratch

Run--quickly. Would you let a man who has offered to die for you perish?

Jenny (pushing Albert)

Go, quick--go now!

Albert

I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!

(Exit Albert. As soon as Albert leaves, everybody stops and there is a moment of absolute quiet.)

Worthy

Don't lose any time--let's get out of here. Head for the woods. Albert won't know which way love has headed us.

Arabella

I put my life and my fate in your hands.

Scratch

Live, live, Scratch--and long live Folly. Let's run cross-country to meet our fate--and leave Albert all alone here to pour out his rage.

(Exit Worthy, Arabella, Scratch, and Jenny in a wild burst of speed. After a moment, enter Albert with a phial in his hand.)

Albert

I bring an elixir of astonishing strength.-- But, I don't see anybody. What suspicion overwhelms me. Jenny! Arabella! Oh, heaven! All is deaf to my cries. What's become of them? What road have they taken? Where to run? Thief-- Police! Help! I stagger, I faint, I fall--for this feigned folly has seduced me, and I alone have lost my wits today. Here's the ridiculous end of my love. Ah, cursed bottle (throws the phial) and credulous old man. Come, follow their steps, we won't give up. Traitorous ravishers--you will be hanged! And you, deceitful sex--more to be feared than fire, plague, famine, and war--you ought to be cursed by all men. I consign you forever to the devil. Let him take you!

CURTAIN

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IN

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