

LE MARIAGE
INATTENDU
DE CHÉRUBIN,
COMÉDIE
EN TROIS ACTES ET EN PROSE.
Par Madame DE GOUGES.

The Unexpected Marriage of Chérubin, a comedy in three acts and in prose,
by Madame de Gouges.¹

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PREFACE.

I am woman and Author, with all the vigour necessary. My first impulse is like a tempest, but as soon as the explosion is over, I remain in the deepest calm: all sensitive, vital, people have this in common.

¹ Caught up in the excitement created by Beaumarchais' *La Folle Journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro*, de Gouges was inspired, in 1784, to write a sequel, *Les Amours de Chérubin*. In her enthusiasm for the original she viewed her own work as an homage to the great playwright. He did not share her opinion, and the contempt with which he treated his fellow author planted a seed of bitterness in de Gouges's heart that she never forgot. He accused her of plagiarism and used his considerable fame and influence to put an end to negotiations that would probably have seen the play enacted at the Comédie Italienne. Realising that the performing life of her play was over de Gouges published it, in 1786, under the title *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin*. Beaumarchais tried in vain to prevent the play's publication. Instead it received favourable reviews - it was deemed inventive, poetic, witty, natural, and not remotely a parody of the original - and Beaumarchais' ungentlemanly behaviour, publicised by de Gouges in the preface to the play, was considered ungracious.

In her sequel de Gouges recreates a similar storyline to the original in which a young bride is threatened by an aristocratic roué - who thinks he is entitled to a wedding night initiation - but subtly alters the narrative to offer a different approach, one that will improve family ties, and therefore society. The women in the play are people of integrity, strength and resolution who do not rely on intrigue to achieve their ends: de Gouges was offering the public a view of her sex that was inspirational and aspirational. The old order, as epitomised by the Count and Countess and their dysfunctional union, could (and should) be replaced by marriages founded on mutual trust and affection.

My *Mariage de Chérubin* is a child of *la Folle Journée*, born of widespread enthusiasm, it is one of my first Works, from which I expected plenty of glory, and even more profit; but, alas! no word rings more true:

Poor little ones so forlorn,
You die before you are born! ²

Read at the Comédie Italienne, it was accepted there; but from Theatre to Theatre, considerations prevented its performance, so today I present it to the Public, full of faults as befits the work of twenty-four hours that has not been altered in any way. Meanwhile, men of Letters, as well as the Gentlemen Actors, found it had enough merit to attract the attention of people of taste; several people encouraged me to play it at the Variety, or to have it printed; I adopted this last idea and, for a year after it was approved, I had forgotten it among my Manuscripts; but today on seeing an announcement in the Newspaper for a Marriage of Chérubin, my Languedocien vivacity awoke leaving me with only a regret of having allowed myself to be forestalled, and the fear of clandestine plagiarism.³ Also perhaps I am like a poltroon who, at the mere sight of a drawn sword, fears being assassinated. Men, on this point, are very prickly, and women are even less reasonable. As nothing is dearer to me than my productions, I rush to reclaim this one, in case it has been stolen from me. The passion that possesses me to create new subjects, makes me forget the preceding ones; the activity of ten Secretaries could not keep pace with the fecundity of my imagination. I have thirty Plays at least; I admit that the bad outnumber the good quite considerably, but I must equally admit that I have ten that are not lacking in common sense. Meanwhile, despite the wealth of my portfolio and the novelty of my projects, in this time of misery, my pains and my hard work will afford me more torment than glory. The Comédie Française has pitilessly and unjustly taken away my means of obtaining some success. As I have created all my subjects, apart from *Chérubin*, I had a right to the suffrage that is given to innovation: *Zamor and Mirza* can convince the Public that this is so, it was received and acclaimed at the Comédie Française; M. Molé, even though he'd had the drama dinned

² *La Folle Journée ou le Mariage de Figaro*, written by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732 - 1799) in 1778, was read at the Comédie-Française in 1781, given a private performance in 1783 and finally performed publicly in 1784. Repeatedly banned by Louis XVI (directly, not through his censors) for being far too provocative, the five-act comedy's success was unprecedented. The play's subversive attack on the nobility proved to be hugely popular, in changing times, and took Europe by storm. In 1786 it was adapted as a libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte and set to music by Mozart as the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

'Pauvre petits infortunés, / Vous êtes morts avant que d'être nés!' is a quote from a one-act musical comedy by Louis Anseaume (1721 - 1784) entitled *Les Deux chasseurs, et la laitière* with music by Egidio Romualdo Duni (1708 - 1775). Later on the verse became a catch phrase plastered on the walls of the Palais-Royal the night after *Mandats territoriaux* (a form of paper money) were brought in to replace the hated *assignats* in December 1795. The *mandats* were a disaster from the first, losing their value on day one, 100 *livres'* worth of *mandats* dropping to 18 *livres'* worth of coinage; scrapped in May 1797, the equivalent amount of *mandats* was now worth a mere 20 *sous*.

³ William Howarth, in *Beaumarchais and the Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995) mentions two plays called *Mariage de Chérubin*, one by Delon in three acts, published in 1785, and an unpublished one-acter by Gabriel de Salins.

into his ears, could not read it without shedding tears, and the entire Committee felt the same; nonetheless the height of injustice led to this Work being cut from the acceptance register; I complained in vain, no one took my part.⁴ I thought that by interesting the Gentlemen Playwrights in my cause, which should equally be theirs, I could win the case: what a vain hope! Should I rather have feared that the true character of the French had almost faded away? Yet it is not quite destroyed since, of the forty Letters that I wrote, I received four replies. These Gentlemen, who proved to me that they truly embodied the character of Men of Letters, distinguished themselves to such a degree that I am obliged to name them: Messrs la Harpe, the Marquis de Bièvre, Grouvel and Cailhava: the others kept a profound silence.⁵ I intend to instruct the Public of the proceedings the Comédie felt entitled to impose upon me, although, preferring a mediocre compromise to a famous trial, I would have liked nothing better than to keep them in ignorance. I will say now that I had sent to M. C. de B...., fifteen months ago, a little play anterior to *The Marriage of Chérubin*; his finer feelings were wounded, and he did not find its moral purpose well enough observed: the student never imitates his Master to perfection, and I thought the best way to mitigate my faults was by offering in my *Marriage* the moral purpose that was lacking not only in the first play that I had created in this genre, but also in all the productions that pertain to the *Marriage of Figaro*; it seems that despite my moral fibre I have not improved on them in the eyes of M. C. de B...., who nonetheless did me the honour of writing me several obliging Letters; I thought, considering my misfortune and my plight given the Comédie Française's destructive effect he could at least have given me some sound advice, even if he did not defend my cause.⁶ How could I not have flattered myself if he had defended it with ardour and zeal? Is he not a man of spirit? A man who understands the finer points of a delicate affair, and who makes laws as all Procurators do; and, when a woman merely asked for his advice as to how to reply to a pointless quarrel caused by the Comédie Française, she finds this man, who is said to be sublime and good-natured, deaf, dumb and insensible to the cries of pain and despair. Now that I am somewhat consoled of my theatrical miseries, M. C. de B....'s gallantry still troubles my heart, and, since I am very frank, I like to express my way of thinking, and a minor revenge always soothes the most docile woman. This one cannot wound the reputation of an invulnerable man; thus I loudly declare to the Public that having written to M. C. de B...., and likewise to all Playwrights, I added this following postscript:

4 François-René Molet aka Molé (1734 - 1802) was a famous actor who made his debut at the Comédie Française at the age of twenty; a warm and intelligent performer with a more natural style than his predecessors he appealed to female audiences. The death of two older actors in 1778 gave him the chance to become a stellar leading man more suited to comedy than tragedy.

5 Jean-François de La Harpe (1739 - 1803) playwright, journalist, critic; François-Georges Mareschal de Bièvre (1747 - 1789) playwright and celebrated writer of puns; Philippe-Antoine Grouvelle (1758 - 1806) writer and journalist; Jean-François Cailhava de L'Estandoux (1731 - 1813) playwright, poet and critic.

6 M. C. de B would have been recognised by all as signifying the playwright Beaumarchais. This long, breathless, sentence expresses the frustration and hurt de Gouges felt when rejected by the playwright she admired and whose work to establish Authors' rights she shared with equal passion and commitment.

"I had the honour, Sir, of writing to you, as to all the men of Letters; but I come to you as the oppressed ran to Voltaire; I am at your door, and I flatter myself that you will do me the respectful honour of receiving me".

The Porter seemed polite at first but when he returned with his Master's reply, he said to me, in that tone of men of his type, that he was very busy, and that he could not attend to me. Not one to commit an indiscretion, I begged him to find out on what day I could return; he replied in vague words, that are pointless to repeat, coming from M. C. de B....'s Porter. Frowning, he finally succumbed to my supplication and gallantly returned to say, on behalf of his Master, that he could not give me a definite day. I replied: nor an hour, nor a month, no doubt, come, *get along Coachman*, and promised myself never to ask for help or advice from those who cannot remember misfortune and adversity. I leave it to the Public to decide if M. C. de B....did well to punish my enthusiasm that compared him to the famous man [Voltaire], the defender of the oppressed, the support of widows and orphans. Moreover, I have lifted the weight off my heart that smothered it for four months; I tell him all this without artifice or witticisms. Perhaps he will reply; I could learn from him, better than anyone, the art of writing a Preface: I admit my ignorance, natural instinct is the sum of my science. Neither knowledge nor sex holds sway, for Writers express themselves through the weapon of their pens, but if all used them with this frankness, there would be fewer wicked people in Society: a cowardly calumniator's cleverness is applauded. If he lies wittily everything is considered charming. Such are men and their dreadful principles.⁷ If I started to moralise I could bore my Reader; there are three endless acts to read, I pray with all my soul, that the Reader take courage.

CHARACTERS.

CHÉRUBIN, Captain of the Spanish King's Guards.

COUNT ALMAVIVA.

THE COUNTESS.

THE DUKE OF MÉDOC, Fanchette's father.

THE DUCHESS.

FIGARO.

SUSANNE.

FANCHETTE, daughter of the Duke and Duchess, supposed daughter of Antonio.

⁷ Beaumarchais's life epitomized his class and time: a brilliant man with many talents, he used them to womanize, to curry favour at court, to spy, to deal in arms, to make his fortune in a multitude of unscrupulous ways including twice marrying widows who died soon after. His reputation both good and bad was notorious; the preface's end can be read as a veiled attack on a man whose behaviour, in many ways, typified all that de Gouges disliked about her society.

ANTONIO.
NICOLAS, Fanchette's fiancé.
BRID'OISON, Nicolas's Godfather.
BASILE.
LA FLEUR, a Lackey.
A NOTARY.
SEVERAL SERVANTS.
PEASANTS, men and women.

The action takes place in Spain, in one of the Count's Castles.

THE UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE OF CHÉRUBIN.
COMEDY.

FIRST ACT.

The set represents a furnished salon.

FIRST SCENE.

CHÉRUBIN, FIGARO.⁸

FIGARO.

Finally, Sir, here you are, the master of this Castle. You are no longer Chérubin, and your elevation at Court has raised you above the Count. He is now, in his turn, dependent upon you.

CHÉRUBIN.

You are wrong, Figaro. Say, rather, that I am the friend of the Count and Countess.

FIGARO.

This generosity is admirable, but the Land is nonetheless yours, and the Count's discomfiture....

CHÉRUBIN.

Despite his position he has never wished to accept my services. I only bought his Lands on condition that he and the Countess occupied them for the duration of their lives.

FIGARO.

⁸ Figaro addresses Chérubin as 'vous'; Chérubin uses 'tu' to address Figaro who is of a considerably lower rank than himself. Chérubin was a young boy when he entered the household and the trust and friendship he feels for Figaro in his youth is implied by his form of address, if it were merely a question of rank then he would probably use 'vous' as the Count does, when addressing Figaro. Throughout the play there is a nuanced use of 'vous' and 'tu' to provide subtleties of tone and nuanced interchanges, these are evidently lost in translation.

Very good: you will not enjoy the Seignourial honours, but you will validate the rights. I believe that the Count would never have agreed to cede his Land to you, if he had not realised that your respect for the Countess increased every day, whereas the love you felt for her diminished exceedingly; it was so violent that it was obvious to even the least clear sighted, but the calmness you have exhibited for a while is no less visible. I am an old hand. Let me see if I can guess the cause of this perceptible tranquility. Her Ladyship, seemingly more tractable on your behalf, could be....Well, what do you say? Women are superior in these intrigues: as long as they are the cruel ones, and do not reproach themselves, they make no effort to hide an affair; but as soon as their gifts become the reward for our efforts, that is when they employ all their wiles and teach us the art of dissimulation in which they excel: the most secret and voluptuous assignations constrain, in public, these impetuous gestures that impel us towards the object we love. You are dreaming, Sir; what is your reply?

CHÉRUBIN.

What you say about women is true, and I have experienced it; but you are wrong, Figaro, about the Countess, she is too respectable.

FIGARO.

No sooner have you confirmed it, than I believe it. So you are very happy at present? No more love, no more madness....You are silent, Sir; you sigh....Ah, I beg you, speak to me. Do you no longer honour me with your friendship?

CHÉRUBIN, *embracing Figaro.*

My dear friend, my dear Figaro, I hardly dare to admit....

FIGARO, *aside.*

What does this mean? Would he again have fallen in love with my dear Susanne? I was right to want to avoid the wedding of my wife's cousin.

CHÉRUBIN.

What are you saying about her cousin, about Fanchette? Is she going to be married after all to that Peasant oaf?

FIGARO, *aside.*

Ah, what a relief. It has to be said, the jealousy of a Catalan husband is terribly stormy. This malaise is getting hold of me, I must try and cure myself of it.

CHÉRUBIN.

What are you mumbling there, to yourself?

FIGARO, *grotesquely.*

My paternosters, that I forgot to say this morning. To be sure, love doesn't prevent me doing my duty.

CHÉRUBIN.

You're as mad as ever. How lucky you are to have kept this gaiety!

FIGARO.

Eh! what would I do without it, with all the problems of the household, and the way my wife bothers me? But let us talk of Fanchette. It seems to me that you are tempted by her, and I guess that you feel for her what the Count felt for Suzanne. Isn't the *droit du Seigneur* close to your heart?⁹

CHÉRUBIN.

No, Figaro.

FIGARO.

What? I thought, myself, that the *droit du Seigneur* was the prettiest thing of all. To prepare a bride for the poor fool of a husband, who awaits her....Well that's charming! His Lordship's sermon holds sway in the family.

CHÉRUBIN.

Cease your teasing.

FIGARO.

Yes, when you are as serious as a Doctor from Salamanca.

CHÉRUBIN.

I don't have such wisdom.

FIGARO.

Well then, let's be mad. Let us have fun at this marriage.

CHÉRUBIN.

I cannot, I have to get away from here.

FIGARO.

What an extreme party! You don't have much of the Page about you....So you are very much in love!

⁹ Scholars and historians have found little evidence that the 'droit de seigneur' where a lord was entitled to deflower his vassal's bride on her nuptial night was ever anything more than a ceremonial custom. However it was feared enough to regularly persuade those affected to offer substantial 'gifts' to their powerful overlords as a preventative. It may have been used by Beaumarchais as a mere narrative ruse but de Gouges saw clearly enough that even without a literal droit de seigneur power imbalances between men and women were a subject that needed airing. Her unwillingness to see the comic value of such interactions distinguishes her play from Beaumarchais'.

CHÉRUBIN.

More than ever. Fanchette has become so beautiful! She has such a noble and decent air. Nothing about her suggests she is a Peasant.

FIGARO.

She only lacks the clothes to look like a lady at Court; but how could it not be so, having been taught by my Susette, and brought up alongside the Countess?

CHÉRUBIN.

I seem to see in her a girl of good breeding under the vulgar clothes of a Village girl.

FIGARO.

Ideas always full of romance. Just like me, I thought myself to be someone of quality. But Fanchette has not been lost, her true father is well known. Peasants are clearer in their dealings. In a word, she is the daughter of Antonio, there's no doubt about it.

CHÉRUBIN.

What a pity that Fanchette's origins are so lowly! If only the prejudice that makes men unhappy could be overcome.

FIGARO.

You're right, Sir; but wrong if you wish to destroy it. Even though you are your own master, and have reached the highest degree of fortune and nobility, you owe it all to your rank.

CHÉRUBIN.

That rank is a fool, and yet one must have the wit to bear it.

FIGARO.

Bravo, Sir. You are the only one in whom I have seen the character of a true man: thus, you have no need of my council. Let your reason alone guide you, and you won't make any mistakes.

CHÉRUBIN.

Love is all powerful. Absence alone can conquer it and not reason.

FIGARO.

Well then leave as soon as possible, since it's necessary, but I fear that the Count will take advantage of your departure to realise his hopes.

CHÉRUBIN.

Dear Figaro, do you think so?

FIGARO.

My word, I believe he's capable of anything. When it comes to seduction, what does he respect?

CHÉRUBIN.

You are opening my eyes. The Count could abuse?...No, I won't leave until after the marriage.

FIGARO.

Very good; but here is the Count. Let us talk of other things.

SCENE II.

CHÉRUBIN, FIGARO, THE COUNT.¹⁰

THE COUNT, *to Chérubin.*

I have just received most interesting news from Madrid, and it concerns you too, Sir.

CHÉRUBIN.

About what, Sir?

THE COUNT.

You are connected, as is the Countess, to the House of Médoc; you remember that the reputation of this Family was stained by a secret marriage with the Duke Don Fernand: this marriage was revoked, your relative was placed in a convent and the Duke exiled.

CHÉRUBIN.

What of it, Sir?

THE COUNT.

The marriage has just been recognised and the ceremony has taken place at Court.

CHÉRUBIN.

What joy! My Family is now entirely absolved.

THE COUNT.

¹⁰ In this scene Chérubin continues to address Figaro using 'tu' but the Count and Figaro only use 'vous' between themselves, as do the Count and Chérubin.

That is not all. The unfortunate couple, as intriguing as they are, are coming to visit us, but it strikes me as most singular, that in their letters they speak to me of Antonio, and at length of Fanchette.

FIGARO, *dreaming and smacking his head.*

I am not confused. Did I remember this story, or was it Suzanne who told it to me? I will give you the facts. I'm worth my weight in gold to make head or tail of these adventures. Antonio's wife was employed as a Wet-nurse and taken away before she was delivered; the child of this lady [the Duchess] died within three months, Mathurine returned to her village with her own daughter, loaded with jewels and presents. I imagine that if the child died no fault was implied, and as Fanchette is her milk-sister, when they come to these parts, they will be very pleased to see her.

THE COUNT.

He is unbelievable, and never wrong; he knows everything. It must be said that without Mister Figaro one would not discover any of these things, and I had forgotten that I had heard speak of them.

FIGARO, *aside.*

Well, what a blessed miracle, he needs me. (*Aloud.*) Your Excellency flatters me. If I have improved the wit of ignorant people, I must have made clever people witless. I succeed where all others fail. A cheerful disposition is my philosophy; I lay down the law to idiots; I defy the wicked, and I am as decent as anyone, doing good despite my enemies.

CHÉRUBIN.

Figaro, what is the point of this dialogue you're imposing on us? We were speaking of Fanchette. You were saying?...

FIGARO.

Oh well, I've told you all I know. Everyone speaks according to his interests.

THE COUNT.

He has his reasons. When Mister Figaro has to rap me over the knuckles he doesn't spare the rod. You play the big man, Mister jumped up Financier. Has one forgotten that we were my Valet, and a former horse Doctor in Catalonia?

FIGARO.

I had the wit not to forget, and you have not had the wit to stop remembering. See, Sir, no apostrophe. I am a man like you, and I know my rights. There is a million times more merit in occupying the place I have attained, without anyone's help. Your Excellency cannot say as much.

CHÉRUBIN.

It is true that he has endured much in his life, and met with annoyances.

THE COUNT.

And everything turned to his advantage. He's so indisposed. Poor little thing, I suggest he bemoans his fate. He is quite the happiest mortal: his star is worth two thousand years of nobility.

FIGARO.

I agree that I was born lucky; that anyone else, experiencing the catastrophes I did, would have thought all was lost. I saw myself in turn praised, blamed, and treated as a little boy. I had as much probity as was required to be an honest man, despite it being considered, this century, like paper money only fit for bribery. I have made a particular study of men; I know how to manage them. If I told you....

THE COUNT.

Peace, peace, Mister Figaro, your lecture will be interminable.

FIGARO.

That's Great Lords for you! Bring them to the heart, or truth of the matter, they're nowhere to be found. (*A noise is heard.*) But here are our Ladies with the bride.

CHÉRUBIN, *aside*.

How can I hide my discomfort? I feel quite emotional at the sight of her.

SCENE III.

CHÉRUBIN, FIGARO, THE COUNT, THE COUNTESS, SUSANNE, FANCHETTE.

THE COUNTESS.

Here's a new Marriage, Sir, being prepared. What shall we do for Fanchette? Not as much as we would wish. Our fortunes are much altered.

FANCHETTE.

Madame, I prefer your kindness to all the gifts of wealth.

THE COUNT.

How intriguing she has become!

SUSANNE.

She doesn't cherish her Nicolas as much as I did my Figaro. This marriage will not be a happy one.

CHÉRUBIN.

And why force her inclination?

SUSANNE.

Her father wishes it.

FANCHETTE.

I wish it too. My feelings are too elevated for the daughter of a Gardener and they must be chastened.

FIGARO.

A Gardener is a man.

CHÉRUBIN.

And his daughter can assume the highest rank when she is as worthy as Fanchette.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

He's as in love with her as a Spaniel. I guessed as much: that is what has cured him of his passion for the Countess. I'm not displeased by it.

FIGARO, *whispering to the Count*.

I can believe it, Sir; thus is your honour covered: you have run grave risks.

THE COUNT, *likewise*.

Shh.

SUSANNE.

See how praise makes her blush.

THE COUNTESS.

That's true.

FANCHETTE.

Your Ladyship, do not favour me, I am already so fortunate.

FIGARO.

Women rarely think so; but she is so young, so simple, that truth has not yet corrupted her soul.

THE COUNT, *whispering to Figaro*.

That will come, Mister Figaro, that will come.

FIGARO.

You hope so, Sir.

THE COUNT.

I'm counting on it.

CHÉRUBIN, *to Fanchette*.

But why marry a man you do not love?

THE COUNT.

They say love grows in time.

FIGARO.

As for me, I maintain that it goes away.

SUSANNE.

Figaro is right.

FIGARO.

I would have sworn to it.

THE COUNTESS.

Especially on the part of men.

FIGARO.

That is the corrective. Women never want to be the first to be in the wrong, and we always beat them to it.

THE COUNTESS.

Nonetheless we must enliven the celebration. You will go, and leave us alone. We have to get Fanchette ready. I am dressing her in Court clothes for her marriage day.

FANCHETTE.

Madame, that is not necessary: I'll have to take them off.

SUSANNE.

Nothing is forbidden today: that's the best of being the Bride.

FIGARO.

And the Bridegroom?

THE COUNT.

I can stay for the preparation. You know that I appreciate these things very much.

Chérubin and Fanchette look at each other during the following dialogue, and create an interesting dumb scene.

FIGARO, *aside*, noticing the looks that are exchanged between our two Lovers.

How the windows of the soul progress! It's true to say that Lovers are like those celestial Beings who share their thoughts just by looking at each other. This mute language is delightful! Happy days of my loves, will you never return?

SUSANNE.

What is it, my Figaro? You sigh, my friend.¹¹

FIGARO, *aside*.

The traitor finds me out, and mocks me. [*Aloud.*] This day reminds me of our marriage.

SUSANNE.

Ah well! What have you to complain of? Was it not one of the happiest? Have we not prospered beyond all our expectations? Believe that we will be united a long time, and that our fiftieth will still crown our love.

THE COUNTESS.

Come, Gentlemen, leave. I have to speak particularly to Fanchette and Susanne.

FIGARO.

I am leaving.

He exits.

SCENE IV.

CHÉRUBIN, THE COUNT, THE COUNTESS, SUSANNE, FANCHETTE.

CHÉRUBIN.

But, Sir, we should await the Duchess.

THE COUNTESS.

¹¹ Susanne and Figaro use 'tu' when addressing each other.

The Duchess!

THE COUNT.

I forgot, my dear Countess, to tell you the news. Your relative, who is also related to the Marquis, has just been reunited with her husband the Duke of Médoc: their marriage has been recognised, and crowns a constancy that was not weakened on either side by absence or the passing of years. They are coming to visit us; here is their letter. I will give the orders to receive them. [*To Chérubin.*] Come with me, Marquis.

They exit.

SCENE V.

THE COUNTESS, SUSANNE, FANCHETTE.

THE COUNTESS.

What joy for my relative! [*After reading to the end.*] She speaks of you, Fanchette.¹²

FANCHETTE.

Alas, I am their unfortunate daughter's milk-sister, who died aged three months, so my father told me.

SUSANNE.

My aunt Mathurine often spoke to me about all this. She cried when remembering the cruelty that had been used to separate these two spouses, and looking at Fanchette, she used to say: "You would have played a great part, my child, and me too." For she was ambitious, for a peasant. Her husband is nothing but a brute, but she had spirit and a tolerable discernment.

THE COUNTESS.

I never knew my relative, I was too young at the time; but I learnt of all her troubles. How pleased I will be to see her! [*To Fanchette.*] What is it, Fanchette?

FANCHETTE, *aside*.

I can sense inside me unknown feelings. The arrival of these people, an inclination that I have to stifle; all this overwhelms my heart and mind. [*Aloud.*] I can't bear it anymore.

THE COUNTESS.

Fanchette, are you going pale? [*To Susanne.*] She's feeling unwell, Susanne: bring that chair closer.

¹² The Countess mostly addresses Fanchette using 'tu'; all other exchanges throughout the remainder of the act use 'vous'.

SUSANNE.

It's that wretched man her father is forcing her to marry.

THE COUNTESS.

Cheer up my dear Fanchette; I'll speak to Antonio, and, if he won't accept my reasoning, we'll find a way to break up this marriage.

FANCHETTE.

It's too advanced; everything is ready for tomorrow.

SUSANNE.

We'll gain time. Haven't we the pretext of the arrival of his Grace the Duke and his spouse?

FANCHETTE.

My father will hear none of it.

SCENE VI.

THE COUNTESS, SUSANNE, FANCHETTE, LA FLEUR.

LA FLEUR.

Antonio and Fanchette's intended ask to speak to her Ladyship the Countess.

THE COUNTESS.

Let them in.

La Fleur exits.

SCENE VII.

THE COUNTESS, SUSANNE, FANCHETTE.

THE COUNTESS.

They've come at an appropriate time.

SCENE VIII.

THE SAME, ANTONIO, NICOLAS.

ANTONIO.

I cometh, yer Ladyship, to 'ave the 'onour of presenting to you my son-in-the-law.

NICOLAS.

It's a lot of honour for us, your Ladyship.

THE COUNTESS.

I am very glad to see you both; and when is the marriage due?

ANTONIO.

By Gosh, yer Ladyship, you knows too well 'tis for tomorrow. I've been an' invited all the village to join in our celebrations, that's not to count those that will come from our in-the-laws's place.

NICOLAS, *giggling*.

I be wealthy enough to treat all them that will come to our nuptials. [*To his Intended.*] You say naught, miss Fanchette. You can't wait to get married, isn't that right?

SUSANNE, *aside*.

The stupid donkey! Where does Fortune find her hiding places?¹³

FANCHETTE.

That is a question that should not be asked, Mister Nicolas.

NICOLAS, *laughing*.

Ah! We'll think up plenty more once we be wed.

ANTONIO, *laughing*.

'E's a right blade, our son-in-the-law.

THE COUNTESS.

Let us cease this conversation. Antonio, you know that your wife was taken on as a Wet-nurse by the Duchess, wife of Duke Don Fernand; both of them are coming to this Estate.

ANTONIO.

I knows that full well, yer Ladyship, and if you want, I'll learn thee...

THE COUNTESS.

¹³ In his *Life of Molière* Voltaire recounts that the playwright gave a beggar a gold coin, the beggar returned it assuming it to have been a mistake, Molière replied: 'Où la vertu va-t-elle se nicher'. De Gouges borrows, and adapts, the phrase just as she did in her pamphlet *Sera-t-il roi*.

I know all that. They are very interested in Fanchette's fate, and I advise you not to finalise anything before their arrival.

ANTONIO.

We would be mightily delighted, yer Ladyship, but let 'em 'urry along. We can't delay the festivities, yer Ladyship knows that as well as we does.

THE COUNTESS.

I can see nothing that obliges you to rush ahead with the ceremony.

SUSANNE.

My uncle, would you wish to be so lacking in respect for people of rank, to whom you owe so much gratitude?

FANCHETTE.

Father!

ANTONIO, *pulling a face*.

Well well! Father. Silence, little maid. [*To the Countess.*] We 'ave our reasons, we do, yer Ladyship. Mister Nicolas is a good boy, who is all right, who doesn't want me to be a Gardener anymore, and who takes my daughter as he finds 'er.

SUSANNE, *aside*.

What does he mean? I glimpse a mystery. [*Whispering to the Countess.*] Your Ladyship, we'll leave you alone together, to try to clarify things.

NICOLAS.

I takes her pretty, 'cos she is, dare say I'd marry her the same even if she weren't. It's enough I gives me word; our father-in-the-law knows us well; me hand is on me heart, so it is.

SUSANNE, *aside*.

What a great genius of a husband! Find a sillier one and straight away I'll take the balloon post to spread the news to Rome.¹⁴ [*Aloud to Fanchette.*] Follow me, cousin. [*To Nicolas.*] And you too, my intended cousin.

NICOLAS, *bowing*.

¹⁴ 'J'irai le dire à Rome' is a well know proverb, used by Molière (in his *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*) among others, and implies that something is very unlikely to happen. The first balloons (built by the Montgolfier brothers) took their inaugural flights in 1783: in June without a basket; in September a sheep, a duck and a rooster were carried aloft, safely; in November, two men flew in an attached basket. Using balloons to transport goods or post was much discussed but the first actual balloon postal service was inaugurated in 1870 to get messages out of Paris when it was besieged by the German army.

I do have the honour of saluting you, your Ladyship. [*Approaching Fanchette.*] Give me your arm, Miss Fanchette, I do be your guide.

SUSANNE, *laughing*.

Give me your hand too. There we shall have a handsome Squire.

Nicolas put his hat on his head which gets in his way, and he is made to turn around a few times, because he is so gauche; the Countess smiles. They exit.

SCENE IX.

THE COUNTESS, ANTONIO.

ANTONIO.

Mistress Figaro has taken the droll air of 'er good for nothin' husband. I don't 'old with all these manners.

THE COUNTESS.

What do you have to say to me, concerning Fanchette?

ANTONIO.

See, yer Ladyship, you be a respectable woman; I will to pour out my 'eart to yer. Yer know 'is Lordship the Count, 'e's ever got designs on young gals, but I fears even more that weakling Page, though 'e's become pretty reasonable, or so they do say, since 'e's become a grand gentleman. I don't trust any of it, I've surprised him several times with Fanchette, they both 'ad a foot of rouge on their noses: I wasn't dazzled, I saw what I saw. Is 'is Lordship the Marquis fit to call on my daughter, and seek to speak to her at any opportunity.¹⁵

THE COUNTESS.

He is merely acting out of politeness.

ANTONIO.

I knows well enough that for their Lordships pretty words get used for what is not pretty behaviour at all.

THE COUNTESS.

¹⁵ 'Un pied de rouge sur la joue' (a foot of rouge on the cheek) was a common expression for an excessive use of make-up. I'm assuming that it being on their noses implies that the rouge rubbed off as they kissed: it could also be a joke at Antonio's expense since he is getting the saying wrong and Fanchette is not the type to wear much rouge. Rouge was a signifier of class, its enforced use at Versailles was such that foreigners often felt women courtiers looked like painted dolls. Some natural products were available, based on safflower and sandalwood, but most women used highly toxic substances that included mercury and lead, alongside the vermilion. Geranium petals, or less appealingly red wine, rubbed on the cheeks were the age-old poor woman's alternative.

Well all that you are telling me is no reason for not delaying the marriage by a few days.

ANTONIO.

I speak as I find, and I don't find everything. So much so as I 'ave to watch our gal like milk that's on the boil. That's not nothing, and then the costs are met, the wedding clothes bought. The contract's got to be signed tomorrow. So you see, yer Ladyship, we can't delay nor un-invite all the guests.

BASILE, *in the wings*.

I must tell her Ladyship what is happening.

SCENE X.

THE COUNTESS, ANTONIO, BASILE.

BASILE.

The post has just arrived, your Ladyship; your relative will not arrive for two weeks.

THE COUNTESS.

Does his Lordship know?

BASILE.

No, your Ladyship.

THE COUNTESS.

I will go and find him. [*To the Gardener.*] Follow me, Antonio.

She exits with Antonio.

SCENE XI.

BASILE, *alone*.

The little girl is attached to Chérubin, his Lordship has cast his eyes on her in vain; the Page will win the *droit du seigneur*, and his Lordship will be left with nothing.

SCENE XII.

BASILE, THE COUNT.

THE COUNT, *entering silently*.

You would have lied about it, Mister miserable Prophet.

BASILE, *surprised*.

You were listening to me, Sir? Your Excellency must have heard in my words only regret for the subterfuge I fear you'll not gain.

THE COUNT.

That is what I must parry, if at all possible. The Duchess is not about to arrive, I will persuade Chérubin that duty calls him to go to his relative; that he must leave for Madrid and return with her. I am wary of Figaro, he is more his friend than mine, he must be engaged to leave with Chérubin. Fanchette abhors her intended; she will not refuse, like her cousin, to the right that is my due. If the Countess could be persuaded to leave, by promising to delay the celebration....Once everyone is distanced, we'll let Antonio react.

BASILE.

My advice will persuade him not to lose a moment concluding this marriage. I understand, your Lordship, and will arrange all of this to the accompaniment of my guitar.

THE COUNT.

Go, and don't get the variations wrong. Here, this is to ensure perfect pitch. [*He gives him money.*]

BASILE.

I won't forget anything, and I won't make even a demisemiquaver's mistake. I'll imitate the voice of the nightingale,¹⁶ but I won't let myself be caught on the hop, for fear of failure. Rely on me, your Lordship; you know how I manage these types of affair. I am like Caesar, who thought he had achieved nothing if he still had something left to do.

He exits.

SCENE XIII.

THE COUNT, *alone*.

That's typical of the pedant, always ready with his quotations! It would be splendid to take revenge on Figaro and the Page by making Fanchette my Mistress. She pleases me even more than Susanne; she doesn't have her cousin's natural wit and good-natured banter; but how she fascinates with her naive candour! How! She has a dignified air that imposes itself on me, when I want to joke with her she says, "I'm no longer a child," while gravely curtsying to me, and then she most politely leaves me there. Let me go and get things ready, she'll change her tune when she's married.

SCENE XIV.

16 [Original footnote.] The Play *Chérubin*, played at the Italians, failed at just the moment when Chérubin imitated the song of a nightingale.

THE COUNT, THE COUNTESS.

THE COUNTESS.

No doubt you are aware, Sir, that a Letter arrived from their Graces the Duke and Duchess, and that they will only be here in a week [sic]?

THE COUNT.

I was aware.

THE COUNTESS.

It would be most proper to delay this wedding. I can get nothing from Fanchette's father; but, Sir, you might be able to make him see reason.

THE COUNT.

The man is too stubborn. It would be easier for me to change a Government.

THE COUNTESS.

Fanchette seems to me to feel great repugnance for her intended.

THE COUNT.

I think Chérubin is more to her taste.

THE COUNTESS.

What an idea!

THE COUNT.

Not such a mad one, and I believe that your relative [Chérubin] does not view this marriage with pleasure. Love likes to narrow the gap between the classes. [*The Countess seems surprised.*] This distresses you.

THE COUNTESS, *with a noticeable coldness.*

What! You think two children....

THE COUNT.

You are used to thinking of Chérubin as a child, but he isn't one anymore. He is no longer that imp who made women laugh with his amiable pranks, he is now a Grand person. [*With finesse.*] Does this change not annoy you?

THE COUNTESS, *with sensibility.*

And why would you wish, Sir, that I be annoyed to see him happy?

THE COUNT.

Are you pleased to see his coolness towards you?

THE COUNTESS.

You constantly question me in a way that offends my sensibility. You, Sir, who have wronged me so often! I never mention it to you. I stifle within my heart the reproaches that you so deserve. Do not be unjust: if I forgive you everything, do me the honour of acknowledging that you have nothing to reproach me for.

THE COUNT.

I agree, my adorable Countess; but, despite my faults, I have never ceased to hold you in my esteem.

THE COUNTESS, *astutely*.

Ah! I'm sure of that: I am too worthy of it, and that is the only wrong I have done you.

THE COUNT.

It makes you all the worthier and more respectable.

THE COUNTESS.

But less beloved.

THE COUNT.

Ah! the rebuke is sharp. Can one be jealous where one does not love?

THE COUNTESS.

Yes, through self-esteem and pride. That is how you love me.

THE COUNT.

Now you are being unjust, my dear Countess. But let us break off at this point and speak of your relative. I think it would be appropriate if you were to go ahead and meet her to congratulate her on the happy event that has reunited her and her spouse. She will be grateful for this mark of your attentiveness.

THE COUNTESS.

I would not have ventured to ask for your permission, and I am enchanted that you have suggested it. It is not duty that will guide me to my relative's side, but blood ties and friendship.

THE COUNT.

Chérubin shares the same blood ties, he must accompany you.

THE COUNTESS.

So you will come too?

THE COUNT.

I cannot go to Madrid. I could not stay incognito in such circumstances.

THE COUNTESS.

But you could come with us as far as El Escorial. It would give you a chance to see your Uncle.

THE COUNT, *in an embarrassed tone.*

I would like to with all my heart, but I have given my word to my Business Men for the day after tomorrow. If, after all, it were possible, I would not deprive myself of the pleasure. I will give orders for this departure straight after the marriage.

THE COUNTESS.

I will prepare what I need; as well as the ornaments I am offering Fanchette for her wedding day.

THE COUNT.

But you will dine with us?

THE COUNTESS.

No, I won't eat anything this evening. I have my migraine and will retire to my apartment.

THE COUNT.

I will give you my arm as far as your apartment. [*Aside, as he leaves.*] Good! Things are just where I wished them to be.

They exit.

End of the first Act.

ACT TWO.

The set represents the same salon. The stage, at night, is in darkness but gradually brightens.

FIRST SCENE.

FANCHETTE, *alone, dishevelled, in rumpled clothes.*

Everyone in the Castle is resting. Sleep will not come and close my eyes. All seems to be calm here, my heart alone is troubled by an inexpressible fear. Ah! Chérubin, Chérubin! His picture pursues me everywhere. Alas! I am not born for him. I am destined by Fate to be a Peasant's companion, and not that of a man of quality. He is no longer that Page, that dreamer; he is a decent sensible man; a greater threat to a sensitive soul. Will I have the strength to forget him? I have to, I must resign myself to my sad destiny, and fulfil the duty it prescribes for me.

SCENE II.

FANCHETTE, BASILE, *from the back of the stage.*

BASILE, *aside.*

Good! She's alone, let me go and tell his Lordship. He'll have time, before anyone rises, to make himself clear to her.

He exits.

SCENE III.

FANCHETTE, *alone, sitting down.*

What a cruel position I am in! I daren't entrust my sorrows to anyone, not even to Susanne my cousin and kindest friend. A hidden pain becomes sharper and harder to bear.

SCENE IV.

FANCHETTE, CHÉRUBIN.

CHÉRUBIN, *from the back of the stage.*

I spent the night in the park without noticing. I wander in the Castle without meeting anyone; but Fanchette is constantly before my eyes. (*Noticing her.*) Ye Gods! Am I mistaken! It's her.

FANCHETTE, *surprised, standing up.*

Heavens! It's him!

CHÉRUBIN.

Ah! My dear Fanchette, what are you doing here this morning so early?

FANCHETTE, *lowering her eyes.*

And you, yourself, Sir, what are you seeking?

CHÉRUBIN.

Rest, that I cannot find. Oh my sweet Fanchette! does your heart not guess all that mine suffers!

FANCHETTE, *in a whisper*.

I am to be pitied more than you. Try and forget me. Alas, will I have the strength to follow the advice I have just given you? (*Aside.*) No, I can tell, this effort is more than I can bear.

CHÉRUBIN.

Can one destroy such a pure love? This love that took shape in our childhood, the years have only increased its strength, without diminishing its purity.

FANCHETTE.

Reason condemns it. What hope do we have?

CHÉRUBIN.

I have none, I see none in the future, and I honour you too much to suggest any alliance that could alarm your sensibility.

FANCHETTE.

Ah! I'll grant you that: your soul is too noble to give free rein to the least idea that could be an affront to virtue. The purity of your feelings makes you quite worthy of the happy fate that has favoured you.

SCENE V.

FANCHETTE, CHÉRUBIN, BASILE.

CHÉRUBIN.

What are you saying about happiness! There is none left for me.

BASILE, *overhearing from the back of the stage*.

I can believe it. Fine feelings do not prosper in this century we are in, and particularly not with women. Ah! Poor Page, how tiresome you have become!¹⁷ Beauties will no longer fight over him; but he will succeed with prudes. His Lordship is taking his time. One must hurry him along.

SCENE VI.

FANCHETTE, CHÉRUBIN.

FANCHETTE, *alarmed*.

I am lost: I have just heard the voice of that unkind Basile. He has the awful talent of blackening the most innocent things. Distance yourself, Sir.

¹⁷ Basile uses 'tu' when referring to Chérubin as a way of further belittling him.

CHÉRUBIN, *sadly*.

Yes, I'm going, I will leave you forever. Farewell, charming and only object of a love that will follow me to the grave.

FANCHETTE.

Farewell, dear Chérubin.

CHÉRUBIN.

Allow me to ask after you. You will hear my news. Do not refuse this single and final favour.

FANCHETTE.

I will never refuse you anything that my duty allows me to offer.

CHÉRUBIN.

Farewell. I will go and attend Court early. I have, at the moment, only the strength to distance myself from you.

He kisses her hand, and exits.

SCENE VII.

FANCHETTE, THE COUNT, BASILE.

BASILE, *whispering to the Count*.

Sir, the bird has flown; but the female is left. Do you need me?

THE COUNT.

Surely, she will be less wary of me. (*To Fanchette*.) The day of her nuptials keeps a girl very wide awake.

FANCHETTE, *troubled*.

Ah!....Sir, on that day one's harsh thoughts intrude.

THE COUNT.

The erstwhile Page knows how to make them more bearable.

FANCHETTE, *aside*.

I recognise in that all the unkindness of that scoundrel Basile. (*To Basile*.) Dangerous man, what can you have said?

BASILE.

Me, I heard nothing; I merely observed in passing. I admit that the nocturnal rendezvous surprised me.

FANCHETTE, *angrily*.

Nocturnal, detestable man!

THE COUNT.

Calm yourself, Fanchette; I will send Basile away, since he displeases you.

FANCHETTE.

On the contrary, Sir, it is I who will surrender my place to him.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

That is not what I desire. (*Aloud*.) Very well, then he will stay. No doubt you are more fearful with me, than with Chérubin. (*Aside*.) That damned Page, mad or reasonable, it has been decided that he will cut the grass from under my feet at every turn.

FANCHETTE.

No, Sir. I am less fearful with you than with him.

THE COUNT, *looking at Basile*.

This naive answer is quite unkind. What do you think, Basile?

BASILE, *seriously*.

There is much to say on the matter, Sir.

THE COUNT, *to Fanchette*.

You are not as happy as your cousin: she adored Figaro. Poor Nicolas, I believe, will not be so fortunate.

FANCHETTE.

If love comes with time, as you predict, Sir, he will be one day.

BASILE, *aside*.

He will be, I am sure of it.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

Let us inspire her with confidence. (*Aloud, with goodwill, to Fanchette*.) Come, open your heart to me. I would like to obtain your friendship, at least.

FANCHETTE.

Sir, it is already yours, and my respect.....

THE COUNT, *aside*.

This respect wears me down.

BASILE.

He doesn't like to overwhelm in affairs of the heart, quite another matter for those who serve him.

THE COUNT.

What are you saying, Basile?

BASILE.

Sir, I am looking at the Sun rising: it's rays are blinding. I was complaining, but it overwhelms me. (*The stage lights up.*)

THE COUNT, *aside*.

That damned Figaro has encouraged all my Servants to be witty.

FANCHETTE.

Sir, I will retire.

THE COUNT.

What! Without saying a word to me about your heart's predicament? If you really feel total repugnance for Nicolas, I will end this marriage.

FANCHETTE.

Whatever my feelings, I must obey my father. Given I have to be settled, I like this young man as much as another.

THE COUNT.

That's very good, Fanchette; you will be a sensible wife. I absolutely want to gain your confidence. Go to her Ladyship; alterations are being prepared for you that will adorn rather than embellish you.

Fanchette exits.

SCENE VIII.

THE COUNT, BASILE.

BASILE.

You are barely advancing, Sir.

THE COUNT.

I have my reasons. Ought I to have put her off marriage, by mentioning the right that I wish to employ with her? That is how I failed with Susanne. Everyone must be persuaded to leave; and when we have only Antonio, the Judge, Nicolas and the young Person, we will succeed without hindrance.

BASILE.

Taking a step back to jump further forward. (*Looking towards the back of the stage.*) But here is Susanne and her husband. Sir, be on your guard.

THE COUNT.

And you in particular.

SCENE IX.

THE SAME, SUSANNE, FIGARO.

SUSANNE, *whispering to her husband.*

There's a plot, Figaro.

FIGARO, *likewise.*

There is, I'll wager. They're here together very early! Yet they don't like each other; but advantage brings them together.

THE COUNT.

Everyone is already stirring!

FIGARO.

Well you are, Sir.

THE COUNT.

I am going hunting, but I will be back for the nuptials. I wish to hand the Countess into her carriage.

SUSANNE.

If her Ladyship wished to take me with her?

THE COUNT.

Have no doubt. She would be very pleased if you were one of her party; but I am saddened that I don't have any post to give you.

FIGARO.

His Excellency now takes me for a zero in cyphers. I'm not so heavy yet that I can't run the post. I will put on the vest of a postillion, take the boots, a whip, and there, I'm a post-boy.

THE COUNT.

You've become a little fatter.

FIGARO.

I'm no less nimble, Sir.

BASILE.

That's true.

FIGARO.

Who's addressing you, Pedant?¹⁸ You can see the point, that's very lucky!

BASILE.

What, Mister Figaro! Epigrams again?

FIGARO.

I'm teasing, our former singing Teacher. I'm addressing you with kindness: you could do the same for me.

SCENE X.

THE COUNT, BASILE, SUSANNE, FIGARO, THE COUNTESS.

THE COUNTESS.

Well, Susanne, we must go and prepare Fanchette. She does not want us to delay her; she is determined to marry Nicolas, so as not to anger her father.

FIGARO.

It is an extraordinary example of obedience.

SUSANNE.

Her Ladyship does not know that we are going with her.

¹⁸ Figaro addresses Basile using the familiar 'tu' in his teasing of Basile but the formal 'vous' when he addresses him normally in his next speech.

THE COUNTESS.

That's grand, my dear Susanne?

THE COUNT.

She and Figaro offered their services to accompany you.

THE COUNTESS.

How pleasing for me. (*On reflection.*) But poor Fanchette will be left alone. Let's take her too.

BASILE.

Then you would have to take the Husband and Antonio as well.

THE COUNT.

You know, my dear Countess, that we only have one coach here and only one Berlin carriage harness.

SUSANNE.

But, your Lordship; come with us too.

FIGARO.

Is his Lordship not coming?

BASILE, *looking at the Count.*

His Lordship knows full well that he has business with the Farmers.

THE COUNT.

I have essential things to decide with them. Otherwise I would willingly have been of your number. I am going to go hunting. Countess, I leave it to you to arrange all that is required for the celebration that I will attend on my return.

THE COUNTESS.

I am of the opinion that we should hold it in the park.

THE COUNT.

That is an excellent idea. The village Girls will prefer it. They would rather dance on greensward than under gilded ceilings. I bid you farewell. (*To Basile.*) Follow me.

They exit.

SCENE XI.

SUSANNE, FIGARO, THE COUNTESS.

FIGARO, *aside*.

I'm not sure, but I suspect a stratagem, between the Count and Basile, worse than the one that was used at my marriage. They are throwing glances at each other, and Basile was striving to forestall the Count.

SUSANNE.

Why this habit of talking to yourself all the time?

FIGARO.

It's an old custom that I abuse sometimes.

THE COUNTESS.

Mister Figaro, what is the matter?

FIGARO.

Nothing, Madame. I was saying that all was going as well as could be.

THE COUNTESS.

I see that you have your suspicions concerning his Lordship.

FIGARO.

For several days I have seen him, even more than is usual, with Basile; in all frank...

SUSANNE.

It is truly awful that a Lord such as he should be perpetually with this man.

FIGARO.

My suspicions may be ill founded, and the peace of mind that your Ladyship seems to feel, must dissipate them.

THE COUNTESS.

My mind is not as peaceful as you think, Mister Figaro. I have all to fear regarding my husband.

FIGARO.

Do you wish to follow my advice. Let us pretend to leave straight away after the ceremony. If you do not wish to retrace your steps, wait for me at the first staging post and under the pretext of having forgotten something, I will return here to find out what is going on.

THE COUNTESS.

That is well thought out; in this manner, I am shielded from complaints and reproaches.

SUSANNE.

I believe, myself, that the Count has changed his ways, and it is all a false alarm.

FIGARO.

That is what we shall see.

THE COUNTESS.

Figaro, keep an eye on everything as we await our departure: I will go and prepare the celebration. (*To her Chambermaid.*) Come with me, Susanne.

She exits.

SCENE XII.

SUSANNE, FIGARO.

SUSANNE.

Farewell, my Figaro. Today reminds me of our wedding. This one will not be as happy, nor as well attended: isn't that right, my friend?

FIGARO.

No, my dear Susanne, it won't. Everything here is at sixes and sevens. The Husband is an imbecile; the intended will say *Yes* as though she were pronouncing her wishes. Talk to me of our love: we made everything dance; people jostled, exhausted themselves, to run to our wedding. At this one people will return to their sad households, without bringing back any nuptial joy.

SUSANNE.

Let us at least try, by our gaiety, to remind those that were there of that happy day.

FIGARO.

Do you think that will be easy!

SUSANNE.

Yes, if you still love me.

FIGARO.

What do you mean?

SUSANNE.

I know what I mean. Farewell, Figaro.

She exits.

SCENE XIII.

FIGARO, *alone.*

She is still just as mischievous. It's a fault that she must be excused since she usually pleases everyone. Though it is sometimes awkward in a couple but we, poor husbands, have to pay the cost and leave the enjoyment to others.

SCENE XIV.

CHÉRUBIN, FIGARO.

FIGARO.

Well, Sir, you are of the party. You will accompany her Ladyship, and I will serve as your Courier.

CHÉRUBIN.

I would be happy if we could leave straightaway; what fills me with despair is to be forced to stay for the ceremony.

FIGARO.

Filled with despair! That is a very strong expression. Come, Sir, let us have no amorous melancholy. What is the point of being wretched. Where I see no remedy I want there to be no pain. Fanchette is a Peasant: soon she will be married to an idiot, I admit; you are making yourself miserable, when you have every reason to hope.

CHÉRUBIN.

Ah, Figaro, she is so beautiful, so attractive in her new clothes! Must she become the wife of a Peasant? Is she made for a clod of this type?

FIGARO.

Sir, let us not criticise the type, it produces good husbands, more than the Courtier model.

CHÉRUBIN.

I will not return to this Estate for a long time.

FIGARO.

All the better for his Lordship; he will profit by your absence.

CHÉRUBIN.

Do you think he has designs on Fanchette and that she will respond to them?

FIGARO.

I do not claim the latter, but his Excellency will try everything to succeed, as soon as everyone has left, and the *droit du Seigneur* will be his first line of attack.

CHÉRUBIN.

This right does not belong to him any more.

FIGARO.

I know, but, in your agreements, you have included so much generosity, that his Excellency will profit from it unreservedly.

CHÉRUBIN.

If I believed it, Mister Figaro, I would not leave; I would loudly proclaim my rights, to solemnly abolish them.

FIGARO.

No eagerness, Sir. Let us pretend to depart. Her Ladyship is aware of her husband's intentions; we will not go far, and if there is a plot, you will make yourself known, and prevent your rival's bad intentions.

CHÉRUBIN.

That is sound advice. The Count will be wrong to push things to this extremity. His conduct will guide mine.

FIGARO.

Here is that imbecile Antonio. What does he want?

SCENE XV.

FIGARO, CHÉRUBIN, ANTONIO.

ANTONIO.

Pray, would you be so kind, our nephew, to announce 'is 'onour the Judge? 'E be our son-in-the-law's god-father and 'e is come to see 'er Ladyship.

FIGARO.

See how the old Bumpkin takes me for a Lackey. Is there no one in the ante-chamber?

ANTONIO.

Gosh, no; or I would not never 'ave prayed you for it.

FIGARO.

I thank you kindly for your preference, uncle.

SCENE XVI.

FIGARO, CHÉRUBIN, ANTONIO, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON, *in his robe.*

FIGARO, *to Chérubin.*

Sir, a chaise harness is missing for us to leave together. We'll just have to bridle these three, it will be the donkey post.

BRID'OISON, *backing off and stammering, as he does throughout the length of his performance.*

What a fine reception I am offered here. It's always the...the...same. In this house one is only ever as polite as is strictly necessary.

FIGARO.

As long as it is enough, Judge, to give you your due.

BRID'OISON.

He's not bad with his compliment! He thinks I am his...his...dupe.

CHÉRUBIN.

You misheard, Judge. Figaro has a way of expressing himself....

BRID'OISON.

I understand, quite droll, isn't that it?

CHÉRUBIN.

Yes, Mister Brid'oison. I will announce you to her Ladyship, myself.

He exits.

SCENE XVII.

FIGARO, ANTONIO, NICOLAS, [BRID'OISON].

BRID'OISON.

He's a decent man, that is clear.

ANTONIO.

A deuce on the politeness of the Grand Lords that gobbles up all the gals.

NICOLAS.

Oh forsooth, when I be wed, I will not have them come and meddle with us.

BRID'OISON.

Listen, my boy, you have to behave yourself with the Great and Good, if you want to succeed.

ANTONIO.

Begad, 'e's 'ere 'as 'e comes. 'As he not 'is two eyes grown in 'is 'ead, with two good arms, enough for to work with?

BRID'OISON.

That is true.

FIGARO, *aside*.

These three imbeciles would amuse me, if I had the spare time to listen to them. Yet one can't say of them that they are three heads in the same bonnet for those three are not worthy of one.¹⁹ I must not delay further. I'll go and prepare my disguise that will allow me to appear here without being recognised.

He exits.

SCENE XVIII.

ANTONIO, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON.

BRID'OISON, *with the air of his profession, looking at Figaro leaving*.

I do not like Mister Figaro. He is an exceedingly sarcastic trifler.

ANTONIO.

I do not liken 'im neither. But what one cannot chase away, 'as got to be suffered.

BRID'OISON.

That's well said, and politeness demands it. It is what I wished to say to this young man. (*To Nicolas.*) You see, my godson, you must allow yourself to be directed by me. I want to make of you a quick-witted man despite Mister Figaro suggesting that I am just a brute. It's

¹⁹ The phrase '*trois têtes dans un bonnet*' metaphorically implies that those under the same hat share similar opinions. A '*bonnet*' has many meanings, including a mortarboard, thus the three characters above, whilst agreeing, are not worthy of even one mortarboard despite there being a judge amongst them.

easy to say; but it must be substantiated. I am far removed from a brute, and I gave my mother much more trouble than that. (*He giggles stupidly, as do Nicolas and Antonio.*)

NICOLAS.

Ah, he's so good, my godfather!

ANTONIO.

You're very funny, Judge, when you chooses to be.

BRID'OISON.

Ha, ha, not bad, not bad. Let us go and see if her Ladyship is in sight: we have been made to wait rather long.

NICOLAS.

Your robe, godfather, will make you trip. Would you like me to gather it up?

BRID'OISON.

None of that, my son, I'll no longer look like a Judge.

ANTONIO.

Gosh, is yer knowledge in yer robe, Mister Brid'oison?

BRID'OISON.

Not entirely.

ANTONIO.

But a tiny bit. It's the same with the Bailiff, my old mate. 'E didn't know more than I, but since 'e's donned that frippery of a black coat, 'e's become such a savant that we don't dare to speak to 'im but with respect.

SCENE XIX.

ANTONIO, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON, LA FLEUR.

LA FLEUR, *to Brid'oison.*

Her Ladyship informs the Judge that he may enter.

He exits.

SCENE XX.

ANTONIO, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON.

BRID'OISON.

That young man kept his word, he is honest. (*To Nicolas.*) Remember to present yourself properly, and don't appear like a simpleton. Make it clear I'm your godfather.

NICOLAS.

Ah, leave it to me, I'll be imitating you all right.

BRID'OISON.

Excellent!

ANTONIO.

Come, let us 'urry along. Go in front, Judge, I owes you the 'onour.

NICOLAS.

I owe it to you too, our father-in-the-law.

Brid'oison goes first, followed by Antonio; at that moment the door at the back of the stage opens, making the Judge step backwards, falling on Antonio.

SCENE XXI.

ANTONIO, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON, LA FLEUR.

LA FLEUR, *to Brid'oison.*

Here comes her Ladyship.

SCENE XXII.

THE SAME, CHÉRUBIN, THE COUNTESS, FIGARO, SUSANNE, *giving her hand to FANCHETTE*, PEASANTS.

ANTONIO, *to Brid'oison.*

Lucky for you, Judge, that I found myself right behind or else you'd 'ave fallen like a ninny.

BRID'OISON, *stung.*

Ninny yourself! Gracious, the Peasant!

FIGARO, *taking Antonio's head to push it towards Brid'oison.*

Embrace your friend. You have exchanged truths. I'm very fond of this openness. Quick-witted men are more chary between themselves, but they are no less opinionated for all that.

BRID'OISON, *stammering*.

Do you know, my friend that you...you understand me.

FIGARO.

Perfectly; but devil take me if I comprehend you.

CHÉRUBIN, *aside*.

I am in torment.

FIGARO, *whispering to Chérubin*.

Courage, ods bobs, courage; no human frailty. Remember that life is packed with misery. Everything must be borne philosophically.

FANCHETTE, *looking at Chérubin, and sighing*.

What a terrible day for me! Ah, if he could read the depth of my heart....

THE COUNTESS.

Are you crying, dear child?

ANTONIO.

Yer Ladyship is too kind to pay attention to the tears of this flaunty miss! Has one ever seen a bride laugh on her wedding day? It's quite another story the day after. Gosh, she's wide awake!

BRID'OISON.

And the husband quite dim.

FIGARO.

Quite often; but our man is not so stupid on this occasion.

THE COUNTESS.

My dear Fanchette, what is the cause of your sorrow? Open your heart to me, my child.

FANCHETTE.

Forgive me, Madame. No, I have nothing to say. Believe....

SUSANNE.

Such obstinacy!

CHÉRUBIN, *aside*.

If only I could abandon everything I stand for! The state I am in is too violent, I must leave. (*To the Countess.*) Suffer, cousin, that I go ahead of you to meet your relative.

THE COUNTESS.

We will leave straight away. The contract must be signed.

CHÉRUBIN.

Allow me to be excused. I have forgotten something and am obliged to leave you. I will see if all is ready.

He exits.

SCENE XXIII.

ANTONIO, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON, LA FLEUR, THE COUNTESS, FIGARO, SUSANNE,
FANCHETTE, PEASANTS.

THE COUNTESS.

Chérubin is quite changed these days. He must have a secret sorrow, the cause of which is unknown to me.

ANTONIO.

I can guess at it well enough.

BRID'OISON.

If you know it, don't make us languish. I take an interest in him, he's a handsome bachelor; he knows his place; he minds his P's and Q's.

FIGARO.

What do you want to know? The Great and Good are like pretty women: they are like dreamers.

SUSANNE.

You are unbearable, always joking.

FIGARO.

Should I not keep my character? Without it you would all be as sad as Carthusians. But I see his Lordship with the Notary.

SCENE XXIV.

THE SAME, THE COUNT, A NOTARY.

THE COUNTESS.

Have you seen Chérubin, Sir?

THE COUNT.

He is already on horseback, and charged me to apologise to you on his behalf. He is going to prepare horses for you at the post.

FIGARO.

Everyone should be in their place. I was supposed to be riding the post horse.

BRID'OISON.

That is my opinion.

BASILE *cries out from the wings.*

SCENE XXV.

ANTONIO, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON, LA FLEUR, THE COUNTESS, FIGARO, SUSANNE, FANCHETTE, THE COUNT, THE NOTARY, BASILE, PEASANTS.

BASILE.

It's dreadful, it's abominable. He recognised me perfectly well, and my coat is black enough to be seen from afar.

FIGARO, *aside.*

Here's an admirable turn from the Page. He wasn't angry with his suit but rather with his shoulders. (*Aloud.*) What is it, our former singing Teacher? What's new?

BASILE.

The erstwhile Page, who pretends he took me for a Postilion. I was in a corner of the stables and, on the pretext that his horse wasn't saddled...

FIGARO.

He bridled you instead.²⁰

BRID'OISON.

Hark at him! Bridle a man!

BASILE, *rubbing his shoulders.*

He whipped me a hundred times: he redoubled his efforts however much I cried out that I was Basile the Organist.

²⁰ Figaro addresses Basile using the familiar 'tu' in this scene.

FIGARO.

Did he recognise you, in the end?

BASILE.

Yes, once his whip was broken.

FIGARO.

That is not his fault.

BRID'OISON.

I totally agree; he is too honest for that.

BASILE.

He then came and apologised a million times.

BRID'OISON.

I was sure of it.

FIGARO, *aside*.

How fate sometimes punishes a rascal! Ah! If one day I could grab hold of him, what I'd give him!

SUSANNE.

Here you are at the heart of things, my friend.

FIGARO.

If I had found myself there, the folly would not have been over so soon, I can assure you.

SUSANNE.

Oh! I will trust in your zealousness.

FIGARO.

It's just that I find there is nothing sweeter than to pay a villain his due: but I'll acquit myself one day.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

I don't pity Basile, but I can see Chérubin's motive. (*Aloud*.) Let us finish, sign the contract, Countess.

THE NOTARY.

Here. (*The Count, Countess and Brid'oison sign.*)

THE NOTARY.

Where is the father?

ANTONIO.

Good grief, can you not see me?

THE NOTARY.

Then sign.

ANTONIO.

Are you's aware that I can neither read nor write?

FIGARO.

There's no great harm in that for a maker of salads: but for a maker of Comedies, it's a great misfortune.

THE COUNT.

An Author who can neither read, nor write! Where have you found such a thing!

FIGARO.

Firstly you must know that this Author is a woman. She has done me the honour of staging me two or three times. One cannot say that what she does is absolutely bad, one must commend her for her feeble productions, since she creates them with an untutored mind.

BRID'OISON.

How can she do that if she lacks the means to put her ideas down on paper?

FIGARO.

Judge, she could teach you many things that are still unknown to you. Like their Lordships, she uses Secretaries.

THE COUNT.

Does she not also have a hack writing them for her?

FIGARO.

No, and that is how she differs from their Lordships. She frequently asks for advice but always ends up holding on to her own ideas. One is convinced of this on reading her works.

THE COUNT.

Let us leave this conversation where it is, Mister Figaro, though it fascinates you. Authors frequently lose sight of what is essential, by paying attention to that which is unnecessary. (*To the Notary.*) I will sign for Antonio.

He signs, as do Nicolas and Fanchette. Six young girls bring a bouquet and a garland. Fanchette kneels, two young girls sing a popular duo, whilst the crown is placed on the head of the Bride; the Count and Countess raise her, each taking a hand, and exit with her, everyone else follows.

End of the second Act.

ACT III.

The set is changed and represents an enclosed park, with two huts on the sides. Drums and music can be heard. The wedding party arrives, Basile at its head with his guitar; Nicolas and Antonio hold Fanchette arm in arm; Brid'oison follows them, as does a multitude of villagers.

FIRST SCENE.

BASILE, NICOLAS, FANCHETTE, ANTONIO, BRID'OISON, PEASANTS.

Nicolas and Fanchette dance a minuet, each partnered by a villager.

BRID'OISON, *to Fanchette.*

I should dance a minuet too, and you, Mademoiselle, should do me the honour.

FANCHETTE.

Monsieur, I could ask for nothing better.

BRID'OISON.

Marvellous. *He takes her hand, the orchestra plays the opening of Rose and Colas: Ah, how he will come to it. He approaches the musicians and says: But, Gentlemen, that's not it. Would you have the good grace to listen to the tune I am about to sing to you; you may then play it.*

He sings the oldest, most baroque, air. The orchestra executes it, while he and Fanchette dance the Minuet; he then goes and sits with her at the door of one of the huts, where there are two chairs and some lighted candles. All these ceremonies make Antonio impatient so he leaves.

SCENE II.

BASILE, NICOLAS, FANCHETTE, BRID'OISON, FIGARO *disguised as a balladeer, holding a guitar*, PEASANTS.

BRID'OISON, *to Basile.*

Why is this cabinet lit up, Mister Organist?

BASILE.

Judge, you know his Lordship's rights. He must interview the Fiancée.

FIGARO, *aside, having approached to listen to them.*

The scoundrel! I wasn't wrong. An old fox, like me, sees things a long way off. No one is aware of our return; I came ahead, and left everyone else not far off. To avoid preparations, the Duke wanted to surprise Count Almaviva, but it is his Excellency who will be much more surprised by their presence. (*Looking at Basile who is gesticulating wildly, while whispering to Brid'oison.*) Look at his rigmarole! He's trying to convert the Judge, and the fool will approve everything. *He moves closer.*

BRID'OISON, *to Basile.*

That's true, and as one says, to every Lord all honour. If the bride did not conform to the Law, the marriage would not be consummated and it could be broken.

BASILE.

I am convinced that his Lordship's intentions are good, and that the advice he will give the bride will allow her to prosper in her family. It is up to you, Judge, to alert her to her duty.

BRID'OISON.

Yes, that is my concern.

FIGARO, *aside.*

The villain! If he were to move away from here a bit, given my costume, I could heap abuse on his shoulders.

BRID'OISON, *getting up.*

Come here, Fanchette.

FANCHETTE, *also getting up.*

What is it, Judge?

BRID'OISON.

My dear child, we must prove your submission to, and respect for, your father and your future spouse.

BASILE.

And in particular, his Lordship.

FANCHETTE.

I know what I owe all three of them.

BRID'OISON.

Very good! Thus, my lovely child, his Lordship will be very pleased with you tonight.

FANCHETTE.

Tonight! What does that mean, Judge?

BRID'OISON, *laughing*.

It means that you will pass the night chatting with his Lordship. It is the law of.....It is the right.....

FANCHETTE, *in a fury*.

What, his Lordship could subject me to this injurious right! I will never consent to it.

BRID'OISON.

The marriage will be worthless.

FANCHETTE, *aside*.

Ah! Thank goodness, I can breathe again. (*Aloud*.) You may make my intentions known to his Lordship. I will, straight away, go and find my father: he will approve of my resolution.

She exits spiritedly; the Peasants follow her.

SCENE III.

BASILE, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON, FIGARO.

Nicolas approaches Brid'oison and whispers to him.

FIGARO, *aside*.

The poor little one, she seems thrilled by the menaces she faces! Assuredly she is not very interested in the validity of this marriage.

NICOLAS, *to Brid'oison*.

The Fiancée is running away without saying a word to me! What does that mean, our godfather?

BRID'OISON.

It means that your marriage will not take place.

NICOLAS.

And why not?

BASILE.

There is a remedy.

BRID'OISON.

I can't see one. To refuse the law! Am I a paper Magistrate?

FIGARO, *aside*.

No doubt, and one could add, perfectly unique.

BRID'OISON.

To refuse the law! I can't believe it.

BASILE, *noticing Figaro*.

Judge, what does this man want?

BRID'OISON.

He has been watching me with a certain enjoyment for a long time. (*To Figaro.*) Come closer, my friend.

FIGARO, *aside*.

Let me create an unknown language. (*Aloud.*) Hospé hal, lidi cirici, cara maladida impogod pospodogo.

BRID'OISON, *backing off in fear*.

What is this language, Mister Basile? It is neither Latin nor Spanish.

BASILE.

It must be Arabic. (*To Figaro.*) Can you not speak French?

FIGARO.

In yerli pla nigoudouil fripoui! Kéfaco. (*Aside.*) It's time for me to leave. Ah! if I could corner this rascal Basile in some out of the way place. (*He goes off dancing.*) Cara miladida, inferni pla in pla bêta jugea, bêta jugea.

He exits.

SCENE IV.

BASILE, NICOLAS, BRID'OISON.

BASILE, *to Brid'oison.*

What do you think of this man, Judge? What a tooth-drawer.

BRID'OISON.

You have guessed. He speaks in Charlatan. Doesn't he also sell songs?

BASILE.

I think so, yes. Do you not find that he closely resembles that impertinent Figaro?

BRID'OISON.

Oh, not so, not so! The other one speaks well, and this one could not utter one word. Bêta jugea, pospolo. I could never learn to pronounce this devilish language. He amused me though. Call him back.

BASILE.

At your service, Judge: meanwhile, try and exhort Nicolas to convince his spouse.

He exits.

SCENE V.

NICOLAS, BRID'OISON.

BRID'OISON.

Really this stranger is most singular. There are people like this who roam the world, and who lead strange lives. Do you remember, Godson, all that he said?

NICOLAS.

Ah! I opened up my ears good and proper, but comprehended nothing of his jargon. We do not speak so where we come from.

BASILE, *crying out from the wings.*

Help, help; I'm being killed. Judge, Nicolas, save me!

BRID'OISON, *turning.*

What does it mean? (*To Nicolas.*) Do not leave me, my boy. There is always trouble in this house. That man is being murdered.

SCENE VI.

NICOLAS, BRID'OISON, BASILE.

BASILE, *running in quite alarmed.*

Save me, save me.

NICOLAS, *at the back of the stage.*

What is wrong, Mister Basile?

BASILE.

That wretched Podogo rained blows on me with his stick.

BRID'OISON.

Oh, oh! Why? What did you do to him?

BASILE.

Me, nothing. I was telling him to come back to us; he took me by the hand, and rearranged me.

BRID'OISON.

In a good way, isn't that it?

BASILE.

It hardly feels like it. Then he ran off, immediately; but I'd recognise him easily enough.

BRID'OISON.

Do you think so?

BASILE.

Here is his Lordship.

SCENE VII.

NICOLAS, BRID'OISON, BASILE, THE COUNT.

THE COUNT.

What have you done, Basile? I have just come across all the village gathered around Fanchette, and that imbecile Antonio, who is threatening to no longer be my gardener.

BASILE.

Your Excellency must punish his impertinence by validating your rights and your authority.

BRID'OISON, *to the Count.*

You have, your Lordship, every power over the daughter and father. Your orders must be executed.

NICOLAS.

But, godfather, I am Fanchette's master. It is only I that has all power over her.

BRID'OISON, *angrily.*

After his Lordship. Do you understand, little chap? Silence.

THE COUNT, *aside.*

Let me feign and support what I suggested earlier. (*To Basile, gesturing at him.*) Basile, you know my intentions, and, despite Cherubin's designs....

BASILE, *without paying attention to the Count's signs.*

Yes, your Lordship, you have reasons to interview the bride and make known to her all the traps of that dangerous Page.

THE COUNT.

Basile, you do not know of what you speak. It is not I that seeks to instruct the bride. You know this very well.

BASILE, *aside.*

Ah, ah, this is new.

THE COUNT, *dissimulating to Brid'oison.*

You are unaware, Judge, that I sold my Estate to Chérubin. In our arrangements I merely kept for myself the usufruct. It is the Marquis who claims the rights that I had abolished.

BASILE, *surprised.*

Oh, oh!

BRID'OISON.

I was unaware of it; he is master of this law, and I feel his understanding augurs well.

THE COUNT.

In two words I will explain. Chérubin has pretended to leave in order to be in this cabinet tonight. He has charged Basile to bring him the bride; perhaps his intentions are good:

Judge, his orders must be executed. (*To Basile, holding his sleeve.*) Do you not understand me?

BASILE.

Forgive me, Sir. (*Aside.*) Devil take me if I can grasp it.

NICOLAS.

Will I not be with her?

BRID'OISON.

You are not needed. You must be circumspect and respect the wishes of the Great and Good.

NICOLAS.

Bitch of a wish! What's more, it makes me angry. For example, I fear the Page has bad intentions. He's known to be quite a threat to young girls.

BRID'OISON, *angrily*.

In faith, as a Judge, I think he's mutineering. I'll make you feel my influence, if you don't stop now. See the little chap; it wants to reason on a subject it knows nothing about. I'll teach you....do you hear me? Eh, eh! (*He shakes his head.*)

THE COUNT.

Rest assured, Nicolas; I will hide in a corner, I'll see everything. (*To Brid'oison.*) Go, then, Judge, and you too Nicolas, to reassure the bride, by telling her that Chérubin wants to validate his rights, but be careful not to mention that I will be hidden there; just point out to her that the law imposes the strictest obedience upon her.

BRID'OISON.

Rely on me, Count. I will rebuke her in my own way which will ensure her submission.

He exits with Nicolas.

SCENE VIII.

BASILE, THE COUNT.

THE COUNT.

Well! Mister Basile, what to you say to all of that?

BASILE.

I glimpse your plans, and that you wish to take Chérubin's place. You are convinced that Fanchette will not refuse this rendezvous: but I foresee problems too.

THE COUNT.

As usual you find the slightest thing a problem, and your only known method for overcoming difficulties is the weight of gold: but, on this occasion, there is no need for it.

BASILE.

Forgive me, Sir, money is always necessary.

THE COUNT.

Go and join the Judge, try and persuade Fanchette. Besides, I am doing this through idle curiosity, to find out her true feelings for Chérubin.

BASILE.

I will second your designs: night is falling, all is in your favour.

THE COUNT.

Yes, but be circumspect. Blow the candles out when she arrives.

Basile exits.

SCENE IX.

THE COUNT, *alone.*

Fanchette does not like me. If Chérubin were in my place, he would gain more from the rendezvous. What will I do? If this adventure cannot remain hidden, I will be lost in the estimation of my wife, and the Duke and Duchess. I feel in the depth of my soul a sense of fear that I cannot fight off. I love and am respectful at one and the same time. I just want to see into Fanchette's heart; if she does not love me, I will respect her innocence. I hear a noise. She hesitates to advance. Let me hide.

He enters the cabinet.

SCENE X.

BASILE, BRID'OISON, FANCHETTE, ANTONIO, NICOLAS.

ANTONIO.

Deuce, Judge, all these manners don't suit us at all, I 'ave no more love for this 'ere law of 'is Lordship nor the Page become Marquis. I've no mind 'e speaks to our gall, but in my presence. (To *Nicolas.*) Isn't that so, our son-in-the-law.

NICOLAS.

That's well said, our father-in-the-law, and I understands it same as you.

BRID'OISON, *backing off*.

What are these two imbeciles about. I order you, by my power, by my position, to conform to the laws to which humans are bound, under pain of death for the least resistance on your part.

ANTONIO.

Ah! That's another matter. I've no mind to be 'ung for our gall's virtue. She's big enough to know 'ow to look after 'erself.

FANCHETTE.

Do not fear, father, nor you either, Nicolas. I can answer for the Marquis, his intentions are pure. (*Aside.*) That is what I shall find out, or overpower him with my fury.

BRID'OISON.

Madame, we will leave you on your own. Follow me, you others.

Basile extinguishes the candles, and they go out.

SCENE XI.

FANCHETTE, THE COUNT.

FANCHETTE, *thinking she is alone*.

Ah, I fear nothing. How, Chérubin, could you be guilty of such a dark plot? So you want to force me to hate you, to despise you! Despise him! Can he cease being estimable? Alas, he is coming to bid me his last farewells. As much as I was gripped with horror just at the idea of finding myself alone with the Count, an equally invincible partiality leads me to Chérubin. I am so weak! (*Firmly.*) I must overcome this weakness by fleeing a meeting that would make us both more pitiful.

She goes to leave.

THE COUNT, *holding her back and disguising his voice*.

Fanchette, you're running away from me.

FANCHETTE.

Heavens! It's dark now. Ah! I did not recognise you, Chérubin.

THE COUNT.

Fanchette, you must forgive me. The truest and most respectable passion must justify me in your eyes.

FANCHETTE.

No, I must abhor you. I see that you flattered yourself I would be dazzled by your rank, and that a poor peasant could not resist a great Lord. I am just a village girl but understand that I have feelings that are too noble to respond to your culpable desires. I could love you whilst I believed you to be honest, but I see that your virtue was nothing but a feint to seduce me, and that you are a man as despicable as the Count.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

What a declaration she has just made me! (*Aloud, kneeling.*) Let me be forgiven, or die in front of you.

FANCHETTE.

Yes, I grant it, if you can prove to me that your sentiments have lost none of their purity.

THE COUNT, *standing up*.

Have no doubts, lovely Fanchette. (*A distant tumult can be heard.*) But what can I hear. What a noise!....Fanchette, follow me. I am the Count himself.

FANCHETTE, *surprised*.

Oh God! Can it be?....What, Sir, you dared use this horrible stratagem! You knew my feelings. Believe me, they will never lead me away from duty. I am going to my husband.... (*The noise redoubles.*)

BASILE, *behind the Stage*.

The Duchess, is arriving. Do you hear, Sir?

COUNT.

Come, Fanchette; enter this cabinet, while we wait for them to cross the park. I can hear carriages, I can see torches. Hide yourself, do not fear.

FANCHETTE.

Why should I hide myself? Innocence has nothing to fear.

SCENE XII.

FANCHETTE, THE COUNT, BASILE, CHÉRUBIN, *sword in hand*, BRID'OISON, FIGARO, NICOLAS, ANTONIO, SEVERAL SERVANTS *holding lit torches*.

BASILE, *to Chérubin and Figaro*.

His Lordship is in the Chateau, this is not the path that leads to it.

THE COUNT, *pulling Fanchette by the arm*.

Go inside, I say, for your sake and mine.

CHÉRUBIN, *in a fury, pointing his sword at Basile's chest.*

Villain, if you continue to bar the path I will run you through.

BASILE, *falling in fright.*

Sir, I beg your pardon.

CHÉRUBIN, *noticing Fanchette, runs towards her.*

Ah, my dearest cousin!

THE COUNT.

His cousin!...What's that I hear?

FANCHETTE.

Ah, Chérubin!

FIGARO, *treading on Basile's body, who then gets up.*

There's an agreeable bridge to cross.

CHÉRUBIN, *throwing himself at Fanchette's feet.*

Yes, we will be united for life; prejudice will not be able to oppose our happiness. Ah, my soul is overwhelmed by the weight of its joy.

FANCHETTE *helps him up.*

NICOLAS.

Well look at all that wooing he's doing to our wife right in front of us. Zounds.

He wants to run to Chérubin's side.

FIGARO, *stopping him.*

Your wife, poor fool! You can do without her this time.

BRID'OISON.

All these people have their heads turned.

ANTONIO.

What the devil do all this mean?

FIGARO.

It means that Fanchette is not your daughter.

BRID'OISON.

How he goes about it! He takes a wife from her husband, a daughter from her father; he'll want to un-baptise me, as well, me. Ah, ah, ah! They're all unbelievable in this house.

THE COUNT, *to Chérubin.*

Explain yourself, Marquis.

CHÉRUBIN.

Yes, Sir, You know of the Duke Don Fernand's secret marriage.

BRID'OISON.

Ah, I remember that adventure. There was a child of that marriage which was entrusted to its nursemaid. I drew up the documents. It was, I believe, a little girl who had a mark on her ear.

CHÉRUBIN.

That little girl is Fanchette.

FIGARO.

Just like me, I also bear a mark.

ANTONIO.

There're all the rage, these marks, but whatever is said, Fanchette is our daughter.

FANCHETTE.

Ah, Chérubin! Can it be?...You're not misleading me? I daren't give in to my joy. But no, you could not force me into a wrong that would be a torment once I recognised it. My birth must be as you describe it; my feelings tell me so, too exalted for a village girl, and actually in their place. Ah, Chérubin, Count, let us all run; let me hold in my arms the Authors of my days. Be consoled, Antonio, you will always be my father.

NICOLAS.

And I'll also be your husband.

BRID'OISON.

It doesn't look like it; but console yourself, my boy, I will marry you to a girl whose father and mother will be sure and certain.

ANTONIO.

I be no longer 'er father, so be it, but I wants proof.

FIGARO.

What did you do with that box that you wife, Mathurine, told you to open only when there was question of Fanchette getting married?

ANTONIO.

I 'aven't touched it.

FIGARO.

You will find, in that box, the true death certificate of your actual daughter Fanchette, and the deeds of Mademoiselle Don Fernand, who is here!

ANTONIO.

I'll be goin' to see all that. I'll be runnin' to fetch it.

He exits.

SCENE XIII.

FANCHETTE, THE COUNT, BASILE, CHÉRUBIN, BRID'OISON, FIGARO, NICOLAS,
SEVERAL SERVANTS.

THE COUNT, *to Chérubin.*

Marquis, as things stand, I owe you an explanation. My conduct towards the Mademoiselle may have given you cause for suspicion but she will be able to acquit me. I only wished to discover her true sentiments; I respected her love as soon as I could be sure of it. Rejoice in a heart that belongs to you.

FANCHETTE, *to Chérubin, smiling.*

Count.

THE COUNT.

I could conceive a desire to please you, without offending you.

CHÉRUBIN.

I will trust in the opinion I have of your consideration in these proceedings. Allow me, Sir, to embrace you, and let us be united, as a happy family.

THE COUNT.

I agree with all my heart.

FIGARO, *aside*.

What an effort! The good Iscariot!²¹ But here are the Ladies.

SCENE XIV.

FANCHETTE, THE COUNT, BASILE, CHÉRUBIN, BRID'OISON, FIGARO, NICOLAS,
SUSANNE, THE COUNTESS, THE DUKE, THE DUCHESS, SEVERAL SERVANTS.

THE DUKE, *to Fanchette*.

Dear child, come and embrace your father.

THE DUCHESS.

Dear pledge of our tenderness.

FANCHETTE.

What, am I holding in my arms those who gave me life! I am the fruit of your love, so long unhappy. I see your tears flow; let me hold in my bosom these precious drops; let them mingle with my own. They are tears of joy that no pleasure can equal in sweetness.

THE COUNTESS.

My dear cousin!

SUSANNE.

You are no longer mine.

FANCHETTE.

Yes I am, my dear Susanne, always.

BRID'OISON.

I am crying too. At first it seems that all these people are mad, and I end up crying at all their adventures.

THE DUKE.

But I believe this is Mister Brid'oison.

BRID'OISON.

There is something in it, Sir, unless you wish me to be no more.

THE DUKE.

²¹ In French, as in English, it is more common to use 'Judas' than 'Iscariot' when naming a betrayer.

Forgive me, Judge, if I did not recognise you earlier. I have not forgotten that I am beholden to you, and I meet you again with great pleasure. You will be useful to us in these circumstances.

SCENE XV, the last.

FANCHETTE, THE COUNT, BASILE, CHÉRUBIN, BRID'OISON, FIGARO, NICOLAS, SUSANNE, THE COUNTESS, THE DUKE, THE DUCHESS, ANTONIO *carrying a box*, SEVERAL SERVANTS AND PEASANTS.

ANTONIO.

I've not opened it: let's see what's in it.

FIGARO.

That will not take long. (*Opening the box.*) Here, firstly, is the true Fanchette's death certificate. Here are your documents, Mister Brid'oison, of which the Duke has the copy. These articles of jewellery, diamonds and gold are more interesting.

BASILE.

And gold!

FIGARO, *looking at him.*

Yes, gold. That tempts you and gets you out of your lethargy.²²

FANCHETTE, *to the Duke and Duchess.*

Dear and respectable Authors of my days; you whom I have not had the joy of knowing until this moment, may your daughter dare to ask for your permission to dispose of these effects?

THE DUCHESS.

They are yours, my dear daughter, and you can dispose of them as you wish.

FANCHETTE.

Well then, I make a gift of them to my father Antonio.

ANTONIO.

Gosh, she is kind! I loves 'er even more though I only be 'er milk-father.

BASILE.

I'd love to be in his place. I have only received blows.

²² At this point Figaro uses 'vous' to address Basile, later on in the scene he reverts to 'tu'.

NICOLAS.

And me, I'm quite dashed.

FIGARO, *to Basile, laughing.*

Eh, do you still remember Podogo? He is at your service.

THE DUKE.

Come, let us go and take care of the happiness of these two Lovers. (*To Chérubin.*) My daughter will be happy with you, Marquis, and her felicity will readily lessen the pains that we have suffered. I must soon present her at Court.

THE COUNT.

She will be it's most beautiful ornament.

FIGARO, *to Basile.*

What do you say to all of this, our singing Teacher? You seem amazed by it.

BASILE.

I see that all is possible in this base world. All is well, says a certain axiom; I add a variation to it. All is well for those for whom all succeeds.

FIGARO.

Thus, our former singing Teacher, according to your maxim I see that you will have no more to do in this house; I suggest you philosophically cross the four corners of the world, and, if you find any of those Gentlemen amenable....listen to me, believe me you had better abandon your infamous career which has offered you, until now, only beatings.

To the Audience.

Gentlemen, it must be recognised that my marriage excited everyone's enthusiasm; several people suggested I was mad, which did not prevent them multiplying my folly. If this new production seems to have more faults than those that preceded it, please afford it your favour in honour of the sex of its Author. A woman, who treads the path of a playwright's career with no other support than her own strengths, has a right to beg your indulgence. Your eyes, accustomed to prestigious art, could they not look round for a moment to examine the activity of an imagination that has only nature as its guide?

End of the third and last Act.

VAUDEVILLE²³

²³ A similar collection of verses ends Beaumarchais' play, and includes the same Latin quote and subsequent joke.

To the same tune as la Folle Journée.

FIGARO.

First Verse.

Female Authors frequently
Satisfy their Public:
But it's never done perfectly
For the empty heads pedantic;
In their censorious cruelty
They daily heap abuses
On the Cupids and the Graces.

SUSANNE.

Second Verse.

Viva a hundred or so,
the good Doctor, beloved
of mankind, Figaro
taught and contented.
May your fiftieth go
equally well, honoured
in spirit, and good-hearted.

CHÉRUBIN.

Third Verse.

No longer now the Page
Swift to travesty for leisure:
The youthful Imp, now Sage,
Who'll always give good measure,
What matters then my form,
If I can be your treasure?
It always offers pleasure.

THE COUNT.

Fourth Verse.

If from an amiable folly
The author's worthy success
One wishes to copy,
Share her creative prowess
And talented wizardry,
Her spirit and happiness,
To gain such illustriousness.

FIGARO.

Fifth Verse.

Men of letters, our brothers,
Would be ignorant of bile,
If from the bosom of their mothers
They had sucked honey's sweet smile.
It is the milk of unknown others
Which, with heart sickening so keen,
Produces bitterness and spleen.

BASILE.

Sixth Verse.

So I go, without company
To an Isle, to live in peace,
Without any calumny
To pass my days without cease,
But, to brighten my destiny
I'll learn, among the trees,
To sing sweetly with the bees.

SUZANNE [sic].

Seventh Verse.

That a husband in alarms,
Goes a roving, with no care,
Has a wife with many charms,
He'd like to keep, I'll swear:
He'll always on his coat of arms
Bear a device triumphant
Of the moon in its crescent.

BRID'OISON.

Eighth Verse.

If I believe all I hear,
I bid adieu to my paternity,
It is not from me, I fear
That my son holds his beauty.
But the law names me his father
And, without being too bitter,
I believe it, and it's better.

FIGARO.

Ninth and last Verse.

To have wife both pretty
And wise, that's the hic;

Though my jealousy
Amuses the Public,
They cry, they pity and fear me.
But rejoice to see me happy.
Gaudeant benè nati.
[Those born well rejoice.]

BASILE.

No.
Gaudeat benè nanti.
[Those born well are rich.]

END.