

LE PHILOSOPHE CORRIGÉ OU LE COCU SUPPOSÉ

COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS AND IN PROSE

By Madame DE GOUGE [sic]

*The Philosopher Corrected, or the Supposed Cuckold*¹

A CHARACTERLESS PREFACE

To which my faithful friends will not fail to add the Epigram: It resembles its author.

I lack the advantage of being educated and, as I have mentioned before, I know nothing. Therefore I will not adopt the title of Author despite already having announced myself as such to the public with two Theatrical Plays that it has kindly welcomed. Also, unable to imitate my colleagues' talent or pride, I will take heed of modesty's voice which suits me in every way. By retaining this gentle pride, the prerogative of my sex, I pray the Reader to read my words without prejudice and to judge me likewise.

I am within reach of that terrible moment when a Writer, quite aware of their merit, trembles as the day approaches that must decide their shame or their glory. Oh awful prejudice from which the most honourable man is not exempt! The vilest of humans is feted, cherished, considered, if his work succeeds. The most honourable who fails experiences a form of dishonour, such ridicule, that even his friends abandon him; that is the fate of those who pursue a career in the Theatre. Here I am myself rising up within it at such speed that I may descend too.

Zamore and Mirza or The Fortunate Shipwreck, first test of my feeble means, received by the Comédie Française, is today the object of my fears and alarms.² I was going to submit this work to the public's Censorship before its Performance when the Comédie Française proved willing, on my behalf, to take a risk, as it does on a daily basis, with new Plays it agrees to consider.

¹ Written in 1787 this play was never performed, instead it was published in de Gouges's two volume collection of her *Oeuvres* printed in 1788. *Le Philosophe corrigé, ou le cocu supposé* is a daring exposition of societal expectations vis-à-vis marriage, adultery, female sexuality and illegitimacy. It portrays three women working together to save a marriage by using society's acceptance of intrigues and adultery to create a false scenario involving one of the women and her husband. The wife must learn to abandon timidity and enjoy her sexuality while the husband must discover that his rigid adoption of a certain philosophy has blinkered his responses to real emotions. By learning to express their own feelings they will create a trusting relationship based on love, not convention and the world will be a better place both for their offspring and the wider community. This theme of openness and equality being the ideal in relationships is one that recurs often in de Gouges's work.

² Many of de Gouges's comments and complaints put forward in this preface in fact relate to her experiences surrounding her earlier production of *Zamore and Mirza*, particularly the references in later paragraphs to Molé, the rewriting of Act 3 and the people paid to ruin its performance. An anti-slavery work it was effectively suppressed by powerful slave traders. Written in 1784, accepted for performance by the Comédie Française in 1785, the piece was published in 1788 (separately to the *Oeuvres*) and eventually performed in 1789 with a new title *L'Esclavage de Nègres, ou l'Heureux naufrage*. Following the complex system then in place at the Comédie Française, the play became the property of the theatre and could never be performed elsewhere. It was effectively taken out of circulation after three performances.

I will leave aside, for a moment, the observations that I must share with the public on this subject in order to let the motive be known that persuaded me to have printed *The Philosopher Corrected, or the Supposed Cuckold*. What times! What manners, to dare present *The Supposed Cuckold* to the light of day! *This title is appalling*, they will say, and *disgraceful when employed by a woman*. In literature a woman does not care about her sex; but decorum, the respect that I feel for women who resemble Madame de Clainville, obliges me to pray this small number, or large if one prefers for I do not want to anger anyone, to read this Play before being revolted by its title. As for prudes, I will never be able to gain their approval so for the sake of a *title*, as far as they are concerned, I am forever lost. As for men who do not believe in the virtue of women, they will wage war on me for having devised *The Supposed Cuckold*. Will they add 'if the Comédie depicts the manners of Society you must not show monsters'? But, unless I dreamt it, I assure you this story has preoccupied my imagination since the age of fifteen or sixteen. It provided the material for a renowned trial; thus I cannot be criticised for any improbability. I will cite several works and a few events of our times caused by similar wrongs.

The best Actors are those in Society. Ever since I recognised that I was born with the disposition needed for dramatic art, I have always wanted to treat this subject. No doubt I have timed this badly and have perhaps chosen the wrong moment to have it printed but I have already announced, in my feeble works, my character traits. I know that at times I have made careless mistakes but they please me and I sometimes put as much meticulous effort into creating them, to my disadvantage, as others put into the precaution of avoiding even one equivocal word.

Happy the time of Molière when manners were more refined, or at least appearances better observed! Then one could stage that which would not be allowed today and I, in my ignorance, dare to attack this absurd prejudice; but I am nature's student; I have said it, I repeat it, I owe nothing to the scholarship of men: I am my own work, and when I am writing there is only ink, paper and pens on the table. Very often I have bad secretaries who multiply the mistakes rather than correct them. These are the useful resources that ornament my works. I know that I could easily procure for myself works of all genres: that I could, at my leisure, create a resumé of all these good readings without using my own imagination but using the ideas of others; dog-ear each page, then arrange all this beautiful Hotchpotch to my advantage, if I possessed the art of plagiarism. There are almost no [original] depictions left; but so many adroit Plagiarists to make up for it! It would be very bold of me to unveil their tricks, if it were not already a truth well known; but I aspire to originality; yes, without a doubt; and it cannot be disputed since I owe it to my ignorance. It pleases me to boast of it openly and you Gentlemen, the great imitators, whose icy style chills the heart without warming the soul, spare this beloved ignorance which is my only merit, one that must promise me great indulgence for the mistakes that teem through my works and esteem for the beauty that can sometimes be found there; and do not contest the propriety of my writings. We have men of good taste, great connoisseurs, critics severe and fair to whom I give the freedom to say whether or not the stamp of natural talent is imprinted in the novelty of my subjects and the simplicity of my dialogue, which is now and then written with purity and nobility. This medley would surely not prevail if a savant, a purist, were to write my Plays for me. This injustice outrages me and I must convince the public of who I am, and what I can do. For this I must challenge a man of letters. I tremble at the choice; but the more terrifying he is, the more he gratifies my ambition. This man, since I must name him is M. C. de B–, and it will soon be apparent, as is already known, that I am not indulging in a pointless squabble with him; but I have reasons to give him preference.³ In his preface to *Eugénie* he ingeniously tells us

³ M. C.D.B. refers to the playwright Beaumarchais; de Gouges uses C.D.B., C. de B. and M. C. B. on other occasions when wanting to refer to the dramatist without actually naming him. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732 – 1799) wrote three plays around the character of a politically astute, outspoken, barber/manservant named Figaro. In the second, *La Folle Journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro*, the eponymous

that he lacked time and talent to become an author.⁴ If only I had his ignorance and his felicity! I would not then fear for my Drama that was accepted at the Comédie Française with the most tender emotion. I saw the Actors and Actresses moved to tears. M. Molé, charged with the reading, was obliged to interrupt it several times due to his sobbing; he assured me that after reading, and re-reading, it at home it always had the same effect on him. I must give him his due here; I owe to this great Comédien the felicitous changes made to my Play. He made me start my third act four times. I even want to repeat one of his sallies on this occasion, the third time that I brought him this last act he said to me after reading it: 'I haven't found your Languedoc fire there; it feels as if it's come from the icicles of the north'; my pride was stung to such a degree that truly I flew into a rage; as a result of altering, and re-altering, I had done nothing good, with all due respect to the advice of the celebrated Boileau.⁵ I entirely reworked the plan of my last act. I totally changed the dialogue, going from one extreme to the other. The Gentlemen Comédiens advised me to modify it. I will leave to the Audience the task of examining whether or not there is enough action and whether, though I have reduced it, it still moves hearts without revolting them.

Oh severe public! Oh indulgent public! Forgive my exclamations. It is to your tribunal that I submit my Drama. I had the compulsion to write; I had it too for being printed, but I don't have it when it comes to my work being performed without warning you of my fears. The woman the most wholehearted in her resolutions is today the most compliant, and offers you an example of wisdom uncommon in men, and even rarer in women. Here is the letter that I wrote to the Comédie Française to urge it to allow me to print my Play before its Performance.

GENTLEMEN,

The women who, before me, had the courage to be performed in your Theatre, afford me a terrifying example of the dangers my sex encounters in a theatrical career. Men's frequent failures there are willingly excused but a woman is not entitled to expose herself to success. I have ambition like all men do but I know how disagreeable it would be, Gentlemen, for you to charge your memories with roles that would be of no use to you. Thus I will prove to you that, once reason has conquered me, I am capable of great disinterestedness. This is the option I would like to take; I believe you will not disapprove. Before performing my play, which you were kind enough to accept, before exposing you to its limited success, I wish to intuit the public's taste by having it printed, and offering it up to the censure of Journalists. If the reading Public welcomes my Play as a script, it will inevitably welcome it on stage, and you will perform it according to the opinion that has made it acceptable. On the other hand, if it is judged to be bad, I will not make the prejudice against my sex grow, which my lack of merit would certainly justify. I lack the art of writing. I only know how to speak naturally; my imagination is my only guide. A little novelty in my objectives is my greatest merit. Not well known and a simple individual, no person of consequence to take the trouble to advise me on my work; so many reasons to fail! There, Gentlemen, are the observations that I owed you, and that I owed to myself, before having

hero's attitude towards his titled employer was so disrespectful and his own self-respect so strong that the play, considered wildly subversive, was banned for many years. When it was eventually produced in 1784 it took Europe by storm. De Gouges was so smitten by the play that she wrote a sequel in 1786 – *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin* – in homage to the original. Her intentions were entirely genuine but Beaumarchais was horrified, in part because the gesture came from an unknown woman who dared to assume she could write a drama. He consistently refused to receive de Gouges and gave her no credit for the wholehearted support she offered his campaign to secure the rights of authors.

4 Beaumarchais's five act play *Eugénie* was first performed in 1767.

5 Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636 – 1711) French poet, admirer of Molière and Racine, famed for his mordant satire and rhetoric but also for his work aimed at changing the style of French poetry. He believed that perfecting certain structures within the poetic form allowed greater freedom of expression.

my Play printed. I had to let you know in order to avoid any aggravation. I will deliver it to the printers after your response. I have the honour to be with esteem and consideration,

GENTLEMEN,

Yours, Etc.

This is what the Comédie did the very day that I was going to give my Play to the Printer. Monsieur Florence begged me to get my roles copied, by telling me that he was going to arrange for my Drama to be read.⁶ Such an offer surprised me more than can be imagined. I thought the Comédie was agreeing to the proposal I had made it, and that it was delighted to get rid of me at such a price. It was not my turn, and there were six Plays before me.⁷ What a flattering surprise it was at that moment, when Monsieur Florence added that the Comédie was offering me a turn, and that it anticipated a favourable success. May his prediction be realised! But I doubt it. Despite their care, their talent and the novelty of my subject, I fear that my Play will be condemned before it is heard. Why, I will be asked, be so decidedly fearful? Why have I seen women better educated than me fail on the French Stage? And why is there this invincible prejudice against my sex? Eh, why say, as I have heard out loud, that the Comédie Française should never perform Plays by women? Why has it already performed some successfully? And let me be asked as well, why the Italiens and the Variétés have some that give them good days?⁸ Why are cabals more formidable at the French than at any other Shows? Because the number of connoisseurs there is greater and more redoubtable. They often speak out contrary to their opinion, so consuming is the envy that renders men unjust, especially those that are of the profession. How they profit from ambiguity! I have heard Plays applauded for as much as three-quarters of the Performance, *Bravos* to shake the firmament, without knowing what is being lauded to the skies. Eh, how could one appreciate, understand the defects or beauties of a Play at its first Performance? Nonetheless it is judged, opinions are given on whether the Author is fortunate or has the hands of Figaro.⁹ Alas! This implementation

6 Nicolas-Joseph Billot de la Ferrière aka Florence (1749 – 1816) was a not very talented actor who joined the Comédie Française in 1778 having played there anonymously a year earlier; he devoted himself to running the theatre.

7 The Comédie Française had a stranglehold on serious theatre in France and generally only accepted plays from established authors. Once a play was accepted it could be shelved, unused for years, while remaining the property of the theatre and banned from performance or publication elsewhere unless specifically authorised by the Comédiens. A lengthy process involved the troupe reading and voting on the play before it could be considered for inclusion in the repertoire. Such was the theatre's reputation that authors would often forego their rights in order to see a play performed. One's place in the queue for a 'turn' or reading was of paramount importance to a playwright. In the second half of the 18th century writers became more outspoken against the system and with the Revolution authors' rights were taken more seriously. Women playwrights were almost never accepted and certainly not expected to engage with the illustrious actors and their court sponsors.

8 In 1780 the Comédie Italienne, the second theatre in Paris that had previously only been allowed to perform comic opera in Italian, was entitled to perform plays in French for the first time. It became a serious rival to the Comédie Française, a friend to authors rebuffed by the latter and keener to put on new plays than its rival. The Comédie Française might put on 5 or 6 new plays per year compared to between 35 to 40 at the Comédie Italienne; the older house however retained its cachet of being the premier theatre in France, sole home of the French classical repertoire, and the stage on which to be performed if one wanted to be taken seriously. The théâtre des Variétés-Amusantes opened in 1779, was taken over a couple of times and moved in 1784 to the Palais-Royal, and renamed Variétés du Palais-Royal. The repertoire shifted from vaudeville to more serious works and attracted a better class of performer. During the 1789 revolution break away actors from the Comédie Française i.e. Talma, Dugazon, Vestris et al. would make it their home and in 1799 it would become the definitive national theatre of France where it remains to this day, the home of the Comédie Française.

9 I have translated 'des mains à la Figaro' literally. I presume its meaning is disparaging given its use in opposition to a 'fortunate' author but have not been able to find any reference to the usage of this phrase.

makes me tremble, and if I did not fear stirring up an ants' nest, how I would love to say to this protector of [our] sex, to this Loyal knight, this second Mohammed, this famous Writer, that his protection, his pen would have been most helpful to me and especially on an occasion when it was only a question of participating in witty things, which would never have given him cause for regret. But I rivalled his talents and I became, in his eyes, a redoubtable man. No sex can withstand his ambition. I can therefore prove the contrary of what he advances, that this feeble and oppressed sex always found in him a trusty protector. Oh C. de B. I see that in you I have a redoubtable enemy but undoubtedly I will not be worthy of your anger. Is it because I am feeble that I challenge your courage, I know not; but you have had the temerity to say that I am not the author of my works, and that is the source of all my grievances against you. You have said it to several people, and even to my son whom you graciously assumed to be one of my admirers, without knowing him. I am a woman, without wealth, and I presume to emulate the honour of deserving men who have joined great glory to an honest affluence. Are women thus never permitted to escape the horrors of indigence other than by the vilest means? Oh false protector of my sex! Despite not sharing your wealth I am brave enough to offer you a charitable act. It will be equal to that of wet nurses, and will give you the chance to expose to the public's gaze your consuming desire to *commit* a good deed, which it doubted until now. Will you have the strength to imitate me? I bet one hundred *Louis*, you will put in a thousand. Comparing our two fortunes that is a most reasonable offer: I pledge therefore to write, in the presence of all Paris gathered if possible in one place, a Play on any subject suggested or one of my own invention, even if I am taken quite by surprise. The hundred *Louis*, or the loser's thousand *Louis*, will be used to marry six young girls. I'll rejoice if I can establish them with a thousand *Louis*! Such gains all at the same time! And what happiness to have convinced Monsieur C. de B. and to have taught him that one must never make pronouncements without being sure; by that means perhaps I will render myself worthy of his goodwill and we will make our peace; he can only have it at that price. It is thus indispensable that I make the public aware of my ignorance and my feeble talents. Then, convinced that I am the only author of my Plays it will offer me the esteem and the indulgence that, without too much prejudice, my originality deserves. The injustice of an infinite number of men and women who say out loud that I have several authors at my disposition revolts me. I feel an intrepid courage; my self-esteem is growing and is annoyed enough to become pride. So the reader must not be surprised by this degree of ambition, it is only founded on the imputations of the Envious.

I had therefore to challenge a man of Letters, and what better man could I choose than M... C...de B... who made it so legitimate for me? I seem to hear all those who love him, or rather those who fear him. One will say: what a fateful choice! The other: what abyss is this woman heading for? That one: this woman has no friends to show her the danger she courts. Will she be irreproachable at all the times of her life? If he cannot incriminate her he will put her to shame through ridicule, and his Epigrams which, in spite of the Public's taste have become maxims, will condemn her to an eternal opprobrium.

Oh dangerous seducer, hated, feared and revered, I am not defying the advice of the wise, nor that of prudent people, but it is you alone that I taunt, that I challenge and discredit, without allowing the fears that you inspire in general to stop me; you alone have allowed me to know a feeling I had never experienced.

As I was about to wipe out all that concerns you in this Preface, your Opera *Tarare* appears.¹⁰ The Public is both captivated and outraged by you, "*Tarare*, you say? Eh! Die of jealousy". Actually I am furious for my style is as barbaric as yours, and yet how different is our fame? 'I could die laughing' you will add, raising your shoulders, 'to see this feeble sex, this little ignoramus, measure herself against a man of my bearing, to claim the honours,

¹⁰ *Tarare* was an opera composed by Antonio Salieri (1750 – 1825) to a libretto by Beaumarchais. It was first performed in Paris in June 1787. Not well received by critics it was nonetheless very popular with audiences.

the genius and the purity of my writings. With just one word I could crush her; but I want to honour her and prove to her through my silence that I do not waste my advantages on so much mediocrity; that to cross swords with her would be to acknowledge that she has any merit. I will satisfy myself to say to her, imperiously: 'shut-up Woman and respect your Master'. Ah! With all due respect, my dear Master, in your Schoolgirl's opinion you have overstepped the limits of honesty and decency. With what bonhomie and simplicity did I not submit to you my works? You seemed to find them interesting and gave me, in writing, sincere advice that no doubt you deemed me incapable of executing. I grasped it beyond your expectations, and the resentment that you showed when reading the manuscript of *The Unexpected Marriage of Chérubin*, while insisting that it was unbearably denuded of Dramatic talent, with no order or plan, finally [stating] that it must be thrown in the fire, is fine proof of your impartiality, and the eagerness with which you always helped this feeble and unhappy sex to shine. I was indeed going to abandon this infant, to whom you gave birth, to the flames when hands more charitable than yours saved it from the conflagration. If I was ungrateful in this circumstance, you were equally hard-hearted towards it. Its glory could neither gratify your ambition nor your interests but thanks to your ruthlessness, that seeks to take over everything, have you not missed an opportunity to triumph? My *Chérubin*, protected by you, could have been played at the Théâtre Italien, and even had a place at the Comédie Française, to give your Figaro a bit of a rest for he tires himself more than he does the Public. Poor Chérubin vegetates in the Provinces, despite the substance and the age of maturity that I have given him. I cannot see him banished from the Capital without pain, while all the Theatres are flooded with anything that is connected to Figaro. True Connoisseurs have claimed that he could appear alongside him, and that is the great wrong I have done you. Ah! C... de B... Ah! C... de B... you are a true friend to women!... Allow me to point out that you are mistaken, nothing is as false as you in favour of my sex. You may find it extraordinary that a woman dares protest loudly against the falsehood but if you knew me really well it would not surprise you; you would know all the sacrifices that I have made. I can be an exception to the rule. Perhaps without prejudice on my part, and without inculpating my sex, I alone have shown myself as I was: I can boast about it since it has cost me my fortune, my repose and my reputation.¹¹ In a short time I will bring to the light of day my Novel with the portrait of my character. Misfortune to those who will not benefit from my avowals; I have never known constraint; I have never known how to be blind on my behalf, and if I do myself no favours how can I similarly treat the brutes I have met along the way.

I am not intending to address these last words directly to M... C... de B... It would be ungenerous of me to attack him in the unfortunate circumstances in which he finds himself, if I did not believe that he was able to respond to a million attacks of this kind, and if he had not directly led me to applaud his honesty, and to say all the good that a man of his genius deserves. Blessed with another way of thinking, I will admit nonetheless that no one deserves the title of Creator in the Dramatic career more than M... C... de B...; he has fashioned a style of his own that pleases, that seduces, that excites. Other times, other manners and other tastes. The Stage has often varied. It needed a new style; but creating a coherent and profound work based on puns and word play, that belongs only to the indefinable man that I am right to mistreat and whom I praise also. That is enough now, my Readers will be tired of these episodes that damage the object of my Preface; I wanted to speak about my *Philosopher Corrected, or the Supposed Cuckold* but I only have the time to recommend my *Zamore et Mirza* that is about to be performed.

Oh sensitive mothers! Run to the Play so that your maternal warmth and tears may distance the storm that threatens it. Already the serpent of jealousy is forming an army of

¹¹ [Original footnote.] French wit has a talent for distorting things, and playing on the most simple words. I need to explain myself. I believe that my conduct was correct and not damaging to my reputation, but those who are never pleased with anyone have decried me. Some have asserted that I am the most ridiculous woman; God knows on what basis.

the most redoubtable and hardened catcalls Paris can offer. It is calling to its aid all the leaders of cabals. 'My friends' it says 'tremble, fear this day. If you don't bring down this head, it will greatly endanger you. See the strength with which she attacks you; it would seem that she has on her side that powerful group, the men of Letters whose taste and enlightenment ensure the success of works they esteem; their support never equivocates because their opinion is only ever informed by justice. If this is the case she is bound to triumph; therefore we must proscribe this Work before its performance by our own means, spread the rumour all around that it is in bad taste, poison hearts with our bile, upset minds, warn them against this Drama. Let it be condemned even before the curtain rises. If one of you lacks food that day, or shoes, and has not the means to buy a ticket, I have no doubt that noble colleagues more fortunate than you, assuming there are any in your sect, will be gallant enough to give you a good supper on that particular evening; eagerness will provide everything, go, prepare yourselves, the fortunate moment is nearly upon us.' Alas, it is coming! – And I can see it. Already I imagine on hearing the first bow on the strings the signal for nose blowing then the General who raises his bull's voice shouting *Bravo* before we have begun. The curtain goes up, the Actors appear; silence, says another; the beat of callous and well paid hands is underway, a draughty breeze brings those *chft, chft, chft* accompanied by a multitude of whistles. The disconcerted Actors, speaking into the void, have no idea whether to start or stop: some 'keep going', others 'stop'. Thus is it forecast for my Play, or the fate that a certain type dare promise me; far from fearing them, I challenge their vile power. Incapable of empathy or doing good, always ungrateful towards those who do good by them, they will punish me for my generosity no doubt. Eh, who better than I can attest to this? As a matter of principle I believe that goodwill is blind. I offered it to wicked People without realising what they were, and I made cowardly enemies of them when I recognised that I had been mistaken. I am obliged to use a Secretary: this inconvenience has often led me to know men without a profession or principles. Fate has meant that some have landed on me that a man would blush to use; insensible to my good practices they have raged against me, like brigands who slit the throats of those who offered them hospitality. Grateful am I that they spared me my life! And I willingly forgive them for what they appropriated or stole from me. Ah! C... de B... if you knew them, if you were to put my success up for sale among these brigands, never would a fall such as mine have been seen before. I would even be concerned for honest Spectators, despite their numbers, that the Comédie Française would become a den on that night. But what can I do? One must know how to bear what one cannot destroy and suffer in silence. I have high hopes of honest people so maybe I will triumph over this odious cabal that rises up against me. I am distressed by it all but I can laugh about it too. A fly that bites me without my expecting it upsets me, or sends me into an unbearable rage: but, prepared to face suffering and circumstances, I am more steadfast and peaceable than the most phlegmatic man. Small setbacks distress me, great wrongs calm me and give me courage. I am full of minor defaults but I possess great virtues. Few people know me well, few are able to appreciate me. People have disagreed about me. Some see me one way, everyone judges me differently and meanwhile I am always the same; I am not the one who changes. I can only befriend truly honest individuals. I abhor false men, I detest the wicked; I run away from rogues, I chase away flatterers and one can judge from that that I am often alone. I do not bore myself, I do not fear contagion. I was made, no doubt, for society, I fled it early, I left it at the height of my youth; I was often told I was pretty; I have no idea, the fact that I spent an eternity everyday beautifying myself proves that I never believed it. Now it makes me laugh, my friends criticize the simplicity of my dealings with the world; they constantly tell me that I am not putting my talents to the fore; that once one has begun to gain a literary reputation one should not speak to everyone, that one should open one's mouth only to talk in sentences, and respect *formalities* with an important person; converse with the most refined wit, pronounce everywhere one's position, never belittle oneself in one's

writings, have the nobility of spirit to know how to show scorn. Those are erudite precepts, I accept but cannot follow them and in that I sympathise with the famous Despréaux. *I call a cat, a cat and C*** a rascal.*¹² I complain about the wicked because I do not know how else to do them harm, nor how to take my revenge in secret. I make fun of myself and others because I am naturally cheerful. I laugh at what may happen to me because I see no reason to upset myself. I am straightforward with everyone, proud towards the Great because I have never been dazzled by titles and honours. It can never be said that my words are at all pretentious, unless I am with Artists. I am always a million miles from my kind. That is the pedantry that accompanies me, and when I achieve a fame I cannot hope for, I will always keep the simplicity that was mine before becoming an Author. There, without my noticing, is half my novel. I have wanted to finish for a long time but the relentless need to speak forces me to keep on. Despite myself I allow the disposition of my sex to lead me on. Ah! Dear Reader, I see you already tremble as I take my breath but be reassured, I conclude by observing that if you see Savages in the Drama that we are going to perform, instead of Negros, it is because the Comédie has not been willing to risk this colour on the Stage; but above all it is the appalling History of Negros that I wanted to investigate. Eh! After all of what importance are the costumes or colour, if the moral purpose is fulfilled. With regard to the *Cocu supposé*, treat it as you deem best. I had to recall it to your memory.¹³ Perhaps I am making a poor choice among my manuscripts, or, to tell the truth, as it is my latest creation one can easily assume that it pleased me the most. So I deliver it to you without having reread or altered it. I would have liked to have the time to embellish it with a bit of Poetry. I happen to have some fairly reasonable couplets but to construct a Romance, duos, choruses is a task beyond me. It would take me at least ten years to finish it. Eh! How can I resign myself to it? I who lack the patience to take ten days to treat a subject! I may boast of this facility, but I accept that I fully compensate for it with the tiresome agitation that spoils my health and then forces me to rest. Pieces fitting to the subject will be adopted, if those I indicate are not suitable. I could easily have pretended to be better than I am by ordering Verses that one does or does not pay for, depending on the Poet of one's choice; but I do not want to take anything from anyone in secret: it is true that had I paid for it this precaution would have embellished my Comedy without committing myself to anyone: if some Poet or other wishes to see his genius shine in public I would be obliged if he would take charge of the Poetry if ever this play is accepted at the French or at the Italians: it would not be the first time this arrangement was seen. I think I have told the Reader all that was needed, and even all that was pointless, and of which he would have spared me, if I could have spared myself.

THE CHARACTERS¹⁴

12 Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636 – 1711) French poet, admirer of Molière and Racine, famed for his mordant satire and rhetoric, is responsible for this well-known quote though his had 'Rollet' where de Gouges has written 'C***'. Charles Rollet was a somewhat unscrupulous lawyer in Boileau's time; de Gouges is presumably referring to Caron de Beaumarchais.

13 The sentence here is 'Il a fallu me rappeler en votre mémoire.' This would translate as 'I had to be recalled to your memory' which in the context does not make much sense. If we assume the French 'me' was meant to be a 'le' then the play de Gouges is discussing becomes the thing to be recalled. As she complains about the many typos present in this work I am going to assume this is one of them. I may be wrong.

14 Generally the characters use the formal 'vous' when addressing each other except for Babet and Blaise who use the informal 'tu' when they converse. The Marquis and Marquise use 'vous' to each other until the denouement when the husband switches to 'tu' underlining the new relationship the couple will develop. The Baron and Marquis, as close male friends, use 'tu' but the Countess and Marquise always use 'vous' presumably considered more decorous in their society. People address their own personal servants using 'tu' but guests mostly use 'vous' to address the household servants apart from Blaise who is clearly seen as belonging to the lowest social order and is addressed using 'tu' by everyone. The use of 'tu' and 'vous' can be very coded and nuanced, often based on age or class differentials and implying degrees of friendship,

The MARQUIS de CLAINVILLE
The MARQUISE de CLAINVILLE
The COUNTESS de SAINT-ALBAN, young widow, friend of the Marquise.
The BARON de MONTFORD, friend of the Marquis.
THE COMMANDER, the Marquis's uncle.
MONSIEUR PINÇON, the Marquis's valet.
MADAME PINÇON, old governess.
BABET, nurserymaid and Blaise's beloved.
BLAISE, gardener and Babet's beloved.
Group of villagers.

The action takes place in one of the Marquis's estates.

ACT ONE

The set represents a park, with a small pavilion on each side.

SCENE ONE

Blaise is at the back of the stage, busy pruning an arbour.

MISTRESS PINÇON, MISTER PINÇON.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Admit, Mister Pinçon, that you are not as reasonable as your age would indicate. Your reservations are unwise.

MISTER PINÇON – Mistress Pinçon it's hardly your place to reproach me.... Yet I deserve it. I'm an idiot, a fool, who allows himself to be lead astray by his wife's fancies.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Me, fancies! Ha, ha! Mister Pinçon, you know perfectly well that I've only ever had them for you.

MISTER PINÇON – See how the minx always knows how to seduce me. But really, when do you want this comedy to end?

MISTRESS PINÇON – Eh! Mister Pinçon! It hasn't started yet. The Countess de Saint-Alban, author of this intrigue, has taken charge of the negotiation. The Marquis de Clainville will find out from her that his wife has always cherished him.

MISTER PINÇON – When all appearances are against her.

MISTRESS PINÇON – These appearances are deceiving. And all men wish to be deceived at such a price.

MISTER PINÇON – We've certainly seen extraordinary things thanks to this frivolous sex. But has excess ever been pursued to the point that it's pursued here? Three women dream up a project: they execute it discretely, and consistently keep their secret for nearly a whole year, without contradicting themselves once. I am involved in their plot; I am made

intimacy or superiority that are unavailable in modern English.

to leave the Marquis and move on to the Marquise in case I expose the mystery to my Master....

MISTRESS PINÇON – But in all of this we are not deceiving him, we're serving him.

MISTER PINÇON – But, but... Don't you see, balloon head, the unfortunate problems that could arise?¹⁵.... The Marquise was three month's pregnant when she separated from her husband, and now she's been a mother for nearly two years. The Marquis is unaware of all of this. It's even known in society that they haven't lived together for nearly two years.

MISTRESS PINÇON – But us, do we not know the opposite?

MISTER PINÇON – Yes. But once again, is that enough to save his reputation?

MISTRESS PINÇON – He is a Philosopher, and the Countess is pleased to push his Philosophy to its limits. The Marquise is more timid than ever. After the step she took she wishes her endeavour to remain unknown to her husband. As for me, my only merit is to keep the secret and though it is said that our sex is inconsequential, I want to prove the opposite.

MISTER PINÇON – It's true that no secret was ever better kept. Three women in agreement on that point! How prodigious! But is that surprising when one knows the bizarreness of the female character? It always excels when taken to extremes. In the circumstances of which we speak any other woman would have used wiles and the most seductive means to disabuse her husband. The Marquise, on the contrary, has thus far conducted herself in a manner most likely to make her seem guilty. She breastfeeds her child, a measure driven by a most praiseworthy sentiment but she is misguided in the present circumstance. Since, my Ladies, you wish to keep the secret so well, you should have persuaded the Marquise to set aside this project until the moment when the fancy took you to tell the Marquis that he was a father, without him ever having suspected it. But what will become of you? He is arriving from his regiment to spend three months on this estate: nothing will stop the bomb exploding. As for me, I already fear the shards.

MISTRESS PINÇON – My dear Mister Pinçon, serving under a military gentleman hasn't hardened you very much.

MISTER PINÇON – Eh, Mistress, let's be fair. Where is the prudent man who would not tremble in light of the dangers we're all running here, especially domestics like us. We will be accused of imposture; we will be seen as untrustworthy servants, and perhaps we will see our endeavour, as innocent as it is, lead to the most unfortunate outcomes. The Commander has let it be known that his nephew might well arrive *incognito* from his regiment and I fear that he may instruct him, not on the truth, but that which he believes it to be for, given the indifference with which he treats the Marquise, I would wager that he suspects her of infidelity towards her husband.

MISTRESS PINÇON – You are a bird of ill-omen. All this will turn out fine, Mister Pinçon; I predict it. Execute the orders that her Ladyship has given you. There is the gardener at his

¹⁵ The first balloons (built by the French 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 over Paris. Balloon-mania swept through Europe influencing fashion and spawning vast amounts of merchandise. Pinçon describes his wife's head as being 'aérostatique' which is the technical term for a hot-air balloon.

arbour, and I will go and arrange the pavilions as is customary. Today we have great company. The Baron has arrived.

MISTER PINÇON – It's true that he makes enough noise to stand in lieu of several people. But I fear that the Marquis will augment that number which would be an unfortunate setback for this busybody of a Baron.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Let's leave things to progress naturally.

MISTER PINÇON, *going to Blaise to give him orders* – Yes, naturally: when they do all they can to disguise them.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *entering one of the pavilions and exiting straight away saying* – There, all is perfectly organised: the Governess can come down with the little one. Here is her cradle. Her Ladyship can also come and rest. She has wanted to breathe the country air here for so long! All I have left to do is get the fruit picked.... I'll go myself. That will amuse me; it's been too long since I've had the pleasure. Being shut up for two months in the Château, the park seems more beautiful than ever.... (*To Mister Pinçon*) Come, Mister Pinçon.

MISTER PINÇON – I'm coming. (*They both exit.*)

SCENE II

THE MARQUIS de CLAINVILLE, *alone, giving orders in the wings.*

Go tell her Ladyship that I have arrived, put away my chaise, go. I'll enter through garden since the gate is open. (*He enters onto the stage.*) I would have preferred to rejoice in her surprise but she may not be alone, I don't want to disturb her. A husband, in similar circumstances, must prudently make a lot of noise when coming home to his wife, especially after six month's absence. (*He walks around the stage.*) Yet I am moved by sentiments that remind me of the pure and legitimate love I felt for the most respectable of women who intoxicated my heart. What wrong has she done me, or rather what wrong have I done here? I could not doubt her and yet I deceived her.... What am I saying, deceived her!.... I thought I was helping her. That timidity so appealing in a well-born person can, without stooping to indecency, familiarize itself to a husband's gentle ardour.... My happiness consisted only in finding ways to please her.... Doubtless another has forestalled me.... And I, unjust man, I could have tyrannized her heart and her inclinations so she would hate me even more, just so I could enjoy the exclusive power over her that Hymen has cruelly given me! Does this knot create happiness in Society? I doubt it.... I am a fair man with finer feelings; I could not compel a person who, while able to give me her hand, was not able to respond with her heart. Thus I left her free. Far from troubling my wife I moved away. In solitude and books I sought to erase her from my heart. This peaceable life did not suit my sensibility: my too active soul couldn't thrive without another inclination.... And you, adorable person, who pulled me from the state of inertia in which I would surely have fallen, when will I rejoice in seeing you?.... If the liaison I pursue was common knowledge I would be an object of ridicule; I would be taken for a fool.... But, why do the opinion of others matter? I rejoice, I am happy, yet my joy is not ideal. Ah! My only regret is that it ceased as soon as.... But the last letter informed me that it would not be long before I see my amiable unknown one again.... Let me go and greet my spouse.... Constraint doesn't suited me.... (*He goes as if to exit and notices Blaise.*) There's my

gardener: let me find out through him what people think of me at the Château. He' funny, if a bit simple: he'll amuse me for a while.... Hello, Blaise, come and talk to me.

SCENE III

THE MARQUIS, BLAISE.

BLAISE, *eagerly* – God's Blood, yer Lordship it's as though yer've fallen from the sky. Did yer come in a balloon, like the ones I've seen already?

THE MARQUIS – No, my son; I left my chaise at the end of the avenue so as to have the pleasure of crossing the park on foot.

BLAISE – Ah! Well done, Sir. Tis better to tread softly on the earth than to crash round in a place where yer can't find so much as a branch to cling on to.

THE MARQUIS – You're right, my poor Blaise. But tell me how is her Ladyship?

BLAISE – I've not seen her since she become the mother of a sweet daughter, but they do say, in the Chateau, that she's as fit as a fiddle.

THE MARQUIS, *surprised* – Blaise, what are you saying? I don't understand.

BLAISE – Zounds! Would yer 'ave preferred it to be a boy? Oh bother me, I shouldn' 'ave let yer know.

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – What have I just heard!.... Lightening is less sudden than the blow he has just struck.... (*He considers.*) It's impossible!.... Let me gather my thoughts... (*Aloud.*) Think, Blaise, you must be wrong. You say her Ladyship....

BLAISE – 'Fore God, since I've done enough by telling yer I won't no longer 'ide from yer the truth. We'd just as rather not tell yer for we didn't want to be upsetting yer. And I should 'ave 'ad some understandin' of that as we did no celebrations like beautiful fireworks, or beautiful bangers and great rockets that shine up in the sky like stars.

THE MARQUIS – And so, what did you do? (*Aside.*) I have to shed light on this.

BLAISE – What did we do! Ah! Nothin' at all, as yer can see. We'd not even notice the baptism. The Priest came drearily without doin' 'is ceremony, and no one went into the chapel; but if it 'ad been a beautiful son I'd 'ave 'ad soon enough fine ribbons and good sugared alm.... But I'd 'ave 'ad nothin' judgin' by your looks as you don't look best pleased.

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – What a dreadful moment! (*To Blaise.*) Cheer up, Blaise: I'll do things properly and you'll be pleased that you were the first to tell me the news. That's enough, you may leave.

BLAISE, *aside, as he leaves* – I've no idea if he's tellin' the truth, but I'm pretty sure he don't look happy.

SCENE IV

THE MARQUIS, *alone, lost in the deepest thought.*

What! Wife, what! This timidity that at least suggested decency did not enable you to keep the mystery that is fitting to your position!.... She is lost and dishonours me! What shall I do? Can I show myself in my own home? Can I bear her presence? Yes: the effort is worthy of my courage. Will I use reproaches, fury? Imitate her imprudence? It's only six months since she disappeared from Paris. Her supposed indisposition is justified in the eyes of the public, and by maintaining the facade I will avoid becoming a laughing stock. I applaud myself for discovering this fateful news from a simple man who took my surprise to be other than it is. I can actually present myself to her.

SCENE V

THE MARQUIS, THE BARON de MONTFORT.

THE MARQUIS, *noticing the Baron* – What an irritating setback! The merciless Baron is here. Never mind, I'll have to tackle him. I know enough to see him coming.

THE BARON, *from the back of the stage* – Hey! So the most wished for husband has arrived. No one talks of anything but you. Everything is in chaos; your unexpected return has affected everyone.

THE MARQUIS, *dissimulating* – Ah! I'm sure of it. (*Aside.*) Does he know about my dishonour? (*To the Baron.*) So everyone is very troubled?.... Very keen.... to see me?

THE BARON – Never has the most cherished lover occasioned such a great upheaval. The dear little lady has been swooning with pleasure.

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – From shame and fear rather. (*Aloud.*) Baron, have you been here a while?

THE BARON – I arrived this morning; I only stayed two days on my estate, and knowing that Countess de Saint-Alban was with your wife I didn't want to leave these two widows being sadly bored by the serious Commander. Do you know I almost didn't leave Paris all year?

THE MARQUIS – And what motivated that, Baron? No doubt some new conquest?

THE BARON – You know, it's such a natural thing for me that I am ashamed to admit it. A coxcomb, given the surplus of my good fortune, would have boasted of it lavishly but I attribute it to my lucky star. One has a certain merit that does not go unnoticed by the fairer sex; but I am modest, and I have never studied how to make the most of my advantages.

THE MARQUIS – Dear Baron, allow my longstanding friendship to express itself frankly.

THE BARON – Speak to me freely. You can, you must.

THE MARQUIS – I find you more ridiculous than ever.

THE BARON – Ha! We've got there. Ridicule, is easily said. But you, who acts the Philosopher, answer in your turn. If your Philosophy allows you to do as you please, how can you condemn the principles of others? Is it my responsibility not to be attractive to women! You is the only one I have respected.... And the only one that I believe to be respectable....

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – The tormentor is making fun of me and enjoying my embarrassment. I won't give up despite the travesty. (*Aloud.*) What! Have you never been tempted to flirt with her? I admit I find your tactfulness edifying. I am not a husband who takes umbrage, and my wife is not the only one I believe to be free from weakness.

THE BARON – Well! I would wager that she is incapable of knowing the happiness that a wife feels when she cheats on her husband. The honour of being faithful to you is all she hopes for.

THE MARQUIS, *impatiently* – Eh! Let's abandon that ideal honour which is of no importance to me.

THE BARON – Admit, in turn, that you are really unbearable, and that you really deserve to have a wife who's a true coquette.

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – I'd be less deceived.

THE BARON – Because, in order to shake up your Philosophy, you'd have to be more convinced than most of your wife's misbehaviour; for example, if she were to give you an heir that you'd not been party to.

THE MARQUIS – Eh! Why would it matter to me, after I'm gone, who enjoys the rank or fortune that luck has given me. Nature, that reproduces itself in so many different ways, does it impose conditions? Ambition has made laws but a wise man, while respecting them, condemns them from the bottom of his soul. The real character of mankind must not be subjected to the yoke of prejudice.

THE BARON – Truly, Marquis, I admire you. How, according to your doctrines, did you resolve to take a woman?

THE MARQUIS – My reply is simple and positive. A woman is a man's companion, but man must not be the tyrant.

THE BARON – It has to be said that men are really different one to the other. Everyone complains, and each one is self-congratulatory, especially when it comes to how they see or feel things. For myself, as I do not have the pleasure of being a Philosopher and see things as ordinary people do, I would not suffer with sangfroid my wife's attentiveness to anyone but me.

THE MARQUIS – Eh! What can you be laying claim to by wanting to set yourself up as a despotic master? You would be even more deceived. Your spouse, with false caresses, would mislead you and not only would you be her dupe but you would also be dishonoured in the eyes of the public. Freedom is a surer guardian than shame. Believe me: if you ever become a husband be a peaceable one and you will be a friend to your wife.

THE BARON – Why don't you add that I should become her go-between? In truth, your precepts will gain a fortune in this century.

THE MARQUIS – At least they are more natural than our current ridiculous claims and rights over this weak and timid sex.

THE BARON – Truthfully, you speak like a husband from the Island of Tahiti. I'd like to see you perched on the summit of a mountain, preaching to all the world, if your voice could make itself heard: 'My brothers, or my fellows, leave your affairs, give up your rights; let go and take what pleases you turn and turn about: follow the rule of nature, and remember that animals are happier in their shelters, because they are free, than you are in your palaces where ambition dominates.' Meanwhile I think I noticed that they were not free from jealousy and rivalry. Will you equally condemn the instinct that drives them to devour each other? Well!... What's wrong? Can't you answer?... How pleasing that a dunce pushes your arguments to their limits.

THE MARQUIS – Yours are unanswerable and I concede, to cut short something that requires more thought. You said they were waiting for me and I have delayed answering this call for too long. Will you follow me?

SCENE VI

THE MARQUISE, THE COUNTESS. *They enter from the wings opposite those used by the Baron and the Marquis to exit.*

THE MARQUISE, *holds back the Countess who is running after the Marquis.*

THE COUNTESS, *to the Marquise* – In truth, my dear friend, I cannot fathom you. Why create such a disturbance? Since the return of your husband was announced you don't see or hear anything any more. You fly in his footsteps and yet seek to avoid him.

THE MARQUISE – Put yourself in my place. I fear him more than ever.

THE COUNTESS – Fear a husband one loves! How childish!

THE MARQUISE – But he doesn't love me! He'll never forgive the stratagem that I used to make him love me.

THE COUNTESS – This naivety is delightful! So you'd rather appear guilty in his eyes, than reveal the truth about the appearances that will lead to you losing his esteem and make him angry with you?

THE MARQUISE – Can't we wait a few more days before confessing to him?

THE COUNTESS – I consent with all my heart and I won't hide from you that I find this intrigue infinitely amusing, it's so well managed. If you wish, we could even wait until your daughter is old enough to be married, before confessing. I am convinced that his fury will not oblige you to disclose to him who the father is.

THE MARQUISE – Do you believe he'll forgive me?

THE COUNTESS – It will be a real effort. At a time when he is happier than he knows, or than he deserves, will he be able to resist being affectionate towards you once more? But what am I saying? He has never ceased loving you. He's made a new conquest, and yet it's always to you that he is bound.

THE MARQUISE – Oh my gentle friend I owe it all to you; I was going to die of despair at having lost his love. Your plan strengthened me, and even inspired me to be courageous as never before. Wearing a mask emboldened me, I'd never been like this in his presence until now, and I seduced my husband to such a degree that he respected the resolution I'd taken not to make myself known to him, until the period of trials and caution had passed. He obeyed in all ways and despite his fond farewells, when he left for his regiment, I left him in the hope that at his return I'd make myself known to him.

THE COUNTESS – For a novice you steered your barque pretty well and if you were able to forget yourself enough to deceive him, you would also have known well enough how to save yourself from this situation.

THE MARQUISE – That's precisely what I fear. I tremble at the thought of opening his eyes to the greatest proof of my love; he'll believe me capable of deceiving him one day.

THE COUNTESS – If that were to happen he'd not be distressed by it. Truthfully, I'm surprised that a Philosopher could have inspired so much love.

THE MARQUISE – But, my dear friend, when he loved me he didn't appear to be one. He was so tender-hearted!

THE COUNTESS – And when he was a lover too?

THE MARQUISE – Oh! Even more.

THE COUNTESS – I am no longer surprised that you prefer to take up with the lover again rather than the spouse. Poor Amphitryon was never so lucky: and you, without Jupiter's intervention, have at least given him a legitimate child.¹⁶

THE MARQUISE – You are having fun at my expense.

THE COUNTESS – Indeed; but the game amuses you. Let's be serious. I taught you well enough to be able to guide you, now you tell me how I must behave in my turn towards the Marquis. On the day of the party I gave in your honour you met your husband. (*She laughs.*) I can't help laughing when I speak to you. My house has been the site of your secret meetings. He believes I am my friend's confidant, he has no idea that I am yours. He comes to his estate, finds me with you, and sees a child he knows nothing about. He knows you are timid and that I am mischievous. Eh! Do you believe that our stratagem will escape his perception? Are you discounting his valet's attachment, who will not fail to reveal everything at their first meeting? Are you not afraid of our Commander's severity? He has treated you badly for quite a while. Every time he addresses you he never calls you *my niece*, always *madame*. In truth, the thought of where all this may lead makes me tremble.

¹⁶ An ancient Greek myth tells that Zeus, attracted to Amphitryon's new wife Alcmene, disguised himself as the absent husband in order to deceive her into welcoming his embraces. Amphitryon returned to find that his wife was pregnant with twins, one his own and one Zeus's. The latter was the demi-god Hercules. Molière's play based on the myth was first performed in 1668.

THE MARQUISE – The Commander’s indifference upsets me and, according to the questions he puts to Monsieur Pinçon, he’s not ready to let it go. He tells him he finds it quite astonishing that I have allowed all my family to remain in ignorance of my motherhood, and that he himself only found out this important news due to a random visit to his estate.

THE COUNTESS – Come, come, my dear friend, we must pluck up our courage and let things go their own way. If you lose the esteem of your uncle and your husband it will only be for a while. But hush, I see Blaise.

SCENE VII

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, BLAISE.

BLAISE – Yer Ladyship, they are lookin’ for yer in the Chateau and as I were with the Intendant I ran ‘ere sharpish to let yer know. The Marquis ‘as arrived and isn’t best pleased not to have found yer.

THE COUNTESS – Has he seen the child?

BLAISE – It was minded in the pavilion properly but he never even pretended to ‘ave a look at it. If it were an ‘andsome young Marquis. Ah me! ‘E would’ve eaten ‘im up with kisses.

THE MARQUISE, *sighing* – Alas! What shall I do?

THE COUNTESS – The child at least.

THE MARQUISE – Come, I must be determined!

THE COUNTESS – What an effort! In truth I find all this priceless. (*They exit.*)

SCENE VIII

BLAISE, *alone*.

I’ll be followin’ along. I’ll learn all about it, and will see at the same time Mam’zelle Babet.... Zounds but she’s nice! Like she’s so pretty when she ‘olds our little Mistress! She’ll be down soon like usual. ‘Ere’s the cradle already; let me get there before her.

End of the first Act.

ACT II

The set represents an old-fashioned drawing room.

FIRST SCENE

MISTER PINÇON, *alone*.

His Lordship will pass through this room when he visits his uncle: it's here, in spite of our too secretive women, that I'll reveal everything to him. Already everyone in the chateau is speculating on his dishonour. The indifference he showed on his arrival towards his wife and child has concerned everyone, and tongues will wag. As for the Commander, he doesn't speculate, he's convinced that his nephew and wife are not living happily together and nothing will change his mind, and the tone of his voice when he speaks to me persuades me that he believes I'm his niece's confidant and the agent of her misconduct. If he was a more amenable man I could explain things to him.... Frankly I've no idea how I'll open a conversation on this matter. I feel that if I was in his Lordship's place I would be suspicious of all conversations and confessions that could be addressed to me on this subject. So, on reflection, I'll leave it in the hands of our Ladies; it was their idea; I'm just an eye-witness and even then I haven't seen everything. I only brought her Ladyship under cover of darkness, and took her back in broad daylight and I was told that his Lordship was her nocturnal lover. Everything led me to believe it at the time, but as things are now.... I hear someone, no doubt his Lordship. Come, Pinçon, be brave; you're going to speak to a Philosopher.... Blasted setback! It's the Commander.

SCENE II

MISTER PINÇON, THE COMMANDER.

THE COMMANDER, *aside*, – I've just arranged to meet my nephew here. No doubt this vile servant has been put here to overhear our conversation. (*Aloud, to Mister Pinçon.*) What are you doing in my apartment?

MISTER PINÇON – Me Sir! (*Aside.*) I've no idea what to reply. (*Aloud.*) I was waiting for his Lordship.

THE COMMANDER – On whose behalf?

MISTER PINÇON, *aside* – I'm quite dumfounded. (*Aloud.*) I had a few little things to say to him.

THE COMMANDER – Go and wait for him in his apartment, and never again come and look for him in mine.

MISTER PINÇON, *aside* – That's too much; my honour is compromised, I'll have to say something. (*Aloud.*) Sir, you are taking me for something quite else.... I am an honest man, and her Ladyship....

THE COMMANDER, *imperiously* – You are bold indeed to enter into a conversation with me. Leave.

MISTER PINÇON, *leaving* – Pride is making him hard and cruel: what a difference between him and his nephew. (*He exits.*)

SCENE III

THE COMMANDER, *alone*.

I am no longer in any doubt about her Ladyship's behaviour; my nephew knows about it and thanks to his philosophy he'll take care to hide it but at least he can't keep anything from me. Will he be able to go against everything he said to me before he left for his regiment? Here he is. Let me dissimulate.

SCENE IV

THE COMMANDER, THE MARQUIS.

THE MARQUIS – My dear uncle, forgive me for not coming sooner. I was held up by my Intendant and household matters.

THE COMMANDER – Yes. I can imagine your house is in chaos, but you will manage all of that. Your presence here is very necessary.

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – My uncle knows: I am lost.

THE COMMANDER, *gravely* – Answer me straightforwardly Sir, without this philosophy that degrades a man when it is indecently taken to extremes. I have heard it said abroad, as you know, that you have abandoned your wife. That a secret inclination was the reason. A few days before you left for your Regiment I shared this with you. You assured me that you had not lived with her for eighteen months, that it was not your fault, and that her indifference towards you, or her distaste for marriage, had led you to respect her wishes. I come to spend time with her in the countryside. I find she is a mother. What does that signify?

THE MARQUIS – Uncle, I would always be straightforward with you. My interests are as dear to you as your own. My wife has deceived me.

THE COMMANDER – And you bear it calmly! You even put up with having this child in your home!

THE MARQUIS – Uncle, I am far from excusing her. I condemn her weakness as you do, but her imprudence is reprehensible....

THE COMMANDER, *imitating him* – *Her imprudence is reprehensible?* Say rather that her impudence deserves the severest punishment. You should forever banish her from your sight and get her locked up for life in the depth of a cloister.

THE MARQUIS – !! Uncle? Create such a scene? Heaven preserve me! She has lost my esteem but I cannot resolve myself to see her lose that of the Public. You feel as I do the importance of such a step. Your indignation regarding her wrong makes you so severe but when you think about what we should do you will approve of my decision.

THE COMMANDER, *angrily* – But as soon as you arrive all of Paris will know, if it doesn't already. Is it not already well known that you have not lived with her for a very long time? You yourself have said it openly.

THE MARQUIS – That was a mistake, and without this imprudence you too, uncle, would be unaware of her behaviour.

THE COMMANDER – How admirable: all you have to do it is to endorse her and do worse yourself, if that were possible. Go to! Your wife understood you perfectly. With any other she would have behaved quite differently. She gives you a child that will bear your name, enjoy your wealth.... Can you bear this outrage and put up with this disgrace! No, it will not be. I'll declare this child to be adulterous and have you declared insane; I will uphold the qualities of a wise man.

THE MARQUIS, *calmly* – Uncle, you are angry and you cannot uphold these qualities unless you are calm. That my indifference should appear excessive to you is understandable but realise that making a ruckus and creating a scene might lead me to destroy what is done. By this means, on the contrary, I would be making my wife's misconduct a certainty along with my dishonour. I think that actually if I appear to be reunited with her it will be very easy to suggest that this rapprochement was made before I left for my Regiment.

THE COMMANDER, *outraged* – I will not dishonour myself so far as to demean myself by pretending. The only line I can take, is to never see you again.

THE MARQUIS – Uncle.

THE COMMANDER – Leave me.

THE MARQUIS – Please, restrain yourself, here is the Countess.

THE COMMANDER – I am leaving, so she may not witness my rage. (*He exits, brusquely bowing to the Countess.*)

SCENE V

THE COUNTESS, THE MARQUIS.

THE COUNTESS – What's wrong with the dear Commander? He seems most agitated. (*With irony.*) But then he's not a Philosopher.

THE MARQUIS – So you think that this characteristic makes one quite indifferent to life's events?

THE COUNTESS – I think it so strongly that I would rather be a quadruped than a philosophical animal.

THE MARQUIS – You are too kind.

THE COUNTESS – I say what I think, and it still will not make you angry.

THE MARQUIS – And why would I be angry? Anything that comes out of such a pretty mouth cannot offend a gallant man.

THE COUNTESS – I cannot imagine, my dear Marquis, how you can have swayed your wife for so long. The poor child, since you were united three years ago, has never believed that there could exist a man more pleasing than her husband.

THE MARQUIS – She is a novice, so timid.... That at least is considered a virtue.

THE COUNTESS, *aside* – I wanted to push him to the edge: it will be apparent that he is the one confounding me. (*Aloud.*) What a man you are! You take account of nothing. Virtue for you is a fantasy. You are therefore immune to passion.

THE MARQUIS – Me! Madame, if my inner self appears indifferent then appearances are against me for my soul is fiery. I feel more than others but I control my passions.

THE COUNTESS – So then you are not a Philosopher?

THE MARQUIS – This word is commonly used yet hard to define. Philosophy is not equal among all men but it is applied to everything; just for being fair and generous in one's actions one is held up as a Philosopher. So, if these qualities can indicate such a state, then I deserve the title.

THE COUNTESS, *aside* – Let me profit from this moment. I will.... (*Aloud.*) Ah! Here is that giddy Baron.

THE MARQUIS – I will leave you with him.

THE COUNTESS – Ah! Do not do me such a disfavour. I need to talk to you. Come and join me in a few moments in your wife's apartment.

SCENE VI

THE COUNTESS, THE MARQUIS, THE BARON.

THE BARON, *holding back the Countess* – You're leaving, because I have arrived. To make the woman one finds the most agreeable flee is an unbearable calamity.

THE COUNTESS – Seriously Baron, is that what you think?

THE BARON – That is what I said to you.

THE COUNTESS – Ah! How will that do you any good.

THE MARQUIS – The pleasure he derives from saying it, and repeating it, is that not a decided advantage for him?

THE BARON – My reply could not be interpreted better but I can do without your help in the future. (*To the Countess.*) You make the most of your cruelty! Ah! Take care, the most keen and adept woman does not always escape the pursuit of a lover who perseveres as I do.

THE COUNTESS – Would you want to be my lover?

THE BARON – From now on, if the fancy takes you.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – Marquis, you are a witness.

THE BARON – Oh! Him? It's as though there was no one here. In anyone else's presence it would be an indiscretion. But you know him, indifferent, distracted, in short a Philosopher.

THE MARQUIS, *to the Countess* – Yes, Countess, you can allow him every liberty in my presence and he can even, if the mood takes him, attack me on a point of honour.

THE BARON – Oh no! On that subject you are not philosophical, and your reputation is too well established. But you cannot stop others finding you a surprising man.

THE COUNTESS – Not at all. This man is very ordinary and I believe that this indifference towards worldly things is merely in his interest. One becomes an egotist: this ill makes gains, it's so pleasant to think only of oneself.

THE BARON, *to the Marquis* – Marquis? What do you think of this observation? The remark is instructive. I could almost be tempted to think the as you do.

THE MARQUIS – Go to! Stay as your are. You would be incapable of happiness if you imitated me. Madame has a very poor opinion of me but, such as you are, you don't fill her with so much disapproval.

THE BARON – I think he is offering me an epigram.

THE MARQUIS – I am replying in the same style.

THE COUNTESS – You both express yourselves with so much frankness that you are encouraging my own. A vain man and an indifferent one are two beings that I find.... unbearable. And if I had been given either one for a husband I would not have been responsible for my actions.

THE BARON – You are taking responsibility then?

THE MARQUIS – In as much as it is possible.

THE COUNTESS – Courage, Gentlemen, cheer yourselves up at my expense.

THE BARON – We may applaud the modest confession you have just made but you, I wager, in the depth of your soul, are laughing at our credulity. Your wit is too far above the average to be stung by an innocent joke. You are hoodwinking us rather severely whilst our aim, on the contrary, was but to amuse you for a moment.

THE MARQUIS – Baron you have never said a truer word. I have confidence in the Countess.

THE COUNTESS, *aside* – Ah! You're joining in the contest! And the game amuses you! Oh! I will soon have my turn. (*Aloud to the Marquis.*) The Baron is learning, and I have no doubt that following you precepts, you will soon make a Cato of him.¹⁷

¹⁷ In French the noun 'caton', derived from Cato the Elder (234 BCE – 149 BCE) a Roman senator famed for his conservative, strict and ascetic views, was coined to describe an austere, severe, man.

THE BARON – In order for that to be possible you would have to remain forever out of sight.

THE COUNTESS – The compliment flatters me.

THE BARON – But it does not irritate you.

THE COUNTESS – I leave you, Gentlemen, and will rejoin the Marquise whom you are barely acknowledging.

THE BARON – Ah! For that one, you are right: upbraid him severely. He arrived this morning and I will wager that he has not embraced her. Let him give me permission to do it and see if I don't acquit myself better than he has.

THE COUNTESS, *leaving* – If you only have the Marquis's consent to overcome you may, Baron, have high hopes concerning the Marquise.

THE BARON – Oh well! What do you say to that? Should I have a go?

THE MARQUIS – Why not.

THE COUNTESS, *aside* – I would have bet on it. Oh! The wretched man! He is unbearable. (*She exits.*)

THE BARON, *stopping her* – You heard him. I'm putting myself in the running.

THE COUNTESS, *with bitterness* – That will be grand and I wish you every success.

THE BARON – Speak then on my behalf.

THE COUNTESS – I will do what I can. (*She exits.*)

SCENE VII

THE BARON, THE MARQUIS.

THE BARON, *watching the Countess leave* – I fly at your heels. (*To the Marquis.*) Well well! Here you are quite astounded. Are you reconsidering your policy of turning a blind eye?

THE MARQUIS – I do not turn a blind eye, I am fair. If you can please the Marquise, why should I be against it.

THE BARON – Very well! You would see her welcome my attentions passively.

THE MARQUIS – No, rather dispassionately.

THE BARON – Come, I will put all in place to succeed without delay. If I fail I will leave twenty-four hours earlier than I had planned.

SCENE VIII

BABET, THE MARQUIS, THE BARON.

BABET *to the Baron* – Sir, here are letters from Paris that I have been told to put in your hands.

THE BARON – Give them to me, beautiful child. (*To the Marquis.*) Look at her, Marquis. Isn't she pretty. She's one of the three Graces given by Love to rock your daughter's cradle.¹⁸

THE MARQUIS, *looking at her* – She seems fine. (*Aside.*) My patience is beginning to flag. It's too much to suffer. (*Aloud.*) I will leave you to read your despatches. (*He exits.*)

SCENE IX

THE BARON, BABET.

BABET, *curtseying* – Goodbye, Sir, I am also leaving.

THE BARON, *stopping her by the hand* – No, no, stay my angel.

BABET – How can I be of service, Sir?

THE BARON, *aside* – She is charming. (*Aloud.*) In many ways, if you will hear me out.

BABET – If you would have the kindness to explain yourself I will do anything I see fit, Sir.

THE BARON – Anything at all.

BABET – Anything within my power.

THE BARON – I am not asking for more.

BABET – And so! What must I do?

THE BARON – Give me a place in your heart. You see how easy a thing that would be.

BABET, *craftily* – A place in my heart?.... I thought that it would be to love you, like one does a husband, or one's lover.

THE BARON – There's no difference.

BABET – That's an impossible task.

THE BARON – Eh! Why is that?

BABET – You are joking, Sir; can you imagine that a poor girl, like myself, could love a man like you?

¹⁸ The Three Graces in Greek mythology were three beautiful goddesses (Aglia, Thalia, and Euprosyne) who personified and bestowed charm, grace, and beauty.

THE BARON – Why not? Am I not made like any other?

BABET – That may well be; but I find such a difference, that I could never presume to love you like I might for example love.....

THE BARON – Ah! You have a lover, I assume. And who is he?

BABET – Since you are asking, I will not hide from you that it is Blaise, the gardener's son.

THE BARON – Presumably he loves you.

BABET – Oh! So much.

THE BARON – And your parents will consent to your marriage?

BABET – Yes. When the little Mistress has learnt to walk. But I am not thinking of it now. I've been here too long already.... She may be crying. Farewell, Sir. (*She exits.*)

SCENE X

THE BARON, *alone.*

She's really interesting, that little village girl, but I mustn't think of her. I'd rather subdue a prude that conquer that untamed virtue. Let me read my letters. Here's one from my mother, it's not so pressing. Let me read the one from the Viscount, what has he got to say to me?That his creditors are now chasing him harder than pretty women? (*Unsealing the letter.*) I doubt they'll gain the upper hand.... He's sending me a song! (*He reads.*) 'As we advise each other mutually I must warn you not to waste your time with the Marquise de Clainville. She has taken the first step and I have no doubt that you are deploying your talents to make her discover the pleasures of a second error: the song that has been written about her will tell you everything.' I can't believe it. (*He reads the song.*) To the tune of Malbrouk?

The Marquis had no idea his wife was pregnant but everyone in Paris knew. That's the way it goes; husbands are always the last to find out. I am cut to the quick. This intrigue slipped through my fingers and it's been snatched away from me. Ah! Madame Countess, you are party to the secret!Ha! Disrespecting your austere virtues I'm going to have fun at your expense, ladies! They must surrender to me, otherwise I'll drive them to despair. As for the Marquis, I'll be generous enough to respect his position. He may be a Philosopher but this situation can't fail to make him unhappy.... Come, I will appear before the ladies with a brassy countenance.

End of the second Act.

ACT III

[Presumably there should have been a stage direction here to indicate a change of set, probably back to the one used in the First Act.]

FIRST SCENE

MISTRESS PINÇON, BABET.

BABET – Everyone in the Chateau's so sad! If it weren't for the Countess everyone would die of boredom.

MISTRESS PINÇON – That's how it is my child, we can't always be happy; everything in its own time.

BABET – I don't see, myself, why there's any point in us being miserable like owls all the time. I've just come through the drawing room and never have I seen such a dull silence rule there. The Marquis, on the day he arrives, hardly rushes to see his wife. He hardly looks at her. ... Are all husbands like that?

MISTRESS PINÇON – Lots of them, my child. No sooner have they made a home than they want to be as far away from it as possible.

BABET – Really. If they were all the same I'd never get married.

MISTRESS PINÇON – That would be very wise, my child. But that little devil love who, I can't think why, has been named a god is very clever.

BABET – You're so right, Mistress Pinçon.

MISTRESS PINÇON – How so, my child, are you in his power?

BABET – See, Mistress Pinçon, I've nothing to hide from you.... But here is her Ladyship, I'll tell you about it another time.

[Stage direction for Babet to exit missing.]

SCENE II

THE COUNTESS, THE MARQUISE, MISTRESS PINÇON.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

THE MARQUISE – You must admit, my dear friend, that what is of concern to me is for you a great source of pleasure.

THE COUNTESS – How could it not be when I reflect on all that I see? You are stubbornly keeping quiet. The Marquis, despite all his common sense, has reached the limit of his rhetoric. That Commander, imperious and quick-tempered man, treats you with an astonishing harshness. Mister Pinçon, who is questing after the moment to tell the Marquis everything, is constantly sidetracked by the Commander's eruptions. The Baron, embroidering on it all, throws out epigrams to disconcert even the most intrepid women. I am supposedly graced by being the confidant of a lover. Truthfully there's enough there to be angry about if I did not find the singularity of your restraint and my own goodwill a source of ridicule.

MISTRESS PINÇON – It's true that there's no great harm in all of this, and these Gentlemen do a great deal more than us by assuming you're capable of doing wrong.

THE COUNTESS – This wrong is so sweet and so fashionable that it's hardly surprising the Gentlemen believe we are guilty.

MISTRESS PINÇON – It's true that if the Marquise had chosen for her lover anyone other than her husband she would experience more satisfaction and much less constraint.

THE COUNTESS – Really, my poor Pinçon!... She's right though, she's also enjoying your difficulty.

THE MARQUISE – Alas! How little you know of my heart! Forced, since childhood, to stifle my feelings; condemned to end my days in a cloister, the Marquis saw me and drew me out of this cruel state. Overcome by his goodness I supposed that my love was in effect only gratitude. I adored my benefactor, and could not overcome, in an instant, the timidity that his presence brought about. Far from him I languish; my constraint fills me with despair: I constantly dream of telling him how I feel. As soon as he appears? All fades away. What a cruel fate! Oh my dear friend! Can you imagine my agonising pain?

THE COUNTESS – You are to be pitied; but at least, dear friend, allow those of us who care for you to let your husband know your true worth.

THE MARQUISE – You have to admit, our position is very awkward.

THE COUNTESS – Not so much.

MISTRESS PINÇON – For you, Countess? But for her Ladyship, and me, it's most improper.

MARQUISE – Assuredly. Monsieur de Clainville will never believe us.

THE COUNTESS – That would be charming. We could name him the *philosopher husband*.

MISTRESS PINÇON – You are hardly reassuring Countess and if we must encourage the Marquis to be more loving than ever, it would be best if he were unaware of what we did for him.

THE MARQUISE – Can he condemn an innocent artifice that should give him the greatest proof of all my tenderness?

THE COUNTESS – No, certainly not. But it is time he found out. Everything speaks against you and I have to admit I am beginning to worry.

MISTRESS PINÇON – You, Countess, who takes pleasure in tormenting men, and who wages war on them all the time, here you are already tired and ready to surrender? I wish, you said, that this adventure could remain a secret for another ten years, it will amuse me all the time. Barely a year has passed and you want it all uncovered.

THE COUNTESS – But a year is a long time for us other women.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Goodness gracious me! Are we not capable of as much reserve and discretion as men when we put our minds to it. I don't know why we would weaken in a circumstance when our reputation needs repairing. Believe me, your Ladyship, we should prove men's injustice, who have claimed supremacy over us, by what right I do not know.

THE COUNTESS – I really think she is well and truly angry. Do you not realise that we are very far from equalling them in courage or ability.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Death of me! If all women were like me one would see, within twenty-four hours, a regiment of Chevalier d'Eon on foot; they would not back down in front of the enemy!¹⁹

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – I agree but my poor Pinçon, so many weak women for every man-woman! Since the creation of the world, up to its end, there will never be more than a hundred made of such stern stuff.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Let them give us breeches and send us to College, you'll see it will make of us thousands of Heroes. I'd like to see myself at the head of Company, I'll wager I'd be covered in glory.

SCENE III

THE SAME. MISTER PINÇON.

MISTER PINÇON, *listening* – Mistress Pinçon at the head of a Company! Of young partridges no doubt?²⁰ Ah! The poor dear woman! All she needs now is to claim she wants to fly. When I insist, myself, that the invention of balloons has done nothing but inflame all the empty heads, I'm not wrong.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *angrily* – What are you saying about empty heads?

MISTER PINÇON – Am I wrong, Mistress Pinçon. At your age, having a crazy desire to travel.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing wholeheartedly* – Ha! Ha! Ha! This is delightful! This misinterpretation is unique.

MISTRESS PINÇON – You're right, Countess, he no longer knows what he says.

MISTER PINÇON, *laughing* – You will see that I'm the one talking nonsense.

19 Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Thimothée de Beaumont, chevalier d'Eon, (1728 – 1810) transgender soldier, spy, ambassador, whose life as a man, and then as a woman, was so complex and full of incident that it would be impossible to relate it here. At the time de Gouges was writing it was assumed that the Chevalière was female and had been obliged to live her early life as a male. On d'Eon's deathbed this was found to be untrue.

20 De Gouges uses the term 'perdreaux', creating a complex pun. In a country house setting a 'company of young partridges' implied the hunting season was starting. The term 'pedreaux' also applies to a form of mortar artillery used in the XVII century. In the singular it can indicate an older person behaving inappropriately like younger one.

MISTRESS PINÇON – I've known that for a long time.

MISTER PINÇON – Very good: you have to be a woman to be so ridiculous.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Come, come; shut up old chap.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – Neither of you mean it. You quarrel without hearing each other, and both of you are right. But, my dear Mister Pinçon, you who are the most reasonable, at least who wants to appear to be, we're concerned with something quite different at the moment.

MISTER PINÇON – Allow me, Countess, to no longer meddle with anything.

MISTRESS PINÇON – That is all we are asking.

MISTER PINÇON – Ah well Madame Pinçon, you will be obeyed.

THE MARQUISE – What, my poor Pinçon, you want to leave me in this awkward position.

MISTER PINÇON – Mistress Pinçon who knows more about it than I do, and who put you in it, will solve it, your Ladyship.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Never has he reasoned so well.

THE MARQUISE – Don't torment him so; only he can put it right.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Say rather, your Ladyship, that he will ruin everything. The poor dear man flushes out his common sense every day.

MISTER PINÇON, *angrily* – We'd lose it much less with a mind as excited as yours, Madame Pinçon.

MISTRESS PINÇON – That's because my mind is full of energy, and you have none left.

MISTER PINÇON – I am upset on your behalf, Mistress Pinçon; you should not be so arrogant and imperious. And you are barely younger than me.

MISTRESS PINÇON – What do years matter when one has all the vigour of youth? I am in good health, my appetite is good, I sleep well; I carry out all my tasks and I even do my duty. Can you say the same, old chap?

THE COUNTESS, *laughing wholeheartedly, to the Marquise* – You can't help but laugh, my dear friend, in truth you must concede that their row is most amusing.

THE MARQUISE – It is true that they are unbelievable. Yet I am enjoying myself less than you, I got used to their debates a long time ago.

MISTER PINÇON, *furious* – I'm leaving, out of respect for these Ladies but we will meet again, Mistress Pinçon, and you will see.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *making fun of him* – I will see to it that I see nothing. (*Mister Pinçon exits, grumbling and making funny gestures.*)

SCENE IV

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, WITHOUT MISTER PINÇON.

THE COUNTESS – You push him to his limits, Pinçon: are you aware that a dependable woman must always respect her husband.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Therefore I am not a dependable woman for I do not have this weakness, to be the subdued slave of a man, a husband, who without us would never have existed.

THE COUNTESS – My poor Pinçon, you in turn don't always do what you say. Let things run as they are. Your anger, and even that of all other women, will never change anything, in spite of these feelings.

MISTRESS PINÇON – That doesn't alter the fact that those who agree with me do things their own way, and take very little note of their rights or their laws.

THE COUNTESS – You would not have got on well in Turkey.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Oh! I agree. I would have set fire to the seraglio after having saved all those who wanted to follow me.

THE MARQUISE – Let's leave aside this conversation and occupy ourselves with the position we're going to take. (*To the Countess.*) Has the Marquis not promised you, my dear friend, that he will come and join you in my apartment? He's taking so long!

THE COUNTESS – I'm not as surprised as you are; you're forcing him to avoid you rather than to seek you out; but as a recompense I await the Baron who's coming to flirt with you following the consent of your dear spouse.

THE MARQUISE – What a terrible setback! I hate that Baron so much. My dear, let's pretend to be occupied so that he's obliged to leave us.

THE COUNTESS – He's not the kind of man to abandon his project so easily.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Would you like me to tell him that you are not available?

THE MARQUISE – Yes, that would be helpful.

THE COUNTESS – One has to watch him. His malicious gossip will cast us into an awkward position from which we'll no longer be able to extricate ourselves. Here he is, let us work.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Or else it's too late.

SCENE V

THE BARON, PRECEDING CHARACTERS.

THE BARON – What! The two of you alone?

MISTER PINÇON – Who do you take me for, Baron?

THE BARON – For a supreme intelligence, and equally invisible, my child.

MISTRESS PINÇON – That is to say that I am unnoticeable. That still makes me feel like an epigram.

THE BARON – You must admit, Ladies, that she is a confidant of the Gods, that Mistress Pinçon: Mercury would have made way for her, even at the best occasions.

THE COUNTESS, *aside* – Very good, this is how I thought it would start.

MISTRESS PINÇON – You are having fun, Baron, at the expense of my innocence and to my being caught off guard responding to your convoluted phrases.

THE BARON, *laughing* – She doesn't understand, the poor little.... When we've had a conversation together we will understand each other very well, I promise.

MISTRESS PINÇON *leaving* – I've never had a talent for understanding men who are not in their right mind and let me tell you, sincerely, Baron, you look to me more like a puppet than a man of flesh and blood. (*She exits.*)

SCENE VI

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, apart from MISTRESS PINÇON.

THE BARON, *watching Mistress Pinçon leave* – She's sharp, at least, your old governess, Marquise.

MARQUISE – Certainly she is not long-suffering.

THE COUNTESS – Instead, my dear friend, you should say that her response to the Baron was right. Sir has got what he deserved; why is he so familiar with such people?

THE BARON – You will find that I am the one in the wrong.

THE MARQUISE – Certainly; and you are not tractable.

THE BARON, *laughing and taking the Marquise's hand* – Me, not tractable! Oh! You only have to tell me what you prefer and I will be at your side and you will find me biddable, compliant, wanting and respecting your every wish.

THE COUNTESS – The most indisputable one, that we will be most grateful for, is that you always avoid her presence.

THE BARON – Ladies, the intimacy that exists between the two of you, does it allow you to answer one for the other regarding your inclinations? And, he who knows how to please one of you can flatter himself that he has made two conquests. But, as far as I can see,

the place is taken and despite the tacit permission of the Marquis I can see myself being turned away before I've even entered the running. Ah well! Let's forget about it.

THE MARQUISE – That's the wisest thing you've said, Baron.

THE COUNTESS – He should always start his conversations with that phrase then they'd be less boring.

THE MARQUISE – They really are unbearable.

THE BARON, *to the Countess* – Congratulate yourself on your work: she becomes more agreeable every day. I found her timidity discouraging; her imperious and grating tone makes her, in my eyes, a thousand times more interesting. Ladies, I must leave you time to reflect. I may not profit from it.... But....

THE COUNTESS – Perhaps?

THE BARON – I'm sure of it, if you choose it.

THE COUNTESS – Eh! What are you hoping for?

THE BARON – That she finds me attractive. As for you it is pointless, so I'm not counting on it; we know each other too well.

THE COUNTESS, *angrily* – We know each other too well, Sir? Your vanity is indecent.

THE BARON – There, there.... If you were a prude I'd excuse your fury. Because there are similarities in our characters you believe I'm implying that we've been close: here is the woman, the greatest, the most ideal, yet always particular. At least accept that truth. I have seen you censure your poor sex a hundred times in similar circumstances.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – One would have to reason like *the Pinçon* to wish to persuade you otherwise.

THE BARON – It is true that she is intractable on the subject. Nothing amuses me more than her assertions. I take the greatest pleasure in pushing her to her limits, nothing makes me happier.

THE COUNTESS – And you don't have to work too hard.... But let us leave aside this teasing. This afternoon will be very dull Baron. We have formulated a plan, the Marquis and I, to stay indoors. We want to study a very tricky *duet*.

THE BARON – Why not a *trio*? I would happily join in.

THE MARQUISE – We do not doubt that, but....

THE BARON – Continue. What have you to fear?

THE COUNTESS – The tricky parts.... You are too good a musician for us.

THE BARON, *seeing a petit-point frame, and going to sit by it* – So, Ladies, amuse yourselves at my expense. Me, I am going to stitch. What an example I offer today of discretion and modesty!

THE MARQUISE, *quietly to the Countess* – Will we never get rid of him, my friend.

THE COUNTESS, *quietly* – I fear.... How unbearable a man becomes when he is bored, and is convinced of his attractiveness.... But let's ignore him and busy ourselves.

THE MARQUISE, *quietly* – If the Marquis were to come perhaps he would finally move away.

The Baron sits down and works at the petit-point. The Marquise occupies herself embroidering and the Countess practises the difficult bars on the clavichord.

THE MARQUISE, *to the Countess* – My dear friend, accompany yourself and sing the *Romance* on the happiness of a sensitive soul.

THE COUNTESS – You are very fond of that song; it expresses what is in your heart. I will do as you wish.

THE BARON – That is very well said. To thank you I will make you a present of a song that I have just received from Paris.

THE COUNTESS – Oh! Let me see.

THE BARON – Women.... But you will have the kindness, Countess, to gratify instead our pleasure at hearing you. (*Aside.*) Without this precaution I may well be deprived of it.

THE MARQUISE – The Baron is right, my friend.

THE COUNTESS – Very well, I agree. (*She sings.*)

In this happy place, etc.

Or any other Romance corresponding to happiness.

THE BARON – You sing like an Angel. My turn. (*He pulls a sheet of paper from his pocket.*) You will let me off singing at the moment. I still have a sore throat brought on by a dreadful cold. You would lose all the pleasure to be had when I sing.

THE COUNTESS, *impatiently* – Oh! Stop chattering and give us that song.

THE BARON, *aside* – That is my intention, but the Marquise must sing it. (*To the Countess.*) You will accompany. (*To the Marquise.*) And you, your Ladyship, here is your part. (*He gives her the letter.*)

THE MARQUISE – And you call this a new song? It's the Marlbourck tune.

THE COUNTESS – No, really?

THE BARON, *mockingly* – No, really? Less disdain, I beg you, for a tune that has made a fortune.

THE COUNTESS – It's been commonplace for ten years.

THE BARON – It is no less sublime, charming and the French theatre trades on its success.

THE COUNTESS, *yawning* – Yes. I know that an unending Play used this tune to roll along its subject.²¹

THE BARON – You do it a disservice for it has no fixed subject; actually that bagatelle no longer excites anyone; wit, incoherence from beginning to end, amusing phrases, jokes that is the basis of works today.

THE MARQUISE, *aside, blushing* – This is a dreadful satire. I'm suffocating. I must dissemble. I want to punish him for his indiscretion by reading this calumny myself.

THE COUNTESS – Let me see the lyrics.

THE BARON – Oh! I want them only tried out on the tune they've been put to. It could not coincide better with the circumstances. I will admit, Ladies, that I love insanely all the husbands of *Malbrouck* style, but the one in my song comes back and finds his household being run quite properly. Everything has prospered in his absence. What a happy mortal! What is so overwhelming for his wife is that is a bit of a Philosopher, like de Clairville's friend.

THE COUNTESS, *aside, and pretending to be cheerful* – I understand what it is about.

(*The Marquise looks at her and blushes.*)

THE COUNTESS, *to the Marquise* – Well then, are you going to begin? I am ready; I am waiting for you.

THE MARQUISE – What? You want me to sing these lyrics?

THE COUNTESS – Assuredly, and it is all to please his Lordship.

THE BARON – How timid she is! The slightest thing makes her blush.

THE MARQUISE – I, Sir, and why would I blush? I will prove you wrong.

Tune: *Malbrouck*.

Hymen and devotion
Have never formed a union,
All ends in deterioration.
Why, please do tell me?

²¹ The popular song *Malbrouck* is thought to date from the seventeenth century but only became universally popular in the eighteenth, and is still well known today in France. De Gouges is probably referencing Beaumarchais again as he used the tune in his play *The Marriage of Figaro* but created new lyrics for his character Chérubin to sing in Act 2, scene V.

Is it breaking a decree
To speak of what we see?

Love and Nature
In accord, despite rumour,
Are a pleasing adventure;
Much more than a husband
Who was not chosen
To be the favoured one.

At war a warrior fearful
At home a spouse cheerful;
His household fruitful,
Especially when an infant,
Even though he was absent
With bad timing is present.

He flies back to his house,
Far from war tempestuous,
In the shepherdess sees his spouse
His lovely other half:
Cuckolded forsooth,
Can it be the truth.

Tremble at his fury,
He threatens earth, and sky,
For he is not the daddy
Of this infant newborn,
Of this infant newborn,
He is in high dudgeon.

Dear ladies, be not afraid
He is still partial to a maid:
In your lovely souls, it is said
He has found his wisdom.
Duty is an exemption
Nature his predilection.

This spouse, a misanthrope,
Sees the world through a microscope,
And now, throughout Europe,
He is imitated so,
To the joy of all the beaux,
To the joy of all the beaux.

Oh hope so flattering,
You for France so strengthening,
Always in proliferating
You will find your satisfaction:
For the price of transgression
One finds the heart's consolation.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing heartily* – Oh! How delightful! That is your story, my good friend, turned into a vaudeville, and the Baron offers it to you with goodness and modesty.

THE MARQUISE, *proudly, returning the song to the Baron* – I thank you, Sir; I beg you to present it to the Marquis.

THE BARON, *crushed* – As for that, Ladies, I am not such a blackguard as I may have appeared. You treat me so cruelly, that you have given me permission to make the most of this cruel banter. All of Paris is permeated with your Ladyship's adventure. Only the Marquis and I were unaware of it. I don't think he needs to find out from me what is being said about him in Paris.

THE MARQUISE – I protest, Sir, you will be obliging me more than you can tell if you show it to him first. (*The Baron looks at her.*)

THE COUNTESS – And you would be helping us resolve our embarrassment. That surprises you! Oh well! There you are, in your turn, embarrassed. What? Nothing to say? In truth, my good friend, we have worked a miracle.

THE BARON – I admit it, Ladies, your serenity is edifying. But can you stop this banter now? You were pretty sure I would do nothing. In truth, that is kicking a man when he is down.

THE COUNTESS – Oh! You weren't already there.

THE BARON, *noticing the Marquis in the distance* – Hush now. Here he comes.

THE COUNTESS – You will see me serve up a dish of my own making.

SCENE VII

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, THE MARQUIS.

THE BARON, *holding back the Countess who is going towards the Marquis* – Take care, you will dishonour her. This is no laughing matter.

THE COUNTESS – I know, and I want to treat all this seriously.

THE BARON – What? You're going to reveal it all to him?

THE COUNTESS – Unreservedly.

THE BARON – How careless! (*Looking at the Marquise.*) And you, you won't stop her.

THE MARQUISE – Far from it. (*Aside.*) Never did a moment appear more favourable. This calamitous imputation gives me courage; I'm going to confess everything to him.

THE MARQUIS, *noticing some embarrassment* – It would seem, Ladies, that you were not expecting my arrival. I will retire.

THE BARON – That is a wise move. According to our agreement, you were not supposed to present yourself without being announced.

THE COUNTESS – But his Lordship is, I believe, entitled to enter freely into his wife's.....

THE MARQUIS – I do not agree. All prudent men should act according to the Baron's principles. I will follow your example, I assure you.

THE BARON – Truthfully, one cannot be more pleasant than that.

THE COUNTESS – You should say instead one cannot be more acquiescent, but you too, Sir, must acquiesce and leave with me. You will be obliging her Ladyship most particularly if you leave her alone with the Marquis.

THE MARQUIS, *surprised* – Why this cruel joke, Countess? We have nothing new to communicate to each other.

THE BARON, *laughing* – He's right. What madness to wish to leave him alone with his wife! (*To the Countess.*) Really? Madame, you think of spouses as lovers. Do you not realise that the former run away from each other while the latter seek each other out.

THE COUNTESS – These ones are the exception to the rule.

THE BARON, *laughing heartily* – What can I say to that? Marquis, answer on my behalf for I no longer have the strength.

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – What agony. I tremble.

THE COUNTESS, *quietly to the Marquis* – Courage: I will leave you alone with him. (*She tears the sheet of paper from the Baron's hands, and gives it to the Marquis.*) Here, Sir, this lampoon should direct your response.

THE BARON – What imprudence!

The Marquis calmly reads the sheet and puts it in his pocket.

THE BARON, *aside* – This time his philosophy will be pushed to its limit. Let's see how he will take all of this. Just the thought of it amuses me.

THE MARQUIS, *with great composure* – Is it possible to waste one's time on such nonsense. Whoever is responsible for writing it worked harder to create it than I to receive it.

THE COUNTESS, *with bitterness* – He resists every ordeal. (*Quietly to the Marquis.*) It's up to you, my dear friend, to attempt the last one. We are going to leave you alone.

THE BARON, *interlacing his fingers and staring at the Marquis* – Is it possible!

THE MARQUIS – What?

THE BARON – Your sangfroid chills me.

THE MARQUIS – Good for you; you will be more authentic.

THE COUNTESS – This man is insatiable. (*Taking the Baron by the arm.*) Come Baron. Whatever his Lordship may say it is vital that we leave them alone.

THE MARQUIS, *protesting* – Why so, Madame? The Marquise, I believe, has nothing to say to me.

THE MARQUISE, *timidly* – Forgive me Sir. I wish.... to speak to you.... alone.

THE BARON, *aside, looking at her* – Oh! I understand. One wants to be forgiven. The Countess is right. (*Laughing.*) She will achieve it easily. (*Aloud.*) We will leave you alone. I yield. I no longer wish to trouble this tender dialogue. (*To the Countess.*) You see how reasonable I am. I've been robbed and I expect you to pay for it. (*They exit together.*)

SCENE VIII

THE MARQUIS, THE MARQUISE.

The Marquis is serious and pays no attention to the Marquise. The Marquise lowers her eyes and they strike attitudes at variance with each other; they must hold their positions. During this silent scene Mistress Pinçon is at the back of the stage.

SCENE IX

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, MISTRESS PINÇON.

MISTRESS PINÇON – What! Here they are both alone! Such silence! They're not speaking to each other. They're not even looking at each other.... What a pretty picture!.... If I don't break the silence they'll stay there like statues. What if I dared to own up myself to everything that has happened.... No, no, no.... Let me be honest.... Only the Marquise can persuade him.

(The Marquise noticing Mistress Pinçon makes a sign for her to retire.)

MISTRESS PINÇON, *after pulling several faces, speaks quietly to her* – Courage, damn it! Have courage.

THE MARQUIS, *to the Marquise, noticing Mistress Pinçon leaving* – I'm in your way, Madame.... And your chamber-maid has something particular to tell you. As for myself, I'm of no use to you whatsoever. I'm going to leave. (*Aside.*) If I were an ill-tempered husband all this would easily arouse my jealousy.

THE MARQUISE, *trembling* – Forgive me.... Sir.... If you.... knew....

THE MARQUIS, *with a fake smile* – I know only too well, Madame,.... of your shame and my dishonour.

THE MARQUISE – You, Sir, dishonoured! How can you be?

THE MARQUIS, *looking at her with disdain* – No.... My probity depends on my own opinion, and not on any vulgarity.... But you are comforting.... Nonetheless I cannot refrain from telling you, Madame, that you should, for your own sake, try and keep up appearances a little to undermine the public's malicious pleasure in creating a satire against you.

THE MARQUISE – What do I care for this public and its dreadful spite? My justification and happiness depends on you alone.

THE MARQUIS – Come, Madame, come. Be reassured.... But, take care to keep the victim that you are going to bring up in my home out of my sight.... I leave you mistress of your fortune, and free to dispose of it as you will.

THE MARQUISE – But Sir! I have nothing. You adopted me as an orphan, and my gratitude....

THE MARQUIS – Enough, enough, Madame, leave aside the sad sentiment that is gratitude.

THE MARQUISE, *aside* – I have no idea what is happening to me.... Confusion has taken hold of my mind.... I cannot go on....

THE MARQUIS – Be reassured, Madame. I am not a tyrant, jealously dishonest.... But I do have feelings.... And by you, I deserved to be treated better.

THE MARQUISE – Alas! If you knew how far my affection has taken me you would not have the strength to see any harm in it. You might not applaud my conduct, but at least you would not condemn it....

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – Passion has made her unable to reason or to appreciate any decorum. (*To the Marquise.*) Happy the mortal who has been able to seduce you to the point of your confessing it to me.

THE MARQUISE – Alas! If only I dared tell you everything!

THE MARQUIS – Madame, I will excuse you from this revelation. That is taking advantage of my good nature too far.

THE MARQUISE, *aside* – I will never be brave enough to confess to him my true feelings.... I lack the strength. I'm fainting. (*She falls into an armchair.*)

THE MARQUIS, *running to her side* – Madame! Madame! Come round. If all you need in order to be happy is for me to hear you then I consent to be your confidant. (*Aside.*) Never have I found her so appealing.... And yet another possesses your heart.... And I will listen calmly to the tale of her infatuation! No, this effort is beyond the power of a man. [*Aloud.*] Come to yourself, Madame. Be happy, tranquil, and let me flee from you.

THE MARQUISE – You, Sir, flee from me, leave me!.... Ah! I'd rather die.... I cannot live without you or your good opinion.

THE MARQUIS, *aside* – I do not understand her. (*To the Marquise.*) You no longer have a right to one or the other.

THE MARQUISE – You must believe me to be truly guilty?

THE MARQUIS – Madame, you have done more, you have removed any doubt. And the indecency of your conduct, since you force me to use such an expression, deserves a much harsher treatment than the one I want to offer you. So stop excusing yourself, you're only increasing your wrongdoing.

THE MARQUISE – The Countess de Saint-Alban can inform you, Sir, of my innocence.

THE MARQUIS, *angrily* – Oh! That is taking it too far! So she knows better than we do what has been happening between us during the last eighteen months? Odious wife! My kindness is but a game for you. Your false timidity was just a clever trap that you set for virtue. I knew women; I thought you were the only respectable one. So it's really true that this perfidious sex wraps its falsehood in such seductive exteriors! The most ingenué at heart is basically the most crafty and the most dangerous. Her mind, not able to spread itself outdoors, is irritated by constraint and can no longer put a brake on her passions. Once she has indulged in her inclinations, she no longer observes the rules of honesty and decorum.

THE MARQUISE, *aside* – Alas! I genuinely deserve this reproach! But it is for his sake that I am guilty. (*To the Marquis.*) I must appear odious to you, and I no longer have the strength to justify myself. (*The Marquis looks at her indignantly.*) The way you look at me! You make me tremble.

THE MARQUIS, *making an effort to reassure her* – That's enough! I can no longer bear to see you or hear you. Since my dishonour is public I am abandoning you to its complete censure. My uncle, better than I, will now show how to repay your temerity. He knows everything, he has every power over you. I am abandoning all my rights to him.

THE MARQUISE – What, Sir, you would force me to have recourse to that inflexible man!

THE MARQUIS, *harshly* – Leave. (*Reconsidering.*) No, Madame, stay in your apartment. This is the last time I will come here. (*He goes to leave.*)

THE MARQUISE, *stopping him* – No, stop. I must confess all my crime to you. Learn, cruel man, that I have never cherished, adored, anyone else but you, and this approach....

THE MARQUIS, *stopping her and pushing her away violently* – Stop, faithless woman! You are taking falsehood into the realms of madness. I abandon you to your fate. (*He exits.*)

SCENE X

THE MARQUISE, MISTRESS PINÇON.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *running in because of the noise, seeing her mistress nearly fainting, holds her in her arms* – Oh my poor mistress! You are in such a state of confusion. I ran as soon as I heard the noise. What's going on?

THE MARQUISE – Leave me, leave me. My life is unbearable. What have I done? What is my crime! I admit that my love has turned me into the most culpable and bold woman, but

with whom was I unfaithful? Why did I use this ruse, this finesse, unless it was for him?.... He is jealous.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Jealous! You are doing him a great honour. It's love that is making him furious.

THE MARQUISE – The state I'm in makes me unable to breathe. The Countess, my dearest friend, is abandoning me. We must pull together: my husband's eyes must be opened; all must be revealed to him. I've kept this cruel silence for too long. He thinks I'm playing a game, and repents in turn at having known me so little. Ah! Marquis! My dear Clainville! How badly you read this heart that has only ever yearned for you.

MISTRESS PINÇON – That is where I think you're to blame. Is a Philosopher capable of appreciating the price of such constancy?

THE MARQUISE – At the very least his exceptional qualities make him worthy of it. It is I who offends him and any other in his place would have behaved worse than he did. (*She exits.*)

SCENE XI

MISTRESS PINÇON, *alone.*

For my part I'm like the Countess; all of this amuses me. A husband meanwhile never finds similar niceties amusing; but should we really feel sorry for him? Never was a husband more fortunate. That's remarkable in this century we're in. Who knows? If these methods were better known there'd be more lovers than spouses. For I believe that all this freedom that exists in marriage encourages weariness. In truth we're really foolish to tie the knot. (*She exits.*)

End of the third Act.

ACT IV

FIRST SCENE

THE COMMANDER, THE MARQUIS.

THE COMMANDER – Finally, you are being reasonable: it was about time.

THE MARQUIS – Uncle, in the circumstances I may not be offering the best example of my reasoning given that I did indeed behave out of character.

THE COMMANDER – Are you already regretting your decision in giving me the freedom to lock up your wife? The scandal is well known, so it must be the same for her position.

THE MARQUIS – I consent, though only if her prison is agreeable. Permit me, uncle, to allow her to dispose of the twenty thousand *livres* allowance that I am giving her for her enjoyment.

THE COMMANDER, *angrily* – You will approve, if you please my dear nephew, no such thing. That is precisely what I oppose. An allowance of twenty thousand *livres* to a wife as guilty as yours, as rash, that you married against my wishes and who, in recompense for the fortune you gave her, covers you in shame and ignominy.

THE MARQUIS – It is true that her ingratitude is even worse than her guilt.

THE COMMANDER – What do you mean by that? I think both are as bad as each other.

THE MARQUIS – Permit me, uncle, to disagree with you for I believe that two beings, not dependant on each other either through rank or fortune, united by Hymen, should be equally masters of their fate and actions.

THE COMMANDER – I'm glad for the instruction and your precepts will do well in this century of ours when almost nothing is held dear.

THE MARQUIS – But I hope that no one will hold on to anyone anymore, one would then be more truly united.

THE COMMANDER – Eh! What will become of laws?

THE MARQUIS – What they were before they existed.

THE COMMANDER – I refer you back to primitive times. According to you men were good then, yet they could not live in this state of independence. Though born Philosophers, they felt that mankind needed to be directed by mankind itself. Laws, prejudices, and all that puts a brake on passions came naturally to them. And you want to pretend to some superiority. You alone, if it were in your power, would overthrow what thousands of others have worked on for centuries. A father leaves to his son the fruits of his observations. Another man leaves to his children a more consummate work. Finally, for generations to come, all will applaud the wise prudence of our ancestors. What would society be, or the arts, wealth, our ranks? A confused mess. Everyone would appropriate the same rights and this great freedom, that you admire like a gift from heaven, would destroy all of humankind. Men are born equal, I know, but they are made to live differently. That is my opinion: condemn it if you can.

THE MARQUIS – Me, uncle, wish to destroy your opinion to make you adopt mine. We can be happy each to his own and although I think the benevolent man, good towards his own, has not been compromised by the ambition of his peers whose party, no doubt, was the strongest, and which has no doubt produced all that you admire, this man has no less strayed from the purpose of nature and truth. The wicked have prevailed; the fair-minded were in the wrong.

THE COMMANDER, *angrily* – Your arguments are such they make countering them an impossibility. Well, fair-minded man! Surrender to the natural laws you obey. You did not fight them when Hymen crowned your desires, when you wanted to associate yourself with a woman you deemed perfect. Adore her. Do better; adopt her children.

THE MARQUIS – Well, uncle! Let me stop you there. You see what Hymen produces. We can certainly guarantee that our children will have our names and our fortunes. My wife is not alone, thousands of examples prove this truth.

THE COMMANDER – I can believe it but at least the others are prudent enough to safeguard appearances.

THE MARQUIS – Madame de Clainville is thus more imprudent than guilty.

THE COMMANDER – Come, weak and cowardly man! Your love, extinguished by her timidity, has been rekindled by her inconstancy.

THE MARQUIS – I will admit, Uncle, that I'm not indifferent to her.... She was dear to me and if she hadn't betrayed my faith, I would still find happiness renouncing, at her feet, a bizarre passion, not really worthy of a wise man.

THE COMMANDER – Another eccentricity.

THE MARQUIS – Ah! You're right. But in the disagreeable situation I find myself, it soothes my pain.

THE COMMANDER – Monsieur is taken with the charms of a young Lady from the Opera.

THE MARQUIS – Uncle, I have no idea. I don't know who she is.

THE COMMANDER, *angrily* – You're in love with a woman you don't know!

THE MARQUIS – I'll surprise you even more. I've never seen her.

THE COMMANDER – Monsieur is in love by correspondence. I remember fifteen years ago I was equally foolish. I received a letter from Dijon from a woman who asked me a favour. She asked me so favourably that I allowed myself to believe she was pretty. But the Lady, who no doubt tired of responding to my amorous letters, abandoned her conquest either through reason or disgust. Not being able to resist the silence I was foolish enough to go to Dijon. What a surprise when I found the heroine of my novel was none other than an old woman of seventy.

THE MARQUIS – My adventure is very different. You remember, uncle, that party that Madame de Saint-Alban gave about a year ago. There I made the acquaintance of a charming woman who, despite her mask, offered delightful glimpses of the brightest youth. She admitted that she'd been in love with me a long time but that she would never have declared herself until she had been assured I no longer lived with Madame de Clainville. She added that it was for a mistress that I had abandoned my wife. Our liaison was formed as soon as it was conceived. She demanded that I never seek to know her and that she had to use the Countess's house. I supposed at first that it must be none other than her amiable cousin and that idea stayed with me quite a while, until I saw her leave for the countryside and yet our daily rendezvous continued. I pushed aside all the investigations that my curiosity might have encouraged and stayed faithful to the promise I had given her. She was a woman who had entrusted herself to me, who offered me her caresses, who showed me so much love, and if she was one of the Countess's companions then I had to respect her secret. That's what I told myself, and thus I affirmed my discretion.

THE COMMANDER – Do you still keep up this intrigue?

THE MARQUIS – I received one of her letters, on the eve of my departure. She informs me that she'll be in Paris at some point next month.

THE COMMANDER – Keep this adventure going, if you think it appropriate. I have nothing to say about it if you find it amuses you, but honour dictates that we lock up your wife.

THE MARQUIS – Uncle, allow me to leave you the sole master of her fate. As for me I'll leave for Paris after having given a few orders on my estate.

THE COMMANDANT – I am pleased with you, at last.

THE MARQUIS – Here she comes, uncle, with Madame de Saint-Alban. Allow me to avoid her presence.

THE COMMANDER – That is a wise decision.

SCENE II

THE COMMANDER, *alone*.

What can she have to say to me? She cannot, surely, pride herself on making me change my mind. Madame de Saint-Alban is very close to her.... She must be unaware of her conduct.

SCENE III

THE COMMANDER, THE MARQUISE, THE COUNTESS.

THE COUNTESS – How so, your nephew flees from me, Commander?

THE COMMANDER – Because you are not alone, Madame.

THE MARQUISE, *aside* – Such humiliation!

THE COUNTESS, *to the Marquise* – Do not be offended, my friend, by the Commander's sally. He's a quick-tempered man, severe but fair and equitable at heart. It's to this tribunal that I come to plead your case.

THE COMMANDER, *astonished* – It would appear, Madame, that you know everything.

THE COUNTESS – Even more for I am the confidant, the author of all that offends you, and if your niece's too amiable wrong is punishable then, like her, I deserve to be punished. I alone managed everything, directed everything. And if everything had not become so serious, I would have kept the mystery going for longer. It's a charming adventure, one you will find acceptable.

THE COMMANDER, *surprised* – Madame, are you speaking seriously? I have just had an idea. (*He reflects.*) Of what use is this stratagem? It's a trap set for me, by your friendship, in order to save her.

THE COUNTESS – What? Has the Marquis told you about the conquest he made in my house?

THE COMMANDER – Just now.

THE COUNTESS – And therefore, Commander, you have forgotten your niece's timidity; this timidity that turned our Philosopher away from the most respectable of women in disgust? And the pleasure I take in innocent mischief? My dear friend filled my bosom with all her sorrows: she believed herself abandoned by her husband, and bolder when masked....

THE COMMANDER, *stopping her* – That's enough, Madame. I admit my mistake. Come, my dear niece, let me embrace you. Although I was against your marriage I applaud my nephew's choice. How could I possibly not have realised it was trick when the Marquis told me about this extraordinary adventure!.... I was only unjust for ten minutes, and it is your fault. Why did you not let me in to the secret? Do you think I would have taken less pleasure than you in stirring up the bile of this phlegmatic man?

THE COUNTESS – I think we've finally got him. He's just made a scene with Madame; now we just have to finish it.

THE COMMANDER – I'll take charge of it.

THE MARQUISE – Ah! Dear uncle, how glad I am to regain your respect!

THE COMMANDER – My dear niece, one word restored it. For a long time appearances were against you.... The poor little one! How upset I am that I distressed her. But, tell me, how did you behave yourself with him? Did you admit to him that you had chosen him as your lover?

THE MARQUISE – No, uncle! I never dared to but I did assure him that I had never loved anyone but him.

THE COMMANDER, *laughing* – Oh! The trick is charming! To believe one is being cheated by a novice, and to be told naively that one is still the beloved. That was well designed to fluster the most pacific man. She must have pushed him to his limits? Her simplicity serves us well, Countess. What new trick can we prepare for him! For I want to play him one of mine.

THE COUNTESS – He deserves it.

THE COMMANDER – I will become his rival; a rendezvous with my niece, at the end of the park, under cover of darkness, in an unknown costume, coming from Paris.... Ha! Ha! Isn't that a good idea? What do you think, Ladies?

THE COUNTESS – My word, dear Commander, you have a fertile imagination. I who pride myself on it could do no better.

THE COMMANDER – I will admit that I am the equal of a woman when I can make the effort, but I am immovable on a point of honour. I can forgive similar faults but I never excuse those who stray from their societal duties.

THE COUNTESS, *to the Commander* – But you do not realise, Sir, that we still have to punish the bad behaviour of the Baron, who endlessly throws epigrams at us, and who

created a satire lampooning your niece. Despite her innocence she finds it very distressing.

THE COMMANDER – What an unbearable man! I dislike him as much as you all do. He is a coxcomb of the highest order. I've no idea why my nephew has befriended him. (*To the Marquise.*) But be assured, my dear, we will vex him, we will vex him I promise you. Here he comes, just in time. I want to seem to be arguing with you. Leave it to me, my child, I will avenge you.

THE MARQUISE, *quietly to the Countess who laughs* – That, you must agree, is a new delight for you, my friend.

THE COUNTESS – Assuredly. But we need this coxcomb to push our wise man over the edge. The Marquise must be indebted to him for your forgiveness. Imitate me and we can enjoy ourselves at his expense. (*To herself.*) It's only fair that we should have our revenge.

THE COMMANDER – Very good. I understand. Begin, Madame.

SCENE IV

THE COMMANDER, THE BARON, THE MARQUISE, THE COUNTESS.

THE COUNTESS, *pretending not to notice the Baron* – Sir, let my prayers persuade you to relent. Can you give way to vulgar opinion? Are you not aware how much its criticism is exaggerated?

THE COMMANDER – Can it cast a doubt on what is only too true. (*Aside.*) He is listening, good.

THE COUNTESS – False appearances are often taken to be great truths.

THE BARON, *aside* – What a renowned lawyer! But she will lose her case. Let me try and improve it by making the most of the Marquis's confession. I want to force them to see that I have my uses. (*To the Commander.*) Sir, allow me to make certain observations. I have just overheard your conversation and the one I have just had with the Marquis authorises me to inform you of a circumstance you are unaware of.

THE COMMANDER – Baron, I am aware of everything.

THE BARON – Forgive me, Commander, you are wrong, as is the public, about your niece. The Marquis wanted his adorable spouse to enjoy the fruits of her deception, by pretending not to have recognised her, but it is nonetheless true that, using an unknown name, she believed that she had conquered him anew.

THE COUNTESS, *surprised* – I can't believe it.

THE MARQUISE – Ah! I can breathe again.

THE COMMANDER – Ha! Ha! What do you say to that, Ladies?

THE BARON, *pulling the Countess by her dress* – Stand firm. Courage and we will save her.

THE COUNTESS – Ah! I understand! (*Aside.*) He tells the truth without realising it. (*Aloud.*) You heard him, Commander; can you still doubt that your niece is innocent?

THE COMMANDER – What the devil! I understand nothing at all. My nephew has indeed been telling me of a romantic adventure but he never said it was with his wife.

THE BARON, *laughing, quietly to the Countess* – I can well believe it.

THE COUNTESS, *quietly to the Baron* – You are charming; I am changing my mind about you.

THE BARON, *quietly, gesticulating to her* – Leave this to me. (*Aloud to the Commander.*) Goodness me! I can well believe it. A Philosopher, a wise man, would never dare admit this childishness to a man of reason.

THE COMMANDER – Well he clearly told you, Baron, you are not one, therefore?

THE BARON – I'm his friend, you're his uncle.

THE COMMANDER, *aside* – He's no more aware than my nephew that it's my niece. It's a trick of the Baron's. I'll pretend to believe him. (*Aloud.*) Actually I do believe that what you're telling me is true. This singularity is worthy of the Marquis de Clairville. He thought he was obliged to let me know about his wife's mischief but, for the sake of caution and decency, he did not name her.

THE BARON – Precisely. Do you not know him?

THE COMMANDER – I know him well. (*Aside.*) If he'd ever considered it he would have done it in order to justify her. The greatest man is often the simplest. I would even wager that he never entertained a suspicion of it. I'll go and leave these Ladies for a moment. (*Aloud to the Marquise.*) My dear niece, I will make amends to you and I'm grateful to the Baron for what he has just made clear to me. I'm going to find my nephew and give him a proper telling off.

THE BARON – Be careful not to, Commander. He asked me to keep it secret, and I beg you to do the same. He has his reasons. (*Aside.*) And I have mine too.

THE COMMANDER – I agree. I look forward to seeing how he will manage to admit it to me. I leave you with the Ladies, I have to countermand some orders I had given.

THE BARON – Do go, dear Commander.

THE COMMANDER, *aside* – Dear Commander! That friendly tone! That smug man is a pest!

He exits, saluting him derisively.

SCENE V

THE BARON, THE MARQUISE, THE COUNTESS.

THE BARON, *laughing heartily* – Ha! Ha! My word! We've got him.

THE COUNTESS – Don't laugh so loud, he might hear you.

THE BARON – Ah! You're right. But Ladies how on earth do you keep your composure?

THE COUNTESS – The guilty do not have the same courage as those who defend them.

THE MARQUISE – Before thanking you for all that I owe you, Baron, tell me how did my husband confide in you what you've just told us.

THE BARON – The thing was simple. I saw him day-dreaming and knowing the cause of his affliction, I tried to find a means of consoling him. 'I know' he said 'that I have wronged Madame de Clainville, and this has no doubt produced all the disorder that holds sway over her behaviour. If she had at least kept up appearances, and if I alone knew what was happening, I could excuse her.'

THE COUNTESS – The good husband!

THE BARON – Do not interrupt me...'But, my uncle,' he added, 'will not listen to reason and absolutely wants to lock her up. You can imagine how much I condemned this violence.' I asked him precisely in what way he had wronged you. He admitted that for the last year he had loved a woman he had never seen. A veil covered her from top to toe, but she nonetheless lavished warm caresses on him. At first I thought he was telling me an idle tale; I admit I was very surprised by this adventure as it's not in his character. I think she is a decrepit coquette who, knowing the goodwill of the Marquis, has enmeshed him with her mysterious charms. I insisted on knowing where and how he made this acquaintance but firmly he made it clear that asking questions on the subject would be in vain, and should I press him further I would still never find out any more. He would even guard against giving me any means that he could have used to know the woman with whom he became involved, because of his word of honour to never seek to discover her circumstances. This is the price of his happiness, so he says. Never has a woman found a better time to justify herself, than the one I am offering you. (*He laughs.*) The trick is admirable.

THE COUNTESS – Eh! What must be done?

THE BARON – Become this adorable unknown one. (*The Countess laughs.*) Ah well! You laugh, unkind woman, the joke appears to amuse you.

THE COUNTESS, *to the Marquise who cannot refrain from exploding with joy* – He is divine. (*All three of them laugh.*) (*To the Marquise.*) My dear friend you must admit that we don't have as much finesse as the Baron. We must surrender to him.

THE MARQUISE – It's true that few men are like Monsieur. His intelligence is quite natural but I would have preferred it if only Monsieur de Clainville had benefitted from it.

THE BARON, *laughing* – Now this is new? How her innocence has changed its personality. The most frank coquette could not put it better. (*To the Countess.*) The only

thing I feared, I must tell you, was her frankness; I believed her to be so simple, so naive! This adventure will make the devil of a noise. We will extricate ourselves from it marvellously.

THE MARQUISE, *with irony* – Is that what you believe, Sir?

THE BARON, *taking her by the hand* – I find this simplicity enchanting. One could not be more adept, with that air of candour.... But to it must be joined a bit of gratitude.

THE COUNTESS – She does owe it.

THE MARQUISE – I will answer to that, always, when my husband is convinced of my love for him, when he restores me in his esteem, and when I no longer have anything to fear.

THE BARON – Innocent of all that you are accused of, your style could not be more assured. What an imperative tone.... But that is not how you should treat the one who is saving you from a great danger. (*The Marquise smiles.*)

THE COUNTESS – Assuredly the Baron is right. (*Quietly to the Marquise.*) Do pretend.

THE MARQUISE – But, what must I do, dear friend?

THE COUNTESS – At least give the Baron some hope.

THE BARON – That's well said.

THE MARQUISE, *to the Countess* – I will do everything you judge to be correct.

THE BARON – Everything?

THE MARQUISE, *smiling* – Anything that pleases Madame. I owe her too much to be able to refuse her anything. (*The Countess laughs.*)

THE MARQUISE, *continuing* – I sense how much I am indebted to the Baron, and soon I hope I can convince him of my feelings for him. But you must give me time to recollect myself for I have to admit that I find all this more embarrassing than you can imagine, either of you.

THE BARON – Not too much: I can't see it myself.

THE COUNTESS, *quietly to the Baron* – Let me speak to her.

THE BARON – Very well.... But see to it that this conversation ensures my happiness. Otherwise, I'm warning you, I cannot answer for myself.

THE COUNTESS – Come now, you can be certain that we'll recompense you in a way you deserve. Be in the park this evening, we'll come and find you, and it will be easier for us to speak of your affairs.

THE BARON, *to the Countess, taking her by the hand* – You're very sympathetic, very pretty, to speak on behalf of another, Aglaia always accompanied Aphrodite, and you're one of the three Graces that Love has kindly disposed in my favour.²²

THE COUNTESS – No one is more sympathetic than you. (*Aside.*) Or more irritating, (*Aloud.*) Now then go, and count on me.

THE BARON – More than all the Gods together. (*He exits saluting the Ladies, and saying to the Marquise.*) Farewell, adorable Clainville. I am leaving but bear in mind that my heart is staying with you. It's waiting for you to welcome it. I'm leaving it here, here, here, very close to you.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – There, there, that's understood. His heart is like a bird. Be very quiet or it might fly away.

THE BARON – Beast! You're teasing me, but I will have my revenge.

THE COUNTESS – That's true and we'll all be pleased.

THE BARON – Chase me a way then.

THE COUNTESS – You should already be far away. You will not advance your affairs by staying.

THE BARON – Very well, I'm going. (*He exits abruptly.*)

SCENE VI

THE COUNTESS, THE MARQUISE.

THE COUNTESS – So, my dear friend, what do you make of all of that? You see things are moving in your favour as you hoped.

THE MARQUISE – Yes; if the Baron spoke the truth; if Monsieur de Clainville had fathomed us; if, in the end, his love had anticipated mine in the steps I took towards him under a pseudonym, if....

THE COUNTESS, *teasing* – If finally he was instructed as the Baron imagined.... I swear to you, my dear friend, that I find nothing more humiliating than to be a man's dupe, and especially a Philosopher's, a creature that only lives for itself, that is never touched by the sorrows of others, that has never known love or jealousy: especially jealousy which is the surest sign of constancy and friendship. Never was a truly jealous man unfaithful.... And your husband, without discovering for himself the cause of your sadness, left you automatically and likewise takes you back without knowing you. Today he sees the most convincing indications of your infidelity, has no interest in who stole your love from him, so long as his honour is intact. That is the only disadvantage he finds in this adventure. And I will listen to you, dear friend, and I will be sensitive to your concerns. Ah! I have to profess that at the moment I find them very diverting. The Commander is on our side; we have nothing more to fear. I want to upset this man who is too phlegmatic, and too loved by the

²² According to certain Greek mythologies Aglaia, the youngest of the three Graces, was the goddess of love Aphrodite's messenger.

most adorable of women. I want to make him jealous, I want to see him worry, to fear that one day he will really lose your heart. Lastly I want him to return to my sex all that his supposed philosophy has presumed to take from you for ever, so that he loves you and experiences all the confusion of the most passionate lover. Yes, that is what I want for him, and how I expect to make him.... But, I hear the Commander laughing heartily. No doubt he has prepared the comedy for this evening. Come, take comfort and remember to play your part well.

SCENE VII

THE COMMANDER, BLAISE, THE COUNTESS, THE MARQUISE.

THE COMMANDER, *to Blaise, laughing* – Oh very good, my boy; so the Marquis scolded you thoroughly?

BLAISE – Gracious me, Commander, that's only too true. I never seen 'is fury before, 'e who always seem so good, so kind. But 'e don't get the joke when one wants to compliment 'im on 'is child, don't you see.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – So what's new?

THE COMMANDER, *laughing, while supporting himself* – Ha! The adventure is charming. My dear nephew, whose philosophy could not stop him beating this unfortunate chap who asked him if he was pleased with the gift you had offered him.

BLAISE, *crying* – Oh! That's not quite at the point that 'e flew off the 'andle; it's when I told 'im that the little Mistress resembled 'im like two peas in a pod, and that I 'oped 'e would make us dance, since Madame 'adn't done it when the baby arrived. At those words I began to dance only too well as 'e gave us a slap. Ah Marry! Such a whack as I'd never 'ave said that was the 'and of a Lord.

THE COUNTESS – And especially of a Philosopher for these gentlemen are so slow in such matters, and reflect so deeply, that you must, my boy, persuade me to believe it.

BLAISE – Oh! Feel it instead, Madame. You'll see the place is still warm

(Everyone laughs all at once.)

THE COMMANDER – So it hasn't cooled down yet, my poor Blaise. Did he not say anything to make you laugh when he did it.

BLAISE, *stung* – Ha! I can see that you're a makin' fun of me alright. I'm goin' to leave with what I hold, that's safer.

THE COMMANDER – No, stay, my poor boy. But tell me, did he not speak to you when he mistreated you? I have my reasons for asking.

BLAISE – Does one beat people without tellin' 'em why?

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – I like to see that in all things one should be logical. Well, he said, my poor Blaise?

BLAISE – Eh! I don't rightly know if I can very well counterfeit 'im, but I can always try to imitate.... 'ere goes, who wants to receive the slap?....

THE COMMANDER – Just do the gesture.

BLAISE, *giving himself a slap* – Shut up, lout; never meddle in your master's affairs. Rather than occupying yourself with things that don't concern you, look after this arbour instead. You're allowing it to deteriorate. I was goin' to begin excusin' m'self again but a slap rained on me other cheek. Oh! A slap that soon made me forget the first; I saw all round me a million stars. So much so I could no longer find the path to get back to my job. Golly! 'ow upset I am to have upset our dear Master so! It's your fault too, Madame. Why did you give him a daughter when 'e wanted a son. No one cares about the breed, and it's a merchandise too poor to dispose of.

THE COMMANDER, *laughing* – Really, my dear niece, you are in the wrong and it's your fault if this poor devil has been mistreated.

BLAISE – Oh! I'm not upset for m'self. And everythin' I did say was with a good 'eart for our master, I feel sorry for 'im from the depth of my soul, even though 'e somewhat tormented me.

THE MARQUISE – His fidelity is enchanting. (*To Blaise, giving him some money.*) Here, my son, here is enough to make you forget the Marquis's slaps.

BLAISE, *jumping for joy* – Golly gosh, Madame Marquise, keep yer money. I don't need that to forget 'em, if you 'adn't asked me about it I wouldn't 'ave remembered a thing.

SCENE VIII

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, MISTRESS PINÇON, *entering in a rush.*

THE MARQUISE, *continuing* – Take it anyway, my friend, take it.

THE COMMANDER, *putting his hand in his pocket* – And I, I also want to raise his spirits. Here, there's a good gold coin, newly minted.

BLAISE – Oh! I can see how it do shine, but I ain't tempted for all that.

THE COUNTESS – I want to be party to it too. Here's something to drink to my health on the first day of your nuptials.

BLAISE – Oh! I would rather it were today than tomorrow: money does nothin' for that.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *quietly to Blaise* – Take it, my boy, it doesn't just move things along.

BLAISE, *distractedly* – Golly! I do take all you're willin' to give, and I do very quickly give it to Babet. (*He takes the money from the Marquise and the Countess, the Commander holds on to this gold coin.*)

BLAISE, *to the Commander* – Hand over, then.....

THE COMMANDER, *cunningly* – Ah! So, little rascal, you will take the money we give you to Babet. So there is a reason for all of this.

BLAISE, *biting his fingers* – Dunderhead me, I've upset the applecart.

(They all laugh together.)

THE COMMANDER – Ah! So you were counting on having fun making fools of us but I want to know what is going on between you and Babet.

(Blaise lowers his head.)

MISTRESS PINÇON – Courage, my poor boy, I will speak for you.

THE COMMANDER, *laughing and making a sign to Mistress Pinçon* – No, no, he must explain it himself, he must be old enough for that.

THE COUNTESS – The Commander is right.

THE MARQUISE, *quietly to the Countess* – He's Babet's beloved, I know that, but I don't want to spoil your fun at his embarrassment.

THE COMMANDER, *still holding the gold coin in his hand, and taking another out of his purse* – Will you speak, or shall I close it up: or alternatively, if you tell us everything I will take out another one.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Hey! Go on, silly thing, tell them firmly that you love Babet.

BLAISE – Oh! I love her, see, above all else. But 'ow did you find out about it, you, Mistress Pinçon? My father advised me good and proper to speak about it to no one. He wants us to wait two years to be married

THE COMMANDER – So your father knows that you make love to Babet?

BLAISE – Oh! Not anymore, not since she be the governess of our little mistress. And I'll suffer this abstinence fine till she be brought up.

THE COUNTESS, *to the Commander* – You must admit that he's fully earned what you wanted to give him. *(To the Marquise.)* My dear friend, I pity this poor boy, we must shorten the length of his suffering. *(To Blaise.)* Go, my poor Blaise, I'll work on your behalf.

BLAISE – Oh! You're so good, Madame Countess.... It's true what they say about the mirror being the image of the soul.

THE COMMANDER, *giving him the money* – Oh! Here, just for that you deserve it.

MISTRESS PINÇON – What do you expect, that poor boy doesn't know any better. It's his good-heartedness that makes him speak so.

BLAISE – Did I say something wrong? It's never my intention, anyways.

THE COUNTESS – No, my poor Blaise. Go and see if the Marquis is still in the park and come back and let us know.

BLAISE – I'll run as fast as I can. (*He exits.*)

SCENE IX

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, apart from BLAISE.

THE COMMANDER, *to the Marquise* – It would seem, niece, that you already knew of their love?

THE MARQUISE – Yes, uncle. I overheard, without meaning to, a conversation this afternoon between Babet and Pinçon.

MISTRESS PINÇON – You must be very discreet Madame for you never mentioned anything to me.

THE COMMANDER – She is more pre-occupied with her own dear husband than in procuring one for Babet. Our Philosopher will marry them within twenty-four hours, I hope, and I want him to dance at their wedding. Then, niece, you must do exactly what I say. I have just given orders to Mister Pinçon to go to the next village and give a peasant a letter for you. You must go to the meeting that it will indicate; your husband will be made aware of it. Leave it up to me, I shall take charge of the rest.

THE COUNTESS – But the Baron will be there too, I asked him to meet me in the park.

THE COMMANDER – Perfect. I will have the pleasure of fighting these two nasty champions.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – But supposing they don't recognise you?....

THE MARQUISE, *alarmed* – My dear Uncle this badinage is too strong, and it may be cruel to all of us.

THE COUNTESS – She's right about that. Change your plan.

THE COMMANDER – Zounds, Ladies, I'm not changeable like women. But be reassured on my behalf and believe that I will manage things with all the prudence I am capable of. I want to amuse myself at the expense of that smug Baron. I want to bring about the happiness of my nephew and my niece, and to this effect I am giving a ball in the park tonight. (*To Madame de Clairville.*) I would advise that you bring that unknown woman, it shouldn't be too hard to make her come along. You must write to your husband; appear in front of him in the costume that disguised you in his eyes; convince him of your love, of his wrongs, of your fidelity. But before that we must make him jealous and there I will rely on the Countess's help.

THE COUNTESS, *with finesse* – Ah! Leave that to me. I assure you that I am as committed to all of this as you are. They are both unbearable men, that we have to correct. I care little for the Baron, but the Marquis de Clairville, delicate man, sensitive man, who is

ridiculous only because of his mind's own foibles, his methods are not found in nature despite his insisting that mankind must submit to it entirely.

THE MARQUISE – What do you expect, my dear friend? If it is his opinion we cannot blame him for it.

THE COMMANDER – See how she justifies him, poor darling. Ha! We want to do much more, we want to punish him. To believe that men are born to live as animals is an unpardonable excess of folly. So, tomorrow....

MISTRESS PINÇON – Let's go and get everything ready. But here is Blaise. What is the matter. He seems quite alarmed.

SCENE X

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, BLAISE.

MISTRESS PINÇON – What's all this running about? What's new, why so out of breath?

BLAISE – Zounds, I really don't know 'ow to go about tellin' you what I've just been seein'. But, my word, I do believe that our dear Master will totally lose his wits.

THE COMMANDER – How so? This is serious. Speak up without being silly.

THE MARCHIONESS, *troubled* – Heavens! What is going on?

BLAISE – Golly, it's caprices that 'ave run away with his good sense. He's goin' to pull up all the trees in the park if no one goes to save 'im.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – He's a second Roland.²³ If he could become similarly angry on his return we'd find him quite charming.

THE COMMANDER, *to Blaise* – What has he done then? No doubt some alteration that you don't like, because you fear it will mean more work for you.

BLAISE – Oh! I won't be angry for all that, but he's properly reprimanded Babet. He's done even worse but I daren't tell you, Madame Marquise.

THE MARQUISE – I beg you, Blaise, don't keep anything from me. You are worrying me more than I can say.

²³ 'Roland' refers to the eponymous character in *Orlando Furioso*, an epic poem by Ludovico Ariosto first printed in 1532. Due to the vicissitudes of love Orlando/Roland famously becomes so angry that he loses his mind. The reference would have been widely known to contemporaries because the character was embedded in French culture thanks to numerous musical and dramatic adaptations (and parodies) since the time of Louis XIV. In 1778, ten years before de Gouges published this play, Nicolo Vito Piccinni (1728 – 1800), an Italian composer working in Paris, produced his opera *Roland* to great acclaim. The libretto – originally written by Quinault for Lully ninety or so years earlier – was taken up and adapted in the same year by Piccinni and Gluck, rival composers, both foreign, both working in Paris, and both pitted against each other in what became an infamous and long-standing quarrel concerning the merits of Italian versus French opera. Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714 - 1787), raised in Bohemia and prominent in Vienna represented the French side. Both composers had at some point in their careers taught, and been supported by, Marie Antoinette.

BLAISE – Oh! I were goin' to tell you all, you musn't get upset for all that.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *impatiently* – Get on with it then! So, what did he do to you?

BLAISE – Ah marry! It would take a lot for him to have done somethin'; rather he has undone all that I'd made the prettiest in the Park, and it's what Madame Marquise loved so.

THE MARCHIONESS, *overcome* – Ah! My poor Chinese pavilion!

BLAISE – Oh! It's now in ruins.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing* – So he has a taste for English Gardens.

THE COMMANDER – Goodness me! Ladies, I have no intention of joking on the subject. I am going to face this reckless man as soon as I can. What the devil! His philosophy has certainly changed its tune. (*He exits.*)

SCENE XI

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, except for the COMMANDER.

MISTRESS PINÇON – All will be discovered, without us having anything to do with it.

THE COUNTESS – Perhaps; the Commander is too genuine to take that pleasure away from us.

THE MARQUISE, *alarmed* – I tremble. Oh! Dear friend, supposing he were to hurt my child, his daughter.... I can't bear it any more.

THE COUNTESS – Don't worry. He's not capable of such cruelty!

BLAISE – Oh, nay, nay! He won't 'urt 'er. Babet quickly reached the Chateau with our little Mistress.

THE MARQUISE – Ah! I can breathe again! Oh my child! Oh Monsieur de Clainville! Can you see her and remain indifferent? And can nature have no effect on your heart?

MISTRESS PINÇON – Nature is often bizarre.

THE COUNTESS – Pinçon is right: illusion is everything.

BLAISE – Oh! That's true enough. 'ow many fathers think they are, and meanwhile are not.

MISTRESS PINÇON – How do you know that, my boy?

BLAISE – Oh! I didn't know it for m'self but I'd got good reasons to guess at it.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Countess, this merits attention.

THE COUNTESS – No, it's just some village prejudice or other.

BLAISE – Golly gosh, that's not prejudice, that 'olds up. This is real truth. I 'eard my granddad tell a story.... Ah, zounds! That's a story....

MISTRESS PINÇON – That I don't have time to listen to.

THE COUNTESS – Why? Let him tell us.

MISTRESS PINÇON – You're not being clever, Countess.

THE MARQUISE – Or discreet.

THE COUNTESS – Why not? Just like anyone else, tell us Blaise, this story....

BLAISE – Oh! I'll tell it you in no time at all. The story says that there was once a Great Lord who 'ad a stepson he raised very well, and who came like a mushroom.²⁴ Then, suddenly, he 'as a notion to no longer want to be the father, because the Madame of the Estate 'ad also taken up the fantasy of 'aving another child, for the reason that 'er husband was no longer at home.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Just like here....

BLAISE – That's right. And this Lord was assured that the father of the last was also the father of the first. Ah zounds! Lots of things 'appened that I've forgotten. Be that as it may, there was a devil of a trial. Everythin' was eaten up by the justice, and these two lovely boys 'ad nothin' left, not even one father, instead of the two they were given by everyone around. That's what I never could understand.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Is that actually possible, my child.

THE COUNTESS – There is after all, in this silly boy's story, cause for reflection.

(The Marquise dreams.)

THE COUNTESS – Is this tale affecting you, my dear?

THE MARQUISE – I won't conceal it. It overwhelms me.... Though my conduct is very different to that recounted by this peasant, I am nonetheless very alarmed by it. False appearances are sometimes more dangerous and crueller than guilty realities. This simple and naive man has opened my eyes. I am going to throw myself at the feet of Monsieur de Clainville straightaway, admit everything to him, before things become more serious.

THE COUNTESS – Won't you wait?

THE MARQUISE – Nothing can stop me. I will take my daughter in my arms, and throw myself in his, make known to him my fault and my fidelity, by offering him the token of my sweetest love.

²⁴ 'Mushroom' is a play on words for in French growing like a mushroom implies growing very fast but also a baby that is born like a mushroom is one that has arrived spontaneously, i.e. whose father is unknown. Blaise is usefully muddling up both terms.

BLAISE – Oh woah! What does all this I've 'eard mean; I understand nought. I admit to doubts on all this, but none of this seems clear.

(The Marquise exits.)

THE COUNTESS – Let's wait for the Commander.

THE MARQUISE, *as she leaves* – I am not listening to anything.

THE COUNTESS, *following the Marquise* – She's decided her course: meanwhile let's try and persuade her otherwise: let's follow her.

SCENE XII

MISTRESS PINÇON, BLAISE.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *also leaving* – Bother that silly pest and his story.

BLAISE, *watching her leave* – So why was I forced to tell it. I'm so unhappy! Everyone's tormentin' me.... Ah! I can well see that I won't be married this year. It's just like a spell. I've said now the opposite to Babet by tellin' her that the good Commander was goin' to pray for us.... My God! How fragile they are, the great and good. They're all like glassware. *(He exits)*.

End of the fourth Act.

ACT V

FIRST SCENE

BLAISE, BABET.

(Babet, in front of the door and rocking the cradle that is covered.)

BLAISE, *looking at her from afar, calling out quietly* – Miss Babet?

Babet makes a sign with her hand to make him leave.

BLAISE – Oh! I won't come near. I can see yer rockin' our little Mistress. Will she soon be asleep?

BABET, *tapping with her feet while still moving the cradle.*

BLAISE – What yer sayin'? Don't understand yer signs at all.

BABET, *very quietly* – Will you shut up? You're going to wake her....

BLAISE, *coming up gently* – Oh! Nay. I'll speak so softly.

BABET, *still beside the cradle* – Well, Blaise, it's pointless you talking to us. Mistress Pinçon told me I'd never be married.

BLAISE – And why's that?

BABET – Ah zounds! It's that you said too much....

BLAISE – All the same I only said what I knows.

BABET – You're such a simpleton! And that's exactly what should not have been said!

BLAISE – Zounds! I've not spent, like you, so much time among the people of the Chateau.

BABET – Well, Blaise, I've often seen that the people in high society are like the weather. You've certainly noticed on some days that it rains, hails, freezes, is hot, or there's bright sunshine over all. Well! It's the same in the Chateau. Sometimes they're happy, as though they were a bunch of lunatics; an hour later, no one speaks: then, there are quarrels, questions. Everyone wants to be right, and they can't get on with each other, neither one nor the other.

BLAISE – Zounds, that is funny! Oh! It's so different with us. I know full well that we speak one after the other and always listen to the oldest person.

BABET – With the Lords, it's exactly the opposite. It's always the youngest who sway the oldest.

BLAISE – Fie, that's bad! And what about politeness?

BABET – Ah zounds! They talk about it often enough: they say that we, the rest of us, are only peasants, vulgar types. Well, Blaise, they're more vulgar than us. If you knew what they talk about. Sometimes I've blushed to hear them. Well, it makes them laugh. They call that being witty.

BLAISE – And the women, Babet, are they the same?

BABET – More or less. And when they're told ugly things, they usually reply with these words: "Ah! That's a pretty one." Because they insist that it isn't a nonsense when it is said with wit.

BLAISE – But tell me Babet 'ow have you managed to accept all that?

BABET – Eh! My word, it's in spite of ourselves, I assure you for I'm not too fond of this language. Here, Blaise, the people of Paris never speak to each other honestly.

BLAISE – Zounds! I've an idea we're not cut from the same cloth.

BABET – Ah! They pretend they are, but mind you don't believe it: the Priest insists that we are all equal. Here, Blaise, you're not made differently to our good King, and me to our good Queen.

BLAISE – Is that possible!

BABET – Just as I were saying.

BLAISE – That, Babet, you really love me.

BABET – Why are you asking me this question?

BLAISE – My word! I'm always afraid that you'll be sick of me now that you're among these beautiful Lords.

BABET – Well! I think about you more. To me they seem so ridiculous, so tired, although they do nothing....

BLAISE – Ah! you're right. They always look sullen.

BABET – Though they do eat good things.

BLAISE – That don't fatten them up any less. I've only got dark rye bread, and sometimes good cabbage soup. Oh well! My health 'll be a hundred times better than them.

BABET – You're too right and if it wasn't for our young Mistress I'd soon go back to the fields.

BLAISE – And what if they took you to Paris, Babet?

BABET – That's exactly what I fear.

BLAISE – And would you have the heart to leave us?

BABET – I would never have the strength but if Madame de Clairville wanted it, we others would have to want it too.

BLAISE – Ah, Babet! Don't think of it. Leave the little Lady's cradle for a moment. She's asleep. Give me your hand.

BABET – Here it is.

BLAISE – Ah! How soft it has become, how white it is now. It shows you're not in the sun anymore.

BABET – Oh! I haven't told you about the remedy they make us use to whiten our hands like that. It's a totally white unguent, that's called.... Wait.... it's in a pretty little pot.... It's called paste.

BLAISE – Pastry for makin' cakes.

BABET – Oh no, paste.... Almond.... Yes, almond.²⁵

BLAISE – And that's what whitens them?

²⁵ Almonds paste was a long-standing exfoliant and skin cleanser recommended both for whitening skin but also for its sanitising properties.

BABET – Yes, it's because of the young Lady. We're not allowed to touch her until we've rubbed it in several times.

BLAISE – Ah! Let me do it, I want to 'ave them the same, I've got almonds.

BABET – Ah! That wouldn't be the same thing. But Blaise.... I'm frightened, look who's behind us.

BLAISE, *turning round* – Ah! I'm lost! It the Marquis. But I'm alright, 'e's not lookin' this way. 'Ere, see how preoccupied 'e looks. I'm goin' to leave quietly, without 'im seein me', and I'm goin' t'o hurry back to my work.

BABET – And me, I'll sing as though I'm trying to put the little Lady to sleep, and I'll look as though I don't know he's there.

BLAISE – That's well said. (*Looking at the Marquis, and leaving quietly.*) Zounds! I was 'olding 'er in the house, and 'e didn't catch me at it.

SCENE II

THE MARQUIS, BABET.

BABET, *sitting down and turning her back on the Marquis, sings* –

Of the Shepherdesses in the Village
Babet is the most beautiful,
Of the Shepherds in love with her
Lucas is the most handsome, etc.

THE MARQUIS, *a letter in his hand, not seeing Babet* – The ingrate! She pushes her foolhardiness to the limit! And the one who seduced her to the point of subjugating her reason in turn pushes his audacity as far as coming here, to my estate. He dares tell her that he's flying to her arms on the precise day that I'm coming here, and I will facilitate this assignation. Ah! My uncle is right. I would be degrading the character of a true man by suffering this ignominy. It's decided. I want her locked up for the rest of her days and she should be deprived of the child that is her delight and my shame. As for the vile object who believes he will find here everything that gratifies his pleasures, he will die by my hand, or I will not survive my dishonour. (*He rereads the letter.*) This disgraceful message that fate dropped into my hands, here it is.

BABET, *humming her song and looking at the Marquis from time to time, speaking very quietly* – How he talks to himself. He really looks angry. I'm quaking.... If only the little Lady would wake up I'd soon get us away.

THE MARQUIS, *noticing Babet, and the cradle, becomes so enraged he is no longer himself. To Babet* – What are you doing here? (*Aside.*) The sight of this infant revolts and outrages me.... (*To Babet.*) Leave.

BABET, *trembling* – Sir.... Sir.... Marquis, I fear waking your little girl.... See how sweetly she sleeps.

THE MARQUIS, *in a fury* – Oh! That is too much. Leave. (*Running towards her right up to the cradle.*)

BABET, *troubled, leaves* – Ah, faith, I'm too afraid, I going to flee without the little one. Well, if he wants to take care of her so be it. It's more his affair than mine since he's bullying me like this.

SCENE III

THE MARQUIS, *alone, looking at Babet leaving. He stares at the cradle.*

Here is this infant that is a stranger to me and that I am given nonetheless. These thoughts make me lose my reason – I think that in my fury.... (*He puts his hand to his sword then restrains himself.*) Heavens! What is this pity that has taken hold of my soul? What was I about to do, wretch? Slit the throat of an innocent victim who never authorized her mother's chaos. All my resentment should weigh on the author of her days.... Here she is alone exposed to my fury and vengeance. Ah! Let me rather die of regret and pain than hold for one moment that guilty thought.... I want instead to be her protector, her support, her father for I cannot deny that this unfortunate child touches me. (*He approaches the cradle and considers her.*) She's opening her eyes.... She's so pretty! She has her mother's looks.... That sweetness.... She's smiling at me.... She's holding out her innocent hands to me.... Ah! I can't resist any longer.... (*He bends over the cradle excitedly, stands up and pulls out his handkerchief.*) I don't recognise myself anymore.... I've never felt an emotion like it. I'm crying despite myself. Ah! Nature, nature! What an effect you must have on a real father, since you have so much power over a sensitive soul. I have to shower her with kisses.

SCENE IV

THE MARQUISE, THE MARQUIS.

THE MARQUISE, *arriving and throwing herself at her husband's feet* – Ah, my friend. My dear husband!

THE MARQUIS, *dumbfounded and looking at the child* – What weakness is this! (*To Madame de Clainville.*) Wretch!.... (*Pushing her away.*) Take care of your child and forever avoid being in my presence. (*He exits.*)

SCENE V

THE MARQUISE, *alone.*

I'm so unhappy! I tore myself away from the others to fly to his embrace, to open my heart to him, tell him my feelings and of that fatal stratagem.... And just when I feel I have the strength I need to tell him everything, he flees from me and doesn't want to hear me.... Oh Monsieur de Clainville, Monsieur de Clainville, you believe me to be guilty! How little you know this heart that only ever yearned for you. (*She turns towards the cradle.*) Oh my daughter!.... Oh my dear husband!.... Will I never rejoice in the pleasure of bringing us all

together. The emotion I have just felt has robbed me of my strength. I don't know where I am.

(*On can hear from the depth of the Park the voice of the Countess.*) *Clainville. Oh my dear Clainville!.... (The Commander also cries out.) Niece, niece where are you?*

SCENE VI

THE BARON, THE MARQUISE, *semi-fainting on the stage.*

THE BARON, *hastening* – Oh my dear Marquise, what a state I find you in! All the Chateau is worried about you. They are looking for you everywhere.

THE MARQUISE – Leave me, Sir, leave me. The only help I should receive should be from my husband, Monsieur de Clainville.

THE BARON, *laughing* – Zounds! You are impenetrable, I cannot understand it. How has the dear man turned your head to this point? You are really afraid of him!

THE MARCHIONESS, *candidly* – Too much, perhaps and there is my misfortune.

THE BARON – Ah! I prefer it when one justifies oneself and is aware of one's faults. Well then, allow yourself to be directed. You have in me the most adroit squire and, especially when it comes to cheating jealous husbands, I am worth my weight in gold.

THE MARCHIONESS, *aside* – What an unbearable man. I find him odious. (*Aloud.*) Sir, until now your perspicacity has failed to grasp my character. I must therefore make myself known to you and open up my heart. Gladly! If you approve of my conduct I will be even more satisfied for my part as it will remove from your mind the erroneous belief that you have anything to hope from me. Monsieur de Clainville has never ceased being dear to me and, by the most painful confession, I will tell you the truth.

THE BARON – Ha! I will listen attentively.

SCENE VI

THE SAME CHARACTERS, THE COUNTESS, THE COMMANDER, MISTRESS
PINÇON, BABET.

THE COMMANDER, *in the wings* – Oh! We will find her, we will find her....

SCENE VIII

[THE SAME CHARACTERS.]

THE COUNTESS, *running towards the Marchioness* – Ah! My dear friend, you really hurt my feelings. What, you leave the Chateau without telling anyone? You run into the park all alone: we are told of your confusion. What is the meaning of this childishness?

THE COMMANDER – Quite, it is not wise, my dear niece, especially following our agreement.

THE MARQUISE – No, uncle, allow all this to stop, and let things go no further.

THE COMMANDER – Surely that is not what you are thinking.

THE BARON, *aside* – The good man is fooled. As for the wily Marquise, she is pretending to lose her senses. Ah what a clever scandalmonger! (*Aloud to the Commander.*) You must not contradict her. (*Quietly to the Countess.*) If you don't talk to her firmly, and especially in my favour, I will abandon you Ladies. You're taking advantage of my patience.

THE COUNTESS – Eh! Be patient in your turn. Can't you see that she doesn't have all her wits about her.

THE BARON – Me, I see that she has more than anyone. What skill! She is playing all three of us off against each other; the Commander, the Marquis and me.

THE MARQUISE, *blanching* – I don't feel well; I would like to rest.

THE COMMANDER – Come, dear niece, come into this pavilion for a moment, near your dear child. Her caresses will soon make you better. (*He gives her his arm and they go in.*) (*To the Countess.*) Make the most of your walk with the Baron, Countess, while we wait for our good old Pinçon to be dressed up.

THE COUNTESS – Let us leave her to it; she will offer us a comedy as long as the Marquise doesn't put any obstacles in the way.

THE COMMANDER – I gave up my task to her on that condition.

SCENE IX

THE COUNTESS, THE BARON.

THE COUNTESS, *aside* – This is not going as I would have wished. (*She pulls out her watch.*) It's getting late and the Marquise will upset all our plans.

THE BARON, *to the Countess* – Finally, you see how I am treated. I have been, in spite of you, let in to the secret. I am saving you from a perilous step. I am taking advantage of the confession the Marquis made to me on the subject of that unknown woman. I am attributing this adventure to Madame de Clairville in the spirit of the Commander. Now all I have to do is persuade the Philosopher that his unknown woman is his wife. Although it will not be easy I am committed to it and when I need encouragement, Madame de Clairville talks to me about the tenderness and the love she feels for her dear husband, and makes a romance of her feelings for him. Does she think I am an idiot, a novice, to reel off such tall stories.

THE COUNTESS, *laughing heartily* – More or less. Though he boasts of cunning and finesse.

THE BARON, *interrupting her* – What are you saying, Madame?

THE COUNTESS – That nothing escapes you. But, my dear Baron, you must make a better use of your wit. Do you not realise that a woman who has only ever committed one error must be a real novice. I have no doubt that a second intrigue would quite season Madame de Clainville and if you could determine her in your favour, you would increase her allure.

THE BARON – You are too polite, and as for your being a woman of wit, well, I bow to your observation. You are right our dear Marquise still has the manners of the convent even though she has spectacularly embraced those of the world. Still she wants to conserve her beloved modesty. In truth I admit that I am an idiot to protest against her little foibles.

THE COUNTESS, *aside* – He doesn't realise how accurate his panegyric is! But I can see the Marquis, let me rejoin his wife. It is time this coxcomb was made to see how ridiculous he is. (*Aloud to the Baron.*) Here is the Marquis de Clainville. I will leave you with him. Patch things up as best you can and I will answer for the Marquise. So, if everyone is ready....

THE BARON – I will wait for you in the gloaming with the Marquise. The evening is delightful, the walk will be delicious.

THE COUNTESS, *leaving* – We'll be there. – Get us out of trouble and we'll have a good laugh. (*She enters the pavilion.*)

SCENE X

THE BARON, *alone*.

Ha! I'm not limiting myself to laughter. I'm willing, Ladies, to procure you this pleasure but there must also be something in it for me.... Here is the Marquis.... How agitated he seems! It was a thorny matter. If he were a fool I could easily persuade him; but why this aversion? A wit is easier to convince than a stubborn man who challenges both himself and the rest of the world. I've often noticed that confidence in oneself allows one to be very foolish. I've done it myself a hundred times. Therefore I can risk everything.

SCENE XI

THE MARQUIS, THE BARON, MISTRESS PINÇON, *at the back of the stage with a hat pulled down over her face, an English style morning coat, boots and a whip in her hand.*

THE BARON, *to the Marquis* – What! You still haven't emptied your head of these marital habits. You who condemned them more than anyone else.

THE MARQUIS – But no gallant man has borne what I'm being put through. I will admit to you that my patience is being pushed to the limit. I'm eagerly waiting for nightfall.... Here, read.... (*He hands him the Commander's letter.*)

THE BARON, *taking it* – It's getting hard to see. (*He reads.*)

MISTRESS PINÇON, *touching her sword* – There he is, very busy reading the Commander's letter.... I feel incredibly brave. In this disguise I have more courage.... Come, let me pursue them, yet seem to be unaware of them.... The Countess has just assured me that I look like the prettiest dandy in Paris and despite my old husband's prognosis I will be the heroine of this adventure.... Ah! If only I were fifteen years old how I would profit from this costume, wearing a Cavalryman's outfit I'd go round the world.... How many heads I'd turn along the way! The whole universe would fall for me, head over heels. (*She walks up and down.*)

THE BARON, *having read the letter* – I can't believe it. I've been played as much as the poor Marquis. Ha! I'll certainly not be giving him a good account of his treacherous wife. (*To the Marquis giving him back the letter.*) There is no remedy for your ills. I had hoped to offer you some comfort by blindfolding you with a tissue of lies but now I have nothing left to say to you.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *coughing and blowing her nose.*

THE BARON, *looks to the back of the stage, and tapping the Marquis's arm* – Who is the man trying to hide?

THE MARQUIS – Oh! I recognise him through the emotion I am feeling. You will witness my conduct, and the insult I expect to avenge in your presence.

THE BARON – I approve but we must examine his behaviour more closely and, if he is the author of this missive, I assure you there will be more than one affair ended in this park tonight.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *all of a tremble* – Has the calm before the storm got hold of me, I don't know but I can feel shivers getting the better of me. That damn Commander promised to be here.... and he hasn't arrived.... Ah! Here he is. (*She sings.*)

Oh night, charming night, etc.

THE BARON – That is the signal.

THE MARQUIS, *drawing his sword* – That's enough, wretch.... (*He runs at Mistress Pinçon; the Commander stops him.*)

SCENE XII

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, THE COMMANDER.

THE COMMANDER, *aside* – Oh Heavens! What a prodigious thing! My nephew in a fury, with his sword unsheathed. (*Aloud to the Marquis.*) What are you going to do, in such a state?

THE MARQUIS – Cleanse my courage in the blood of that wretch.

THE COMMANDER – And who might that be?

THE BARON, *turning the Commander around* – Look down that avenue. Can't you see him?

THE COMMANDER – Who?

THE MARQUIS – Eh zounds, uncle, you should have guessed. The author of my dishonour.

THE COMMANDER – Impudent one! He must be attacked, but as a man of honour.... Are you sure it's him? What clues do you have? (*Looking towards the back of the stage.*) The scoundrel is well mannered.

THE MARQUIS, *taking out the letter* – Uncle, listen to the meaning of what fell into my hands. (*He repeats it to him.*) "I fly into your arms, oh my dear Clainville, to save you from the dangers that you are facing, to take you away from the persecution of your uncle, and your cold husband." (*Aside.*) The wretch adds yet another odious taunt! (*Aloud.*) "I will arrive as usual through the little gate into the park. Be ready; a post-chaise awaits you." See, uncle, how our power is scorned.

THE COMMANDER – As for me, my dear nephew, I am not at all surprised that you are being confused to this extent. Your friend, the Baron, who is here, told me a story this afternoon that justified your wife but now I can see what he actually planned. His insistence that I keep this mystery from you convinces me that he only wanted to rescue her in order to gain her favour. That is how his friendship served you.

THE BARON – I don't deny it; the Marquis seemed to have given me his blessing.

THE MARQUIS – Uncle, you will be a witness, along with the Baron, to what is about to happen.

THE COMMANDER – Let him approach. He appears to have neither seen nor heard us.

THE BARON – He is too pre-occupied with his plan to be aware of the danger he is in.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *comes forward, on the side of the pavilion, holding a handkerchief to her nose.*

THE MARQUIS – My blood is boiling in my veins. I have never felt such turmoil. (*He throws himself into his uncle's arms.*) Oh! Dear uncle!

THE COMMANDER – My dear nephew, your state really pains me. (*Aside.*) And gives me great pleasure too.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *coming towards the pavilion singing while disguising her voice* – I am going to see my charming mistress again.

THE BARON – Ha! We're going to see you now.

THE MARQUIS, *tearing himself out of his uncle's arms and rushing towards Mistress Pinçon* – On guard, wretch, and explain right away why you have covered me with such opprobrium.

MISTRESS PINÇON – I don't have my sword. I only have my hunting knife. But here are two pistols that will help us agree.

THE MARQUIS, *with emotion* – Give it. (*He snatches one of the pistols from her hands.*)

MISTRESS PINÇON – Fire first. (*Aside.*) There's nothing in it.

THE COMMANDER, *going to the pavilion's door, very quietly to the Countess* – Can you hear clearly?

THE COUNTESS, *from the pavilion* – We can hear every word.

THE BARON, *running in between the two champions* – One moment. I will not allow the Marquis to risk his life without enjoying the fruits of his victory. (*To Mistress Pinçon*) Whoever you are, and although you show great bravery in this instance, your conduct is nonetheless cowardly. Here is my sword so defend yourself against the Marquis, for I am telling you that you will have to defend yourself against me even though I'm certain he will take away your desire for any such thing.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *quietly to the Commander* – I've got the colic.

THE COMMANDER, *pretending not to understand and answering contrarily* – There's no risk, Sir, and you are dealing with people as courageous as yourself. I am here to be the judge on points of honour.

THE MARQUIS, *furiously* – That's enough. (*To the Baron.*) Move away, Baron.

THE BARON, *moving back* – Willingly.

MISTRESS PINÇON, *trembling, and aside* – Oh! My hand is quite numb. Oh! I am going to make myself known.

THE MARQUIS – Will you stand on guard?

MISTRESS PINÇON, *bitterly disappointed* – Eh! One moment for goodness sake! You're not giving me time to think.

THE BARON – Oh! Oh! What a change of voice.

MISTER PINÇON, *from the back of the wings* – Stop, Sir. Do nothing until I've spoken to you.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Ah!... the poor dear man, for once he has arrived at the right time.

MISTER PINÇON, *continuing from the back of the stage* – It's my blasted wife who is deceiving you, dressed up as a man.

MISTRESS PINÇON – See this beast.

THE MARQUIS – What do the cries of my Valet mean?

SCENE XIII

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, MISTER PINÇON, A CROWD OF PEASANTS,
BLAISE AND BABET *at their head. (Lackeys carry torches.)*

MISTER PINÇON *very troubled* – Ah! Sir, be very wary of believing all that you see.

THE MARQUIS – Who then is this man in disguise.

MISTER PINÇON, *pulling off his wife's hat* – As I said Sir, it's my mischievous wife. And the letter you received was dictated by the Commander, and written by his Secretary.

THE MARQUIS – What does all this mean, uncle?

THE COMMANDER, *laughs*.

THE BARON – I am totally floored....

THE MARQUIS – Uncle, you are laughing!

THE COMMANDER – With happiness, I assure you.

MISTER PINÇON, *falling at the feet of the Marquis* – Ah! Sir, my dear Master forgive me for having deceived you in order to please the Countess, and Madame your wife. This unknown woman whom you met at Madame de Saint-Alban's party was Madame de Clainville. The Countess, I and my wife, were all party to the secret.

THE BARON – I am vexed. What an ordeal.

THE MARQUIS – What do I hear! Oh joy that I cannot imagine! My dear de Clainville, where is she? Let me die at her feet from the pain of not having guessed it, and from the regret of having affronted her.... And you, uncle, you do not deny it.... Is this a dream? Is it the truth?

THE BARON, *aside* – Both are possible but what I see most clearly is that here I am everyone's dupe.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Can you doubt it from my costume, and does everything not reassure you that it is by these resources of my imagination and the Countess's that you are the happiest of husbands.

THE COMMANDER – I know everything. (*Going to meet the Marchioness.*) Come, my dear niece, and you Countess, try and convince him for never has a man received a more agreeable surprise.

SCENE XIV, and last.

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, THE MARQUISE.

THE MARQUIS, *running to meet the Marquise* – Oh most adorable of all women! At your feet I renounce this false philosophy that was never in my soul. Any man with finer feelings can only use the shortcomings of his own mind to control his passions.

THE MARQUISE, *with the greatest joy* – Oh my friend, my dear husband!

THE MARQUIS – Say your lover, your most passionate lover.

THE COUNTESS – Always keep this title, and we promise you, on our part, to never change....

THE MARQUISE – They are both the same in my eyes.

THE COMMANDER – Finally we have corrected him.

THE MARQUIS – Ah! Say rather that you have cured me. May all husbands take me as their model, but the corruption of our morals no longer accepts this pure and respectful love. One unites oneself today to separate tomorrow. That is the fruit of our century of philosophy. But I recognise, from now on, true happiness. To be united with my wife, to adore her and be tenderly loved by her and cherished by my children, and make them happy. Henceforth that is where I will chart all my pleasures.

THE COUNTESS, *to the Baron* – So, dear Baron, what will you think of me and the Marquise now? I had promised to be useful to you, and I do believe that in allowing you to know us properly, I have been of service to you.

THE BARON – I can see, Madame, that for pretty women anything is possible.

THE COUNTESS, *to the Marquise* – My dear friend, should we take this as a compliment or as a caricature?

THE MARQUIS – A caricature Ladies. I challenge his wit to find a subject fit for it in your conduct.

THE COMMANDER – If he were a coxcomb, he would easily find a way to take revenge for the cruel badinage of these ladies.

THE BARON, *aside* – The Commander is also mocking me.... I have truly deserved it. (*Aloud.*) Ladies, the Marquis alone gives me the justice that is my due. I leave you the triumph of having made a dupe of me and, far from complaining, I will always congratulate myself for having given you this pleasure.

MISTRESS PINÇON – Baron, I return your arms having beaten you.

THE BARON – The sword will now be equal in worth to Joan of Arc's. The Pinçon heroine would never yield to her in anything.

MISTRESS PINÇON – I am satisfied with myself; I proved to Mister Pinçon that a woman is always right when she wants to be.

MISTER PINÇON – How she will boast of that!

THE COUNTESS – It seems that we are all happy but I can see around me two people who are not.

(*She looks at Blaise and Babet who make a sign to her.*)

THE BARON – Ah! I see. There is a certain Blaise among us, I know him only too well.

BLAISE – Odds bodkins, Baron, I know you very well, and you're talkin' of me. So back me resolutely.

THE COMMANDER – I will provide Babet with a dowry. (*To the Marquis.*) You will take good care of your gardener?

THE MARQUIS – I wish, my children, to unite you this evening.... My dear Pinçon, I won't forget you, nor your husband.... And you, Countess, find joy in having overwhelmed with happiness two hearts that have never ceased to long for one another.

BLAISE – The good Lord!

BABET – The good Master!

ALL THE PEASANTS TOGETHER – The good Lord, the good Master!

THE END

VAUDEVILLE.

Tune: *With the games in the Village.*²⁶

THE COUNTESS.

If we want to bring back judgement
That to all things offers its rule
We must be quite intelligent
And use the voice of ridicule.
From a pedant too dejected
It would defy any lesson;
Amity pure and light-hearted
Is the way to accept reason.

THE MARQUIS.

With a heart so tender and peaceful,
Despite its taste for hauteur,
Of a wife forever thoughtful
I find I am again the lover.
We may think we are expert,
But under a mask all are equal.
Friends have known how to instruct,
I was taught all since the ball.

THE BARON.

²⁶ The song *Avec les jeux dans le village* comes from a one act vaudeville called *Amours d'été* (*Summer Loves*) written by Pierre-Yvon Barré and Pierre-Antoine-Augustin de Piis, performed in 1781.

I, from a lesson so wise
Will try my best to profit.
One must, if one is able,
Stop those who wish to cheat:
All sensible woman agree,
And in this way we secure
Certain favours that constancy
Delivers us, here and there.

THE COMMANDER.
Let us not believe in appearance,
It's too often found to be faulty:
A wife who shows perseverance
Knows her husband will be happy.
I feel for all those in the city,
Ensnared by a worthy spouse,
Few are wronged like the marquis,
But those truly cheated are numerous.

MISTER PINÇON.
As for me I'm just a ninny,
Not once did I doubt it, never;
But I do remember that party,
Goodness how I was in error!
I did believe a wife back then
To her husband was duty bound,
As, Madame we used to see, when
She'd to agree his ways were sound.

BLAISE AND BABET.

BLAISE.
I am certain of our lovin'
That I'll keep among us 'ere.
In the village we're caressin'
In the town they've all to fear.

BABET.
Ah! Rest assured, Blaise dearest,
It's you I'll only ever be loving;
Who wants to be the richest,
When the one we love is equal to a king.

THE MARQUIS.
It's an amiable Philosophy
That we should all now follow.
For love, and not jealousy
Will tie me to the god Apollo.
My homage to him I will vow,
To him my songs I will dedicate,
They'll make a fool wisely bow,
And a wise man lovingly intimate.

MISTRESS PINÇON.

I feel very becoming in this suit,
I'm as pretty as a painting,
Wearing it makes me resolute,
Nothing will be found wanting.

TO THE PUBLIC.

[An unnamed male speaker, or Mistress Pinçon speaking as a man.]

I am happy, may you be too,
My playing having given you pleasure,
The school boy who wins over his tutor,
Is most delighted by his venture.

THE END.

I knew perfectly well that I had written poor verse, and I made light of it in my Dialogue but I did not expect that my printer, kind M. Cailleau, wanted to be my hack writer for the poetry, my executioner for the rhymes, he removed the reasoning and the common sense, he added to that unpardonable typographical errors that highlight with greater brilliance the multiple mistakes that I allowed to slide into my works. I beg therefore that my reader will only consider half of it and tell M. Cailleau to watch over his workers more carefully, and no longer to expose the work of a woman to the ignorance of his apprentices. The sex merits the eye of the master and it is ungallant of M. Cailleau to hold with such negligence.

[The three volume edition of de Gouges's *Oeuvres de Madame de Gouges dédiées à Monseigneur le duc d'Orléans* held at the British Library has these hand-written words at the bottom of the last page of the play and over onto the next blank one. They can also be found in a copy held at the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP) though in that example they have been struck out seemingly in the same ink. Four other extant copies held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) do not feature this addition. The BHVP researcher presumes that de Gouges, disenchanted with her printer's work, would have added her note to the copies she held at her address for any sale she might make personally. The printer was also her bookseller so presumably the copies free from the note are from his stock. The BHVP researcher suggests that de Gouges wrote the notes herself. I believe this to be unlikely as she employed secretaries in part because her handwriting was poor. I don't think she would have wished to inscribe her newly printed and cherished volumes with a script she considered less than adequate. It is hard to prove as virtually no examples of her handwriting are known to exist. As might be expected from a hand-written note the two existing examples are not identical though their differences are slight and in no way alter the overall message.]