

MME JOURDAIN: He explained it very clearly and I'm quite satisfied. Send for a notary.

DORANTE: That's very well said. And so that your mind may be set completely at ease Madame Jourdain, and to clear up any jealousy you might have felt about your husband, let me say that this lady and I intend to use the same notary to arrange our own marriage.

MME JOURDAIN: I consent to that too.

M. JOURDAIN (*aside to Dorante*): Is that to lead her up the garden path?

DORANTE: Yes, we've got to keep her amused with our subterfuge.

M. JOURDAIN (*aside*): Good! (*To the others*.) Someone go and fetch the notary.

DORANTE: While we are waiting for him to come and draw up the contracts, let's watch our ballet. It will keep His Turkish Highness entertained.

M. JOURDAIN: Excellent idea! Come, let's take our places.

MME JOURDAIN: What about Nicole?

M. JOURDAIN: I give her to the interpreter — and my wife to anyone who'll have her.

COVIELLE: Thank you sir. (*Aside*) If there's a bigger fool than him anywhere on earth, I'll shout it from the rooftops!

The comedy continues and concludes with a 'Ballet of the Nations' which has no relevance, except as a spectacle, to the play which ends here.

Those Learned Ladies

A Comedy

Les Femmes savantes
Comédie

*First performed on 11 March 1672 at the Théâtre du
Palais Royal by the King's Players*

Conceived in 1668 and completed by December 1670, *Les Femmes savantes* was staged in March 1672. Audiences reacted positively at first but quickly lost interest, and after Easter, having been played nineteen times, it was withdrawn. Its modest success may perhaps be attributed to the fact that war was in the air (Louis XIV would invade Holland in June), but there was also a feeling that the subject — the follies of preciosity — was too slight for five acts and that Molière was too sweeping in his strictures on women.

His new play, which showed how intellectual ambitions ruin women, gave the opposite side of the argument put in *The School for Wives* (1662) which had shown the un wisdom of raising girls in ignorance. It also resumed the attack on the foolish *précieuses* he had satirized in 1659. Philaminte and Bélise seem to be Magdelon and Cathos a generation on. They know everything but have learned nothing: they have ideas but no judgement, taste but no discrimination, passion but no affection. They are silly, snobbish and pretentious. Bélise has had her wits turned by reading too many novels. Philaminte, who is more intelligent, nevertheless dotes on the nature of the universe and Armande, taking her lead from her assertive mother, is odious. But whereas Molière had let his *précieuses* down lightly in 1659, he now shows them little mercy, for he presents them as a threat to the family and to society at large.

He had regularly attacked the excesses of preciosity, often in similar terms: Trissotin reads his poems in 1672 as Mascarille had done in 1659, and with equally comic results. But the comedy now acquires a harder edge. The mood may be lightened by the satire of pedantry and by the character of Henriette, who is a sister to Elmire and Éliante and a splendid advertisement for the freedom Molière was prepared to allow 'natural' women. But he shows as little sympathy for his learned ladies as he does for learned men (the play was originally titled *Trissotin*). They neither understand science and philosophy nor do they show much sign of being capable of the mental effort required by serious study. Yet they are prepared to foist Trissotin on Henriette and propose to play

an intellectual role in society by setting up an academy to police language and censor whatever offends them. Clearly, a little knowledge is dangerous and Molière treats them with a noticeable lack of charity.

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that he had abandoned his usual practice of satirizing human types and was settling personal scores. His target was certain coteries dominated by women which had made his professional life difficult. But while there is no clear model for Philaminte, there was no doubt in the minds of his contemporaries that Trissotin (initially named Tricoitin) was based on the caustic abbé Cotin who had achieved little success in the pulpit but had acquired great influence in fashionable literary circles. He had criticized *The School for Wives*, attacked Molière's friend Boileau (who had replied in his *Satires*) and spoken dismissively of the wretched farces staged by actors, a breed judged to be 'infamous' by any standards, Christian or pagan. Molière turns him into a ridiculous figure (his name suggests that he is 'three times a fool') who is also a repulsive dowry-chaser: unlike Tartuffe, who desires Elmire, his appetites are simply venal. Here, too, Molière is less than fair. Cotin was more pompous than vicious and the two poems which he attributes to Trissotin were in fact examples of how not to write gallant verse. His opponent, Vadius, shelters the Hellenist Gilles Ménage who, though clever in several languages, was reckoned to be dull in all of them.

But though the tone of the play is darkened by this strong element of personal satire, it nevertheless remains one of Molière's most sophisticated comedies of manners. His ladies are Célimène's inferiors. They belong in the ranks of the upper middle class and are as socially pretentious in their way as Monsieur Jourdain. Into this carefully observed setting Molière inserts a plot which is another version of the clash between young love and the selfishness of a parent. But he adds enough variations to keep the action moving: two clearly defined camps, an intruder (who, like Tartuffe, does not appear until Act III), an impertinent kitchen-maid and a difference of opinion between two sisters which mirrors the disagreement between their parents. And once again we are offered a gallery of individualized types: Philaminte, whose ideas have destroyed her femininity, has enough character to face the loss of her fortune with courage, Bérise is the poor relation who lives in a world of 'notions' and Armande has read too many books for her own good. Among the men Clitandre and Ariste are prepared to act in defence of common-sense,

unlike Chrysale, the blustering husband who fears his wife, while Trissotin is both comic and odious.

Molière takes up positions on a number of issues. In addition to satirizing pedantry, he shows how it disrupts families, turns rational people into fools and allows rogues to prosper. He warns against intellectual pretentiousness in both sexes and demonstrates that ill-digested ideas disturb both judgement and the imagination. He explores relationships – of husband and wife, parents and children – and judges all his characters by the yardstick of vanity. For while Molière might express strong views on women and vent his spleen on personal enemies, his real target remains the cheats and dupes who through weakness, blindness or self-interest deny the natural principles of tolerance and love without which there is no happiness.

Act I

Scene i:

ARMANDE, HENRIETTE

ARMANDE: But surely sister, to be called a 'Woman' is distinction enough. Are you seriously thinking of abandoning its pleasant ring and reveling in the notion of marriage? How can you entertain such a vulgar prospect?

HENRIETTE: But I do sister.

ARMANDE: Oh! That 'I do'! I can't stand it. The very words make my stomach turn.

HENRIETTE: But sister, how does marriage itself in any way force you to —

ARMANDE: Ooh! shame on you!

HENRIETTE: What?

ARMANDE: Shame on you I say! Don't you have the most awful sinking feeling every time you hear the word? Aren't you offended by the disgusting picture it evokes? the repulsive turn it gives your thoughts? Don't you shudder at the very idea? Henriette, how can you reconcile your feelings with the implications of the word 'marriage'?

HENRIETTE: When I consider the implications of the word, I see a husband, children and a home. And if I may say so, I find nothing there to offend me or make me shudder.

ARMANDE: Heavens, don't tell me you would gladly allow yourself to be shackled?

HENRIETTE: What better could a girl of my age do than bind herself to a husband, a man who loves her and is loved by her? And then in a marriage based on affection, surrender to the charm of a blameless life? Surely marriage, provided both partners are compatible, has much to recommend it?

ARMANDE: Oh really! What elementary lines your mind runs on! Can't you see how small you make yourself look in everybody's eyes by shutting yourself up in domestic bliss and seeing nothing more exciting than an adoring husband and a string of snivelling children? You ought to leave whatever simple amusements can be derived from that sort of thing to people who have neither minds nor taste.

Characters

CHRYSALE, a good citizen
PHILAMINTE, his wife
ARMANDE } his daughters
HENRIETTE }
ARISTE, brother of Chrysale
BÉLISE, sister of Chrysale
CLITANDRE, in love with
Henriette
TRISSOTIN, a wit
VADIUS, a pedant
MARTINE, a kitchen-maid
LÉPINE, a footman
JULIEN, servant to Vadius
NOTARY

The scene is set in Paris

You, Henriette, should set your sights higher. You must acquire a taste for the nobler things, learn to treat the senses and base matter with contempt, and give yourself completely, as we do, to the things of the mind. You have our mother as a living example. She is honoured everywhere, acknowledged as an intellectual. Try to be a true daughter to her as I do. Try to live up to the intelligence that runs in our family, and learn to appreciate the fascination and joy which the love of study brings to our hearts. Far from becoming the slave of one man, sister, marry Philosophy which raises us above the rest of humanity and recognizes reason as its sovereign lord by the power it exercises over our animal natures whose gross appetites reduce us to the level of beasts. These are burning passions, tender attachments worthy of filling every waking moment of our lives! And all the worry which makes life miserable for so many suggestible women I see, appears quite degrading and horrible to me.

HENRIETTE: When we are born, Heaven, which is only too visibly all-powerful in its workings, intends us all for different purposes. Not every mind is made of such stuff as can be moulded to produce a philosopher. Yours may be naturally suited to rarefied heights occupied by the speculations of scholars. But mine, Armande, was meant to be pedestrian and remain within its limitations by keeping to the practical side of things. Let's not disturb the proper dictates of Heaven. Let us each follow the direction of our instincts. You, borne along by a fine and clever mind, can dwell on the lofty mountain-tops of philosophy, whereas I, with both feet on the ground, shall taste the earthly delights of matrimony. That way, though our points of view are opposite, we shall both follow in our mother's footsteps. You will imitate her soul and noble aspirations, and I her senses and earthy pleasures; you shall emulate the products of her mind and intelligence, and I, sister, those which are made of base matter.

ARMANDE: When you claim to take your lead from other people, you should try to reflect their noblest qualities. Modelling yourself on them, sister, doesn't mean you should go around coughing and spluttering just because they do it.

HENRIETTE: But you would hardly be what you are so proud of being today, sister, if our mother had possessed only the noblest qualities: it's as well for you that her fine intellect did not always bury itself

in philosophy. Please, can't you find it in your heart to allow me a little of those same lapses to which you owe your very existence? And in your determination to win me round to your way of thinking, don't snuff out some budding little intellectual who is waiting to be born.

ARMANDE: I can see there's no curing your mind of this crazy idea that you must have a husband. But tell me, who do you have in mind? I hope at least that you're not setting your sights on Clitandre?

HENRIETTE: And why should they not be set on him? Is he so lacking in merit? Would he really be an unsuitable choice?

ARMANDE: No. But it would be quite dishonest to run off with what belongs to someone else. For it is no secret to anybody that Clitandre has expressed the deepest regard for me.

HENRIETTE: Yes, but his regard hasn't got him very far, for you refuse to descend to such low human weakness. In your mind, you have given up all thought of marriage for ever and settled all your love on philosophy. So, since you have no sentimental plans for Clitandre yourself, how can it matter to you if someone else sets her cap at him?

ARMANDE: The control which reason exerts over the senses does not mean we have to give up the delightful experience of being loved. The qualities one would not wish for in a husband may be very desirable in one's retinue of admirers.

HENRIETTE: I have never tried to stop him worshipping your beauty. All I did was to take what his heart offered me, after you'd turned him down.

ARMANDE: But I ask you, how can you trust what the heart of a man on the rebound offers? Do you believe he really loves you and that his feelings for me are dead?

HENRIETTE: He tells me so Armande, and I believe him.

ARMANDE: Don't be so naive Henriette. The truth is that when he says he has deserted me and loves you, he doesn't really mean it and is deceiving himself.

HENRIETTE: Perhaps. But if you like, we can easily find out. I see him coming and on this point he'll be able to tell us exactly how matters stand.

Scene ii:

CLITANDRE, ARMANDE, HENRIETTE

HENRIETTE: Ah Clitandre! To clear up a doubt my sister has just put into my mind, do tell us which of us you are in love with. Leave no corner of your heart unexplored and, please, let us know which of us has the better claim on your feelings.

ARMANDE: No, no. I have no wish to subject what you feel to rigorous analysis. I take an easier line with people. I know what a trial the strain of talking about these things face to face can be.

CLITANDRE (*to Armande*): Not at all Madame. I have nothing to hide and do not feel the least awkward about speaking freely. It is not something that embarrasses me at all and (*gazing at Henriette*) I don't mind saying out loud, frankly and unambiguously, that the tender coils in which I have been caught, that is my love and my dearest wishes, lie entirely with your sister. You shouldn't be upset by this admission: it's what you wanted. Your beauty captivated me at first, and my tender sighs gave you ample proof of the strength of my feelings. I was ready to give you my undying love. But you did not think that what you saw was a conquest worthy of you. The way you looked at me inflicted endless slights: your eyes ruled my heart like two proud tyrants. Tiring of being so consistently scorned, I looked for a less inhuman conqueror and softer chains. I found both in your sister's eyes: I shall always treasure the way she looked at me. With one gentle glance she dried my tears and did not despise what your beauty had rejected. Such rare kindness touched me so deeply that nothing now can ever loosen the ties that bind me. Which is why I dare ask you now, Madame, to do nothing to undermine my feelings or attempt to win back my heart, for it is filled with gentle love and will remain so until the day I die.

ARMANDE: And who says anyone wants to Monsieur? Who is so concerned about you to try? I find it amusing that you should imagine any such thing and consider you impertinent for telling me.

HENRIETTE: Not so hasty Armande. Aren't you forgetting your philosophy which governs our animal parts so easily and keeps such a tight rein on anger?

ARMANDE: And, since you've brought it up, aren't you forgetting your

duty by listening to what is dressed up as a protestation of love without first obtaining the permission of our parents? Remember that duty makes you dependent on their authority, that you are not permitted to fall in love except with the man they choose, that they have absolute power over your feelings and that to decide these matters for yourself is a crime.

HENRIETTE: I am most grateful for the thoughtfulness you display in reminding me where my duty lies. I shall model my conduct on your lessons, and to show you just how much I take them to heart I ask you, Clitandre, to place what you feel for me on a proper footing by obtaining the approval of my parents. Obtain this legal sanction over my sentiments and give me the right to love you without committing a crime.

CLITANDRE: I shall set to work at once and spare no effort. I was only waiting for your consent.

ARMANDE: So you win, Henriette! And, judging by the look on your face, you seem to think I am upset by it.

HENRIETTE: I think that? Not at all! I know you believe that the requirements of reason are invariably more powerful than the call of the senses, and that by following the lessons learned from tranquil reflection you are above such weakness. Far from imagining that you are upset in any way, I feel sure you will now do everything you can to help me by supporting Clitandre when he asks for my hand and, by giving us your backing, hasten the happy day of our wedding. I implore you, and as a first step —

ARMANDE: Don't be sillier than you are by trying to be sarcastic with me! Anyone can see that the cast-off love I've tossed to you has gone to your head.

HENRIETTE: Cast-off it may be, but you wouldn't be altogether unhappy to catch it on the rebound. If you could get it off me again by looks and glances, you would soon learn modesty and lower your eyes accordingly.

ARMANDE: I shan't demean myself by replying to that. I refuse to listen to such nonsense.

HENRIETTE: That's very good of you. Thank you for showing such restraint. It's more than anything we could have imagined. (*Exit Armande.*)

Scene iii:

CLITANDRE, HENRIETTE

HENRIETTE: Your frankness rather took her by surprise.

CLITANDRE: She needed to be spoken to frankly. The airs her foolish pride give her deserved at the very least plain speaking. But now that I'm free to do so, Henriette, I shall go and speak to your father . . .

HENRIETTE: It would be best to start with my mother. Father will agree to anything but he never follows through the things he has decided. He was born with a very easy-going nature, which means he goes along with whatever his wife wants. She rules the whole house and is so categorical that whatever she decides is law. I'd prefer it if, in your dealings with her and my aunt too, you could go out of your way to be, frankly, a little more amenable and react in an enthusiastic way to their notions, for that would earn their respect and approval.

CLITANDRE: I am sincere by nature and could never bring myself to flatter those aspects of their character which have survived in your sister. Intellectual women are not to my taste. I grant you, a woman should know all sorts of things. But I cannot abide a woman who feels the deplorable urge to learn simply to become learned. When such matters crop up in conversation, I'd rather she knew enough not to know what she knows. I mean I would prefer her to wear her learning lightly, be content to have knowledge without wanting other people to be aware of how much she knows, and not go round quoting authors, using long words and adding clever comments to the most prosaic observations. I have a great deal of respect for your mother. But I don't approve of this mania she has. I refuse to be a sounding-box for whatever she says, nor can I understand why she idolizes her hero of wit, her Monsieur Trissotin. I find the man irritating, and boring beyond words. It makes me furious to see her showing someone like him such respect and raising him to the ranks of the greatest and finest minds, whereas he is a ninny whose books are laughed at, a pedant whose free-flowing pen supplies grocers with endless wrapping-paper.

HENRIETTE: Yes, to me everything he writes and says is tiresome, and my opinion of him more or less coincides with your tastes and views.

But since he has great influence over my mother you must make an effort to be agreeable to him. A man pays his court to a woman who possesses his heart. He'll try to win over everyone to his side and, to make sure that nobody opposes him, he will even be nice to the family dog.

CLITANDRE: You're right of course. But Monsieur Trissotin fills me with unutterable contempt, to the bottom of my soul. I could never agree to surrender my self-respect by praising his books, simply to get his backing. It was through his writings that I first became aware of him. I knew the man before ever I set eyes on him. In the drivelling books he foists on us, I saw the effects of the pedantic self-regard which he spreads far and wide: the constant arrogance of his presumption, the unflinchingly good opinion he has of himself, his lazy assumption of superiority, all these make him endlessly self-satisfied and enable him to smile unceasingly at his own brilliance, with the result that he congratulates himself on everything he publishes and would not exchange his fame for all the battle honours of a general.

HENRIETTE: How very clever you are to see all that!

CLITANDRE: It even worked for his appearance, for in the poems he inflicts on us I could see his face, even what the poet must look like. I guessed how he would look with such accuracy that one day I ran across a man in the Palais de Justice and bet that it was Trissotin himself – and I won my bet.

HENRIETTE: You're making it up!

CLITANDRE: No, it happened just as I said. But here's your aunt. Please, won't you let me reveal our secret to her? With her on our side, we'll have an ally close to your mother. (*Exit Henriette.*)

Scene iv:

CLITANDRE, BÉLISE

CLITANDRE: A word Madame, if you permit? Will you allow a man in love to take advantage of this fortunate moment to reveal to you the sincere feelings which –

BÉLISE: Oh, soft! Take care you do not speak to me too frankly of your passion. I have added you to my list of admirers, but you must make do with saying what you have to say with your eyes only, and refrain

from using any other kind of language to express desires which, to my way of thinking, are an outrage. Love me, long for me, pine for my beauty, but oblige me by keeping it all to yourself. I can turn a blind eye to your secret yearnings as long as you don't go beyond the unspoken glance. But the moment you give them speech and utterance, I shall be forced to banish you from my sight for ever.

CLITANDRE: Don't be alarmed by what I feel in my heart Madame. Henriette is the one I love and I have come to beg you most earnestly to use your good offices to further the feelings I have for her.

BÉLISE: Ah! the approach is original I must confess! A clever subterfuge which deserves congratulations. In all the novels I have read I've yet to come across anything so ingenious.

CLITANDRE: I am not trying to be clever Madame, it's the straightforward truth about how I feel. With chains of everlasting love, Heaven has bound me to Henriette's beauty. She holds me entirely in her gentle power and to be married to Henriette is the only thing I aspire to. You can help a great deal and all I ask is that you should be good enough to support my efforts to win her.

BÉLISE: I see through what you're asking in your roundabout way. I know exactly what you mean when you say the name 'Henriette'. It is a pretty conceit and I'll continue it in stating what my heart prompts me to say in reply. I tell you 'Henriette' is not interested in marrying anybody and you must languish for her cherishing no hope.

CLITANDRE: Madame, what is the use of complicating matters in this way? Why do you insist on believing what is not the case?

BÉLISE: Oh please, no more protestations. Stop denying what your eyes have told me so often. It should be enough that the flight of fancy your love has so prettily devised has found favour in my sight. I am pleased to suffer your homage beneath this figure of speech which is a proper expression of respect — but on condition that its rapture, guided by honour, makes oblation upon my altar of only the purest of vows.

CLITANDRE: But —

BÉLISE: Farewell! For now, you must be satisfied with this, for I have said more than I intended.

CLITANDRE: But you are wrong to —

BÉLISE: Enough! I am blushing now. My modesty has been sorely tested.

CLITANDRE: I'm hanged if I love you and if —

BÉLISE: No no! I'll not hear another word! (*Exit Bélise.*)

CLITANDRE: The devil take the crazy woman and her idiotic notions! Did anyone ever see such bone-headedness? I'd better involve someone else in this business which I must settle. I'll try and get help from someone wiser.

Act II

Scene i:

ARISTE

ARISTE (*to Clitandre who hurries off*): Yes, I'll bring you the answer the moment I have it. I'll back you up, I'll hurry things along, I'll do the necessary. (*To himself*): What a lot of things a man in love says when all he wants is to hear just one word. And so impatient to have what he wants. Never . . .

Scene ii:

ARISTE, CHRYSALE

ARISTE: Ah, good day to you, brother!

CHRYSALE: And good day to you, brother.

ARISTE: Do you know why I'm here?

CHRYSALE: No, but I'm willing to listen if you are prepared to tell me.

ARISTE: Have you known Clitandre long?

CHRYSALE: Why yes. I often see him around the house.

ARISTE: And what do you make of him?

CHRYSALE: He's an honourable fellow, clever, heart's in the right place, very sound. There aren't many who have his qualities.

ARISTE: I've come here because there's something he wants. I'm delighted you think so well of him.

CHRYSALE: I met his late father when I was in Rome.

ARISTE: Good!

CHRYSALE: He was, brother, a most respectable gentleman.

ARISTE: So I've heard.

CHRYSALE: We were both only twenty-eight at the time and, if I say so myself, a fine couple of sparks!
 ARISTE: I can well believe it!
 CHRYSALE: We were most attentive to those Roman ladies. Everyone talked about the things we got up to. We made lots of men jealous.
 ARISTE: Excellent! But let me turn to the reason that's brought me here.

Scene iii.

CHRYSALE, ARISTE, BÉLISE (*who enters and listens*)

ARISTE: Clitandre has asked me to see you and speak for him. He has fallen in love with pretty Henriette.

CHRYSALE: You don't say! With my daughter?

ARISTE: Yes. Clitandre is mad about her. I never saw anyone so smitten.
 BÉLISE (*to Ariste*): No no! I overheard what you were saying. You don't know the full story. Things aren't the way you think.

CHRYSALE: What do you mean sister?

BÉLISE: Clitandre isn't being honest with you. He is in love with another person altogether.

ARISTE: You must be joking. Are you saying it's not Henriette he loves?

BÉLISE: That's right. I'm certain.

ARISTE: But he told me himself.

BÉLISE: Quite!

ARISTE: And you see me here, sister, because he wanted me to ask her father for her hand.

BÉLISE: Of course!

ARISTE: And he was so in love that he said it was most urgent that I should press ahead with the marriage as quickly as possible.

BÉLISE: Better and better! He could not have managed the deception more gallantly! Between ourselves, Henriette is no more than a diversion, a clever decoy, a pretext for his real feelings to which I hold the key. I am most anxious that both of you should not labour under a misapprehension a moment longer.

ARISTE: But if you know so much about this, tell us, please, who is this other woman he's in love with?

BÉLISE: You really want to know?

ARISTE: Yes. Who is it?

BÉLISE: Me.

ARISTE: You?

BÉLISE: Yes, me.

ARISTE (*laughs*): Really, sister!

BÉLISE: Why are you laughing? What's so surprising about what I've just said? Someone as attractive as myself can, I think, be allowed to claim to have more than one suitor in her retinue of admirers. Dorante, Damis, Cléonte and Lycidas are living proof that one is not entirely without charms.

ARISTE: Are all those men in love with you?

BÉLISE: Yes, and with all their might.

ARISTE: Have they told you so?

BÉLISE: None has dared take such a liberty. Thus far, they have worshipped so reverently that they have never spoken a word of their feelings. But their eyes, those silent witnesses, have done the work of offering their hearts and service to their lady.

ARISTE: Damis is hardly ever seen in this house.

BÉLISE: That's to show how completely he respects me.

ARISTE: Dorante is always making cutting remarks about you.

BÉLISE: The uncontrolled outbursts of jealous rage.

ARISTE: Both Cléonte and Lycidas have got married.

BÉLISE: They did so out of desperation. I drove them to it.

ARISTE: Really sister, these are obviously delusions.

CHRYSALE: You must forget these fanciful notions.

BÉLISE: Ooh! Notions! Fanciful notions, you call them? Are you saying I have fanciful notions? Really, there's nothing wrong with fanciful notions! I am glad I've got notions. I had no idea that they were fanciful! (*She goes out.*)

Scene iv.

CHRYSALE, ARISTE

CHRYSALE: Clearly our sister is mad.

ARISTE: And getting worse by the day. But let's get back to what we were talking about. Clitandre is asking you for Henriette's hand in marriage. Tell me, what answer am I to give him?

CHRYSALE: Need you ask? I agree with all my heart. I'll be honoured to have him in the family.

ARISTE: You do know that he is not terribly well off and . . .

CHRYSALE: A consideration that isn't of prime importance: he is rich in virtue and that's worth more than money. Moreover, his father and I always saw eye to eye on everything.

ARISTE: We'd better speak to your wife and try to win her over to —

CHRYSALE: No need. I'll have him for a son-in-law.

ARISTE: Yes, but to confirm your consent brother it would do no harm to have her agreement. Come now . . .

CHRYSALE: You're not serious? It's not necessary. I'll answer for my wife. Leave the whole thing to me.

ARISTE: But —

CHRYSALE: Leave it to me I say. There's nothing to be afraid of. I shall go this very minute and tell her how things stand.

ARISTE: Oh, very well. And I'll go and ask Henriette what she thinks and then come back to find out if . . .

CHRYSALE: Consider it done. I shall go and speak to my wife without further ado.

Scene v:

MARTINE, CHRYSALE

MARTINE (*in tears*): Oh, what a pickle! It's true wot they say: 'give a dog a bad name, then hang him' and 'wearing liveries don't bring legacies'.

CHRYSALE: What's all this? What's the matter Martine?

MARTINE: Matter?

CHRYSALE: Yes.

MARTINE: The matter, sir, is that I've just been given me marchin' orders.

CHRYSALE: You've been dismissed?

MARTINE: Yes. Madame told me to get out.

CHRYSALE: I don't understand. Say that again.

MARTINE: She told me if I didn't get out, I'd get a good thrashin'.

CHRYSALE: No, you shall stay. I'm satisfied with you. My wife gets a little carried away at times but I don't want . . .

Scene vi:

PHILAMINTE, BÉLISE, CHRYSALE, MARTINE

PHILAMINTE (*seeing Martine*): What! Are you still here, hussy? Get out this minute, you baggage! Be off with you and never show your face here ever again!

CHRYSALE: Steady on!

PHILAMINTE: No, it's all settled.

CHRYSALE: What's all settled?

PHILAMINTE: I want her out of here.

CHRYSALE: But what has she done to make you —

PHILAMINTE: What? Are you siding with her?

CHRYSALE: Not at all.

PHILAMINTE: Are you taking her part against me?

CHRYSALE: Heavens, no! I'm simply asking what terrible thing she's done.

PHILAMINTE: Am I the sort who would dismiss her without good reason?

CHRYSALE: I'm not saying that. But in the matter of servants, we —

PHILAMINTE: No! She will leave this house I tell you.

CHRYSALE: Well yes, of course. Has anyone said anything to the contrary?

PHILAMINTE: I will not have obstacles put in my way when I say I want something.

CHRYSALE: I agree.

PHILAMINTE: And if you were a considerate husband, you would side with me against her and be as furious as I am.

CHRYSALE: And so I will. (*To Martine*.) Yes, my wife was right to tell you to go, you wretched girl. What you did was quite unforgivable.

MARTINE: What did I do then?

CHRYSALE (*to himself*): Blessed if I know.

PHILAMINTE: She still won't see how serious it is.

CHRYSALE: Did she give you good cause to be angry by breaking a mirror or some china ornament?

PHILAMINTE: Now would I dismiss her — and do you think I'd lose my temper — for something so trivial?

CHRYSALE (*to Martine*): What can it be? (*To Philaminte*.) So it was something more serious?