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SF PERUSALS

The Imaginary Invalid

A Play in Three Acts

Miles Malleson

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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THE IMAGINARY INVALID

CHARACTERS

(*in the order of their appearance*)

MONSIEUR ARGAN
TOINETTE, the maid and nurse
ANGELICA, Argan's elder daughter
BÉLINE, Argan's wife
MONSIEUR BONNEFOY, a lawyer
CLÉANTE, in love with Angelica
DR DIAFORUS
DR THOMAS DIAFORUS, his son
LOUISE, Argan's younger daughter
MONSIEUR BÉRALDE, Argan's brother
THE APOTHECARY
DR PURGON

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

The sitting-room of Monsieur Argan's house in Paris. 1674

ACT II

The same. Immediately following

ACT III

The same. A little later

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

ACT I

SCENE—*The living-room of Monsieur Argan's house in Paris. 1674. There is a door* L *leading to the rest of the house and a door* R *leading to Argan's bedroom. An immense armchair is* C *with a small table* R *of it, loaded with bottles of medicine, boxes of pills and medicine glasses, etc. Slightly* L *of the chair is a somewhat larger table on which there is a great sheaf of bills and papers, a handbell, a large quill pen, an inkwell, some counters and an abacus, beads threaded on wires, which Argan uses to help him with his sums. There is a spinet and duet stool up* L, *a three-fold screen up* C *and a cupboard up* R. *Upright chairs stand down* RC *and down* LC.

When the CURTAIN *rises,* MONSIEUR ARGAN *is seated alone in the armchair* C. *He is in his dressing-gown and nightcap and is surrounded by pillows, cushions and rugs. His stick is beside him. He is busy with the bills, obviously doing some sums of addition. He uses the counters, the abacus and his fingers. Even so he adds with difficulty. He puts aside one bill and picks up another.*

ARGAN (*reading*) "A statement of accounts, due, from Monsieur Argan to Monsieur Fleurant, apothecary." (*He throws the bill aside and picks up another*) "Due to Monsieur Fleurant, apothecary . . ." (*And another*) "Monsieur Fleurant . . ." (*And another*) "Monsieur Fleurant . . ." (*He throws it down*) Aaah! Bills, bills, bills! Like leaves in autumn, and just as difficult to get rid of. Like falling leaves, you clear 'em up, turn your back—and there they are again. I don't know which is worse—adding 'em up, or paying them. But if I don't go through 'em for myself, then I get cheated —a bit added on here, another there—shameless. I don't know what the world's coming to. No honesty left. Oh, well—here we go. (*He selects another bill, picks up his quill, dips it in the ink and starts*) Two—and two—make four. All right so far. And five—makes nine. (*He checks that on his fingers, with the counters and the abacus*) Yes. (*He writes*) And seven, and eight make thirteen. (*He checks*) No. Fifteen. Oh, well, a mistake on the right side—make it eleven. (*He looks at another bill*) Oh! Here's a much larger one. Now, what's all this about? (*He reads*) "For Monsieur Argan. A special mixture, smooth and insinuating, to encourage, sweeten and humour the digestive processes." Oh, very well put! Such delicacy! That's what I like about my apothecary—his bills are so well worded. So discreet! ". . . to encourage, sweeten and

humour . . ." Beautiful! 'Pon my word, almost poetic. (*He examines the bill*) Hey, what's this—*forty* francs. Oh, no, Master Apothecary! That won't do. That won't do at all. You can put it into verse, for all I care, but that's no reason for overcharging like this. Forty francs indeed! It may encourage my digestive processes; but it enrages *me*. Besides, it wasn't half as encouraging and humorous as you thought. Not half. So halve it. (*He scratches out and writes*) Twenty francs. And that's generous. (*He selects another bill*) And here's another. (*He reads*) "A juleep soporific, narcotic and somniferous." What was that for? (*He reads*) "To induce deep sleep." Um, I wonder whether it did. (*He puts the bill aside, selects another and studies it for a moment*) Now, what was this? Why did I take this? What *could* it have been for? (*He reads*) "Five ounces of cascara, two pints of senna pods, in a syrup of fresh figs." (*He puzzles over it for a moment. Suddenly*) Ooh! Yes! Of course! And I never slept a wink. (*He tears up the two bills*) They cancel out. I'll pay nothing for that little lot. (*Discouraged, he fingers through another pile of bills*) Fifteen francs; seventeen; twenty-six; forty-two! Oh, *no*, Master Apothecary, this is beyond a joke. I mean, if you go on like this—who can afford to be ill—and where would *you* be then? That's what I'd like to know. Out of business—and you'd deserve to be. (*He goes through another pile of bills*) On the twenty-fourth, a mixture for my blood; on the twenty-fifth, for my heart; twenty-sixth, for the kidneys; twenty-seventh, for the wind; the thirtieth, for my nerves. Ridiculous! What's wrong with my nerves, I'd like to know. (*He picks up another pile of bills*) Aah! Now, let's see. This month I had—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight different medicines; and twelve treatments—last month I had twelve different medicines and fifteen treatments. No wonder I'm not so well now as I have been. I must see the doctor about this. (*He picks up a very small handbell and rings it*)

(*The bell makes a ridiculously small "tinkle"*)

Better have him sent for at once. (*He tinkles the little bell again, but without effect*) Dam' silly little bell—doesn't make a sound. (*He shakes the bell again, more violently, but it only tinkles*) They only give it to me so they can't hear it. (*He shakes more violently, without effect*) Not that they'd come if they did. (*Now each time he rings, it is more and more violently and furiously, until it is to the limit of his strength*) I might be dying for all they know. (*Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle*) I rather believe I *am*. (*Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle*) I could easily die of rage! (*He suddenly gives an ear-splitting yell of uncontrollable anger, hurls the little bell away from him, and collapses, panting, into the depths of his great chair. His panting dies into silence, and for a moment he lies there quite still, then he begins to stir into life again. He struggles into a half-sitting position and looks round. The offending little bell is hopelessly out of reach, so he calls out, but very, very feebly, indeed only just audibly*)

Hullo. (*He struggles up a bit more, and calls a bit louder*) Hullo! (*He suddenly sits bolt upright and lets out a stentorian bellow*) *Hullo!*

(*In the distance, but so it can be clearly heard, a female voice answers*)

TOINETTE (*off* L; *calling*) Hullo?

ARGAN (*shouting*) Come quick. I'm dying!

TOINETTE (*off*) Dying?

ARGAN (*shouting*) When I can get my hands on you, I'll give you what for.

TOINETTE (*off*) What for?

ARGAN (*shouting*) Stop talking like an echo, and come here. (*He pauses*) Can you hear me?

TOINETTE (*off*) *No!*

ARGAN. Aaaah! (*He shouts*) Come here, come here, come here. Drop whatever you're doing; and come here.

(*There is the most terrific crash off* L, *followed by a scream and some horrible bumping sounds, and a noise as if all the china in the house were being smashed.*

TOINETTE, *Argan's nurse, and his wife's maid, enters* L *and stands in the doorway. She is a very amusing, wide-awake young woman. At the moment she is dishevelled, and holds a large empty tray*)

TOINETTE. Now look what you've made me do.

ARGAN. What?

TOINETTE. I've fallen downstairs.

ARGAN. Well—what of it?

TOINETTE. With your wife's breakfast tray. I've broken her cup; I've broken her saucer—and I've broken all the plates.

ARGAN (*grasping his stick*) You clumsy slut! Come here!

TOINETTE. I can't.

ARGAN. Why not?

TOINETTE. I've broken my ankle. (*She flops into the chair* LC, *at a safe distance from him and his stick*)

ARGAN. Broken your ankle. How can you look after me with a broken ankle?

TOINETTE. I can't.

ARGAN. Oh, you wicked girl! But if I can't reach you with my stick, I can give you the rough edge of my tongue! Now, listen . . .

(*Upon which* TOINETTE *takes hold of her ankle, and sets up the most frightful howling*)

(*He yells at her*) Will you be quiet?

(TOINETTE *goes on howling*)

(*Yelling*) Stop it! Will you stop it! I can't hear myself speak.

(ARGAN *stops speaking and immediately* TOINETTE *stops howling; so there is a sudden silence*)

How can I scold you, if you make that row?

TOINETTE. Scold me? When I've half killed myself, obeying you.

ARGAN. Obeying me. Did I tell you to break your ankle. Now listen . . .

(TOINETTE *again starts howling, and again Argan yells at her*)

Stop it! *Will* you stop it! St—— (*He suddenly clutches at his throat, and is silent*)

(TOINETTE *is suddenly silent*)

(*He whispers*) I think you've given me laryngitis.

TOINETTE. Then we're quits.

ARGAN. *Quits?*

TOINETTE. You've got laryngitis, I've broken my ankle; you want to scold—you're scolding; I want to cry—I'm crying. And if that isn't fair, what is?

ARGAN (*in his ordinary voice*) Don't argue; it makes my head ache. Clear these things away. (*He indicates the bills*)

(TOINETTE *rises and crosses to the table*)

I thought you'd broken your ankle.

TOINETTE. I've mended it.

ARGAN. You couldn't.

TOINETTE. Oh, yes, I could. It's cured—like your laryngitis. (*She sees the litter on the table*) Ooh, what a mess! What is it?

ARGAN. Mind your own business!

(TOINETTE *picks up a bill*)

(*He shouts*) *Don't touch 'em!*

(TOINETTE *throws the bill down, as if it had stung her*)

TOINETTE. How can I clear 'em up without touching 'em?

ARGAN. Um? Put the table over there; as it is; I'll go on with 'em tomorrow.

(TOINETTE *carries the table across the room, and puts it against the wall* R. *As she does so, she observes what is on it*)

TOINETTE. Oh! From your apothecary—all of 'em—bills—he's a nice one. And doing himself proud over you. And that doctor of yours. A pretty pair! And you, too! The three of you! The things you get up to with that poor inside of yours.

ARGAN. You leave my inside alone.

TOINETTE. I wish *you* would. You'd be a different man.

ARGAN. Don't show your ignorance, girl. My apothecary's the

best in Paris; and my doctor a man of the greatest skill, and learning—what he doesn't know about illnesses . . .

TOINETTE. I agree with you there. He smells 'em out, where nobody else would think of 'em.

ARGAN (*pleased*) That's true; that's very true.

TOINETTE. Why, if it wasn't for him you wouldn't know you were ill.

ARGAN. That's true, that's . . . What are you talking about? Of course I should be ill, but I shouldn't know what *of*. When I wanted to talk of my illnesses I shouldn't know what to call 'em.

TOINETTE. Oh, your illnesses! They're all your little darlings, aren't they? With their own pet names—(*she waves an arm at the row of bottles*) and each with a little bottle of its own—and when they're thirsty you give 'em drinks.

ARGAN. May you be forgiven! With all I have to suffer, I think this lack of sympathy is the hardest to bear. (*He sinks his head in his hands*)

(*The door* L *opens, cautiously, just enough to let in a very attractive head, that of* ANGELICA, *Argan's daughter.* ARGAN *lifts his head from his hands, and, as he does so, the head at the door disappears, and the door closes again*)

Where's my daughter?

TOINETTE (*who has seen her in the doorway*) How should I know? I haven't the slightest idea.

ARGAN. Go and find her; and send her to me; I want to talk to her.

(TOINETTE *crosses, exits* R *but reappears immediately*)

TOINETTE. She was just coming. (*She crosses to* R) A loving daughter always knows when her father wants her. You don't deserve such a daughter.

(ANGELICA *appears in the doorway* L)

ARGAN. Oh, there you are. Come in. I want to talk to you.

ANGELICA. Yes, Father. (*She comes into the room*)

ARGAN. Sit down.

ANGELICA. Yes, Father. (*And very demurely she sits on the chair* LC)

(*There is a pause*)

(*When she can bear it no longer, but still very demure*) What is it you want to see me about?

ARGAN. All in good time, all in good time; don't hurry me. Are you comfortable?

ANGELICA. Yes, thank you, yes.

ARGAN. Well, I'm not! (*He throws off his rugs, rises and hurries towards his bedroom door* R) Back in a minute.

(ARGAN *exits* R)

TOINETTE. A minute! He's an optimist!

(*As soon as ever her father is out of the way, the demure* ANGELICA *is transformed. She rises, hurries across the room to Toinette and speaks in a kind of intriguing, childish ecstasy*)

ANGELICA. Oh, Toinette!

(*But* TOINETTE, *catching this change of tone, and as she is constantly "putting on an act" of some sort, out of her own high spirits, now decides to tease Angelica; so turning her back on her, she makes as if she were busy, tidying up the bills on Argan's table*)

TOINETTE. Yes, Miss Angelica, what is it?
ANGELICA. Oh, Toinette! Toinette!
TOINETTE. What's all this about?
ANGELICA (*repeating*) Toinette!
TOINETTE. I heard. And what d'you want with me?
ANGELICA. Oh, *dear* Toinette!
TOINETTE. Oh! So now I'm "dear".
ANGELICA. Turn round and look at me

(TOINETTE *turns*)

TOINETTE. I'm looking.
ANGELICA. Can't you guess?
TOINETTE. Guess what?
ANGELICA. Why, what I want to say, and talk about.
TOINETTE. Considering we've been talking about nothing else for the past week, I've got a fair idea.
ANGELICA. Well, why don't you begin?
TOINETTE. Begin! Me begin? How can I begin, when you never stop?
ANGELICA. Oh, Toinette—he's so *handsome!* So *wonderful* to look at!

(ANGELICA's *ecstasy, her young love, is so genuine and so deeply felt that it should be revealing and touching as well as amusing. But* TOINETTE, *still putting on her act, pretends to be dumb; and does not answer*)

(*Sharply*) *Isn't he?*
TOINETTE (*immediately reacting as if the words were jolted out of her*) Oh, *yes! Yes; he is!*
ANGELICA. And his manners! Such perfect manners! Oh, but they're exquisite.

(*Again there is no answer from Toinette*)

(*Violently*) *Aren't* they?

TOINETTE (*again jumping to it in sudden violent agreement*) Oh, yes. *Yes, they are!*

ANGELICA. And his bearing! The way he holds himself! With such a manly grace! *Don't you agree?*

TOINETTE. *Yes, yes, I do!*

ANGELICA. He's every inch a Splendid Gentleman! *Toinette!*

TOINETTE. Yes?

ANGELICA. What d'you say?

TOINETTE. Yes.

ANGELICA. Yes what?

TOINETTE. Every inch.

ANGELICA. Noble! He's *noble!* That's the only word—you can't deny it. *Can you?*

TOINETTE. No, I can't.

ANGELICA. And *passionate!*

TOINETTE (*taking real interest*) *Eh?*

ANGELICA. Oh, if you only knew!

TOINETTE (*impatiently*) Well, go on, tell me.

ANGELICA. And with it all, so *gentle*; and so *self-controlled.*

TOINETTE (*disappointed*) In fact, nothing to tell.

ANGELICA. And don't you think our meeting was *ordained*?

TOINETTE (*puzzled*) Ordained?

ANGELICA. No. *Pre*-ordained. Arranged in Heaven—sometime just after the Creation. Set down, indelibly, in the Divine Diary —"On such and such a day in sixteen seventy-four, Angelica meets Cléante." What do you think?

TOINETTE (*rather doubtfully*) I suppose it *could* have been!

ANGELICA. But, Toinette—the *one* evening in the whole year when I go out to the theatre with my aunt—that *he* should be there; and in the next box to us; and think of such a wonderful excuse to come and introduce himself.

TOINETTE. Yes, he's got his wits about him, I grant you that.

ANGELICA. And isn't it *maddening*, being kept so close, and under such restraint, that I can only see him, here and there, and every now and again.

TOINETTE (*thawing again*) Oh, there, dear Mistress, I agree with you—it must be *maddening.*

ANGELICA (*encouraged by the thaw, and becoming confidential*) And, dear Toinette, now tell me: d'you think he loves me, as he says he does?

TOINETTE. Aah! Now you're asking.

ANGELICA. What do you mean by that?

TOINETTE. In matters of love, all men are much the same.

ANGELICA. How can they be?

TOINETTE. They are. When a man makes love—whatever kind of man, and in whatever way—why, then, as the philosophers say, "Appearance and Reality are hard to tell apart."

ANGELICA (*starting to interrupt*) Yes, but . . .

TOINETTE (*overwhelming her*) Take this from me: in the playing of love scenes, there are more good actors off the stage than on!

ANGELICA (*protesting*) Oh, *no*, Toinette, oh *no!* If you look close —if you look *very* close—you can tell the difference.

TOINETTE. You pretty innocence! The closer you look, the more your eyes are dazzled.

ANGELICA. Then how can you tell?

TOINETTE. You can't. Till it's too late. Who cares? I love good acting.

ANGELICA. You're wrong, and I can prove it.

TOINETTE. How?

ANGELICA. I've had a letter from him.

TOINETTE. Is he more convincing with his pen than with his tongue?

ANGELICA. No: but he told me in his letter, he was going to ask my father for his consent—so we can get married.

TOINETTE (*dropping all pretence at teasing, and embracing her*) Oh, my dear Mistress, I'm so happy for you. Isn't that wonderful! And you heard? Your father has something special to say to you.

ANGELICA. Of course I heard. Can it be that?

TOINETTE. What else?

ANGELICA. Oh, Toinette! Darling, dear Toinette. How does one live through minutes when one's whole life hangs in a balance? If Cléante has asked him . . .

TOINETTE. But of course he has.

ANGELICA. What will my father say? Another moment of this suspense, and I shall die.

TOINETTE. I hear him coming back. You won't have long to wait. And let's be nice to him.

ANGELICA. Yes. Very, very nice.

(ARGAN *enters* R. ANGELICA *and* TOINETTE *rush to each side of him*)

Darling Father!

TOINETTE. Oh, my dear Master!

ARGAN (*quite taken by surprise*) Eh? What's all this about?

TOINETTE. How are you feeling now?

ARGAN. Weak. Very weak—what's left of me.

TOINETTE. Come and sit down.

ANGELICA. Let me help you.

TOINETTE. Lean on me.

ANGELICA. And me.

(*In their eagerness to get him back into his chair, they almost drag him across the room*)

ARGAN. Hi! Not so fast! What's all this hurry?

(*So the girls slow up a little*)

TOINETTE (*with great concern*) That's right. Gently does it!
ANGELICA. Careful!

(*And so they reach his great chair*)

TOINETTE (*lowering him into it*) Hold on to me.
ANGELICA. And me.

(ARGAN *gets into the chair. The girls continue to fuss over him*)

TOINETTE. Let's make you comfortable.
ANGELICA (*with a rug*) Put this over you.
TOINETTE. To keep you warm.
ANGELICA. Now let's tuck you in.
TOINETTE (*putting a cushion under his arm*) This for your arm.
ANGELICA (*doing the same*) This for the other one.
TOINETTE. This for your head.
ANGELICA. Another for your feet.
ARGAN (*when he has been made thus comfortable*) Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear—I really must have a rest. I think I'll take a nap.
ANGELICA (*horrified*) A nap!
ARGAN (*repeating*) A nap! (*He closes his eyes*)

(*The two girls regard each other, over him, in sudden despair*)

TOINETTE. We've overdone it!
ANGELICA. I shall go mad!
ARGAN. I can't have you chattering here. Be off—the two of you.
ANGELICA. But, Father—you're not going to sleep?
ARGAN. That's the idea.
TOINETTE. You can't.
ARGAN. Can't I? When you clear out, I'll have a dam' good try.
TOINETTE. But you *mustn't!*
ARGAN. *Mustn't!* And why not, pray?
TOINETTE. The doctor said so.
ARGAN (*opening his eyes, and taking notice*) The doctor?
TOINETTE. He said you weren't to sleep in the daytime. And, especially, not when you wanted to.
ARGAN. Why ever not?
TOINETTE. It's very *dangerous.*
ARGAN. Dangerous?
TOINETTE. You might never wake up.
ARGAN (*horrified*) Never wake up!
TOINETTE. That's what the doctor said—I heard him telling you.
ARGAN. I don't remember.
TOINETTE (*apparently in a great state*) Oh, you poor man! Oh, Miss Angelica, your poor dear father! His memory's going!
ARGAN. Eh?

TOINETTE. Now, don't be frightened. Try and sit up a bit. (*And she drags him up into a sitting position*)

ANGELICA. Father, you had something to say to me.

ARGAN (*getting confused*) Something to say to you?

TOINETTE. Yes. Something important. What was it?

ARGAN (*terrified; to Angelica*) She's quite right. My memory's going. I can't remember.

TOINETTE. God help us all!

ANGELICA. But you sent for me.

ARGAN. I sent for you.

ANGELICA. Yes.

(ARGAN *stares at Angelica for a moment*)

ARGAN (*suddenly*) *Oh, yes! I've got it!* Thank God, it's all come back. Of course, of course! Oh, what a fright you gave me.

ANGELICA. Father! Well?

ARGAN. Yes—I've news for you.

ANGELICA (*hardly able to gasp out the word*) News?

ARGAN. You have been asked in marriage.

(*For the moment* ANGELICA *cannot speak; it is all she can do to prevent herself shouting for joy*)

TOINETTE. *No!* Well! Who'd have thought it. Oh, no. I don't believe it, you're making it up.

ARGAN (*livid; shouting at her*) I'm *not* making it up.

ANGELICA. Asked in marriage! (*And out of sheer relief and joy, she breaks into a laugh*)

ARGAN. You laugh! You like the idea. Find it amusing! Oh, well, you're growing up—it's only natural. So you're pleased?

ANGELICA. Father, even if I wasn't, I'm your daughter, I should obey you.

ARGAN. I should hope so! I'd see to that! Still, I'm glad you're pleased. It makes it easier for me.

TOINETTE. For *you?*

ARGAN (*to Angelica*) Your stepmother was against it; wanted to make a nun of you.

ANGELICA. A nun?

ARGAN. Send you to a convent. You, and your little sister.

ANGELICA. But why?

TOINETTE (*knowingly*) No doubt she had her reasons.

ARGAN. But I put my foot down. And to stop any unpleasantness, I've arranged to have you married as soon as possible.

TOINETTE. Oh, dear Monsieur Argan, this is the best, the wisest thing you've ever done. Oh, I'm so proud of you. Now, what can I do for you—what about a little drop of medicine?

ARGAN. Medicine? What for?

TOINETTE. To celebrate.

ARGAN. Which?

TOINETTE. The nastiest.

ARGAN. Eh?

TOINETTE. You always say that does you the most good.

ANGELICA. No. Give him the nicest—and a double dose. Oh, Father—I'm so grateful.

ARGAN. So you ought to be. Well, that's all settled. I haven't seen the lad, but from what I'm told, when you set eyes on him, you'll be well satisfied.

ANGELICA (*thoughtlessly*) Oh, yes, I shall! I shall!

(*At which* TOINETTE *begins to make violent signs of caution to her, behind Argan's back*)

ARGAN. You seem very certain. How can you be so sure? (*Then he catches the signs, and looks from one to the other of the girls*) What's all this? What's going on? And now, young lady, perhaps you'll tell me why you're so sure you'll be "well satisfied"?

ANGELICA (*haltingly*) Well—you see, Father—it's like this. Recently—and quite by chance—we met.

ARGAN. You've met?

TOINETTE. In company.

ARGAN. Hold your tongue! What happened?

ANGELICA. Nothing.

ARGAN. Nothing?

ANGELICA. We looked at one another.

ARGAN. Didn't you speak? Did neither say a word?

ANGELICA. Only a very few.

ARGAN. What kind of words.

ANGELICA. A greeting, and good-bye.

ARGAN. I see no harm in that. I'm glad you liked the look of him. They say he's handsome.

ANGELICA (*ecstatic again*) I've never seen a man who's half so handsome!

ARGAN. And clever with it.

ANGELICA. I've never known a man who's half so clever.

ARGAN. He seems to have made an impression. But for once you're right. He must be clever to talk Latin and Greek.

ANGELICA. Latin and Greek?

ARGAN. Yes.

ANGELICA. He never told me that.

ARGAN. You surprise me! You meet—in company; look at one another; say "How are you" and "Good-bye"—and he never told you he spoke Latin and Greek. Still, you might have guessed.

ANGELICA. Guessed?

ARGAN. If he's just taken his doctor's degree—he *must* know Latin and Greek.

ANGELICA. Doctor's degree?

ARGAN. Yes.

ANGELICA. A doctor?

ARGAN. Yes.

ANGELICA. Father—are you sure?

ARGAN. Of course I am.

ANGELICA. But how do you know? Who told you?

ARGAN. My doctor. Dr Purgon.

ANGELICA. Dr Purgon? Does Dr Purgon know him?

ARGAN. Don't be so silly! What a ridiculous question. "Does Dr Purgon know him?" Not know his own nephew!

ANGELICA. Nephew! Cléante—Dr Purgon's nephew?

ARGAN. "*Cléante*"? Who's Cléante, if you please? Cléante, Cléante, Cléante! Never heard of him. I'm talking of the man you're going to marry.

ANGELICA. And so am I.

TOINETTE. I knew it. You're not talking of the same young man.

ARGAN. Oh, yes, I am!

TOINETTE. But *who?* Who are you talking of?

ARGAN. Why—young Doctor Thomas Diaforus. Son of the great Doctor Diaforus.

ANGELICA. Oh, *no!*

TOINETTE. That young booby!

ARGAN. *Booby?*

TOINETTE. BOOBY!

ARGAN (*yelling at her again*) Will you be quiet!

TOINETTE. And let you play havoc with your daughter's life? Not me.

ARGAN. Not you, indeed! And what's it got to do with you? Answer me that? No, don't. I'll not argue with you. I'll not demean myself. I'll not say a word to you. Not a single word.

TOINETTE. But you can listen.

ARGAN. Listen. I won't.

TOINETTE. You can't help it. You're not deaf. Not yet.

ARGAN. Aren't I? We'll see about that! (*He claps his hands over his ears*) Now you can talk your head off.

TOINETTE. Oh, Monsieur Argan! *Dear* Monsieur Argan!

ARGAN. I can't hear a word you're saying—and don't call me "dear".

TOINETTE. Oh, he's impossible! The silly old idiot.

ARGAN (*taking his hands from his ears; livid with rage*) Silly old idiot?

TOINETTE (*overwhelming him*) What possessed you to arrange this senseless marriage?

ARGAN. Senseless? I've never done anything so sensible in all my life. And I'll tell you why—no I won't; I'm not talking to you. But I'll tell my daughter. (*He turns to Angelica*) Daughter! If there's any compassion in you, any pity, you'll understand. I'm a sick man. God knows I do my best to bear my ill-health; but

I need attention. Constant attention. By this marriage I shall have a doctor in the family. And his father a doctor; and his uncle. Three doctors. And they won't want paying—or at least half-price.

TOINETTE. So you'd sacrifice your daughter.

ARGAN. Sacrifice! Oh, what a *little* mind you've got. What meanness of spirit. Are you quite incapable of taking a larger view—I'm giving her the chance to be unselfish; to behave nobly —with all the rewards of that; in this world and the next.

TOINETTE. And you not even ill.

ARGAN. Can I believe my ears! *Me!* Not ill?

TOINETTE. What's wrong with you?

ARGAN. Wrong? Everything! I'm wrong from head to feet.

TOINETTE. I don't know about your feet; but I agree about your head. There's something wrong with that.

ARGAN. I shall have a stroke.

TOINETTE. No, don't; not till this is settled. All right, all right —you're ill.

ARGAN. Yes.

TOINETTE. Very ill.

ARGAN. Yes. Very.

TOINETTE. On your last legs.

ARGAN. Eh?

TOINETTE. You can't last much longer.

ARGAN. Hey!

TOINETTE. So when you're dead and buried, what good is it going to do your daughter to be married to a doctor?

ARGAN (*to Angelica*) Don't listen to her. This is a good marriage. Young Thomas is an only son; his mother's dead; he'll inherit his father's money; and old Diaforus is the richest and most influential doctor in all Paris; last year he made twenty thousand crowns.

TOINETTE. He must have killed an awful lot of people to have made all that.

(ANGELICA *suddenly bursts into tears, and exits* L, *sobbing*)

ARGAN (*violently*) Now see what you've done! Have you *no* consideration for your mistress, and my daughter?

TOINETTE (*with superb and calculated impertinence*) Now we're alone, I can say this to you; you can put this marriage right out of your head.

ARGAN. How *dare* you!

TOINETTE. She'll never marry him.

ARGAN. Oh, yes, she will. She'll *have* to.

TOINETTE. *Have* to?

ARGAN. Of course she will, or else . . .

TOINETTE. Else what?

ARGAN. I'll do as my wife has always wanted, and she'll be in a convent before she can turn round.

TOINETTE. You wouldn't do that.

ARGAN. Who'd stop me?

TOINETTE. You'd stop yourself. You wouldn't have the heart.

ARGAN. You don't know me.

TOINETTE. Oh, yes, I do; and strange as it may seem, I don't think you're really a bad man.

ARGAN. Eh!

TOINETTE. You're very silly.

ARGAN. Ah!

TOINETTE. And you're difficult.

ARGAN. Um?

TOINETTE. But you're not wicked and cruel.

ARGAN (*in a rage*) I *am* wicked and cruel! What am I saying? Get out! Out of my sight.

(*Quite unruffled,* TOINETTE *makes her way calmly to the door* L)

TOINETTE (*turning*) And I'll tell you something more—if she obeys you, I'll disinherit her.

ARGAN. Disinherit?

TOINETTE. Yes.

ARGAN. What have you got to leave?

TOINETTE. Nothing, and she won't get a penny of it.

(ARGAN, *beside himself with rage, flings one of his cushions at Toinette.*

TOINETTE *laughs and exits* L. ARGAN *grabs a second cushion and flings it after her.*

BÉLINE, *Argan's wife, enters* L. *The cushion hits her and she gives a squeal of surprise at this unexpected reception.* ARGAN, *seeing who it is, struggles to his feet and stumbles across the room into* BÉLINE'S *arms*)

ARGAN. Oh, wife, wife, wife . . .

BÉLINE. Husband!

ARGAN. My dear!

BÉLINE. My love!

ARGAN. Sweetheart!

BÉLINE. Pettikins! What is it? What's the matter?

ARGAN. It's *her.*

BÉLINE. Who?

ARGAN. Toinette.

BÉLINE. Toinette?

ARGAN. Yes.

BÉLINE. What's she been doing?

ARGAN. Nothing.

BÉLINE. Nothing?

ARGAN. She does everything I don't want; nothing that I do.

BÉLINE. That's bad.

ARGAN. It's worse. She keeps on telling me that I'm not ill.

BÉLINE. Oh, that's ridiculous.

ARGAN. Yes, it is—isn't it?

BÉLINE. Of course it is.

ARGAN. Oh, thank God for you. What should I do without you? You're such a comfort. But I tell you this—if she goes on telling me there's nothing the matter with me, it'll be the death of me.

BÉLINE. I'll speak to her. (*She calls*) Toinette! (*She pauses*) Toinette!

TOINETTE (*off*) Madame?

BÉLINE. Come here.

ARGAN (*as he returns to his chair*) You *will* get rid of her.

BÉLINE. Well—we'll see.

ARGAN. No. Send her away at once. (*He sits in his chair*)

BÉLINE. But servants are hard to come by. They're so scarce, and they're in such demand, they can behave exactly as they like —and make their own terms.

ARGAN. Shocking state of affairs! I don't know what the world's coming to.

BÉLINE. But we've got to live in it. Of course I *could* send her away.

ARGAN. Yes. Yes, you must.

BÉLINE. But, of course, then you'd have no-one to look after you.

ARGAN (*horrified*) No-one to look after me.

BÉLINE. You'd have to look after yourself.

ARGAN. I couldn't do that.

BÉLINE. Well—there you are.

(TOINETTE *appears in the doorway* L)

TOINETTE. Madame called?

BÉLINE (*going to her*) Now what's all this about?

TOINETTE (*wide-eyed innocence; butter wouldn't melt in her mouth*) Madame? What's what about?

BÉLINE. You've upset your master.

TOINETTE. Upset the master?

BÉLINE. Yes.

TOINETTE. *Me?*

BÉLINE. Yes, you.

TOINETTE. Oh, no, there's some mistake. It was the breakfast tray.

BÉLINE. He's very angry.

TOINETTE (*becoming tearful*) I don't know why he should be. I do my best for him.

ARGAN (*from his chair; cupping his ear with his hand, towards her*) What's she say? I can't hear. I bet she's telling a whole lot of lies.

TOINETTE. He's been in one of his moods.

BÉLINE. But what's been happening?

ARGAN. Speak up, girl; speak up!

TOINETTE (*moving nearer Béline, and deliberately dropping her voice*) Well, first—he told me how he intended to give his eldest daughter in marriage to young Thomas, son of the great Dr Diaforus.

BÉLINE. Yes?

TOINETTE. And I also ventured to say I thought it would be better to send her to a convent.

BÉLINE. What did he say to that?

TOINETTE. He didn't like it. And when I reminded him that that was what you wanted, he flew into a rage.

ARGAN. What's she saying?

BÉLINE. That she's very sorry, Pettikins; and she'll never be rude to you again.

ARGAN. I'm glad to hear it. Never—not till the next time.

BÉLINE (*moving to him*) Now don't be naughty. Oh, you *are* in a pickle. Let's straighten you out a bit. (*She arranges his rug over him*) And look at your night-cap!

ARGAN. I can't. I haven't got eyes in the top of my head.

BÉLINE. Put it on properly. Pull it down over your forehead. Further. Further.

(ARGAN *pulls it down, so that it is over his ears*)

That's better. It's the way to catch a cold—letting the air in through the ears. (*She picks up one of the cushions he has thrown on the floor*) Sit up a moment. (*She puts it behind his back*) There! That to keep your back comfortable. (*She puts something over his legs*) That to keep your feet warm. (*She turns away from him to pick up something else*)

TOINETTE (*who has picked up the second cushion he threw, now puts it over his face*) And this to keep your mouth shut.

(TOINETTE *runs out* L.
ARGAN *leaps up with a yell*)

BÉLINE. What is it now?

ARGAN (*pointing after Toinette*) She wants to kill me!

BÉLINE. Kill you?

ARGAN. Suffocate me! Smother me to death!

BÉLINE. You mustn't let yourself get so excited. It's very bad for you.

ARGAN. Yes. Yes—it is.

BÉLINE. You haven't the strength.

ARGAN. No, no—I haven't.

BÉLINE. A great baby—that's what you are; throwing your things about. (*Making him comfortable again*) But what a darling baby.

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