

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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Once Bitten

A farce in three acts

adapted from Alfred Hennequin
and Alfred Delacour's *Le Procès Veauradieux*
(The Veauradieux Case)

by Reggie Oliver

Samuel French — London
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ONCE BITTEN

First presented at the Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond,
on 15th December 2010 with the following cast:

Fauvinard	David Antrobus
Fanchette	Amy Neilson Smith
Tardivaut	Mark Frost
Madame Laiguisier	Briony McRoberts
Angèle	Mia Austen
Thérèse	Caitlin Shannon
Gatinet	Richard Durden
Madame de Bagnolles	Rebecca Egan
Sophie	Amy Neilson Smith
Césarine	Beth Cordingley
De Bagnolles	Damien Matthews
Commissioner of Police	Michael Kirk

Directed by Sam Walters

Designed by Sam Dowson

Lighting design by John Harris

Deputy Stage Manager and sound effects: Sophie
Acreman

CHARACTERS

Fauvinard, a lawyer in his 30s

Fanchette, his maid

Tardivaut, a lawyer, slightly older than Fauvinard

Madame Laiguisier, middle-aged, formidable
but not unattractive

Angèle, Fauvinard's wife

Thérèse, Fauvinard's cook

Gatinet, a dissolute-looking, elderly gentleman

Madame de Bagnolles, 30s, veiled, fashionably
dressed

Sophie, a maid, cousin of Thérèse

Césarine, a glamorous young woman

De Bagnolles, a serious man in his 30s

Commissioner of Police

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in two locations in
Paris

ACT I

Fauvinard's study, afternoon

ACT II

11 Rue Saint-Lazare, that night.

ACT III

Fauvinard's study, the following morning

Time — Spring, 1875

Other plays by Reggie Oliver
published by Samuel French Ltd:

Imaginary Lines
The Music Lovers (adapted from Feydeau)
Put Some Clothes On, Clarisse!
(adapted from Feydeau's *Mais N'Te Promène Donc Pas Toute Nue*)
Winner Takes All (adapted from Feydeau's *La Main Passe!*)

This play is dedicated to
Sam Walters MBE
and the Orange Tree Theatre

ACT I

Fauvinard's study, Spring 1875, afternoon

There are three entrances: Entrance 1 to a front door, Entrance 2 to other rooms and Entrance 3 to Fauvinard's dressing room. There is a desk piled high with documents, legal tomes etc. There is a chair behind the desk and in front of it, a sofa and a side table on which is a clock

Fauvinard, a lawyer in his 30s, is at his desk rather aimlessly shuffling papers. He wears a prominent pair of whiskers. He leans back in his chair and stares at the ceiling. There is a knock at the door. Immediately he resumes his air of business, shuffling papers etc.

Fauvinard Come in!

Fanchette, the maid, enters Entrance 1

Fanchette It's Monsieur — Oh ...

Fauvinard Who?

Fanchette Sorry, monsieur. I forgot his name ...

Fauvinard Well, go and ask who it is.

Fanchette goes

Servants! They're getting stupider by the day.

Fanchette enters

Fanchette I remember now, monsieur. It's the lawyer.

Fauvinard Well, that narrows the field. A colleague. (*Slight pause; wearily*) Just show him in.

Tardivaut enters, also a lawyer, slightly older than Fauvinard. He carries a barrister's gown over one arm

Tardivaut!

Tardivaut Is Counsellor Fauvinard at home by any chance?

They both laugh heartily at this. Fauvinard rises and they shake hands across the desk. Fanchette joins in the laughter. Fauvinard looks at her sternly

Fauvinard That will be all, Jacques!

Tardivaut Jacques?

Fanchette My name is Fanchette, monsieur. Fanchette Beaudru. I come from —

Fauvinard (*firmly*) No, it is Jacques! (*To Tardivaut*) It's my mother-in-law, you see.

Tardivaut Jacques is your mother-in-law?

Fauvinard No, No! My mother-in-law is called something completely different. But you see we had this servant called Jacques. And my mother-in-law sacked him.

Tardivaut This is Jacques?

Fauvinard That's right. So I said to her — my mother-in-law — I said to her very firmly. "This can't go on. Sacking people all over the place in my own home. I can't have this chopping and changing. I want Jacques back." She could see I meant business, so we compromised. My mother-in-law hired someone else — er — Fanchette, or whatever — and I still call her Jacques.

Tardivaut I see! Excellent.

Fauvinard Yes. We lawyers, you know. We have a talent for this kind of arbitration.

Tardivaut Very impressive.

Fauvinard Yes. Well ... That will be all, Jacques!

Fanchette Would you like me to warn madame?

Fauvinard Madame? Which madame?

Fanchette Madame your wife.

Fauvinard Yes, my wife, madame. Not the other er ... What d'you mean, warn her?

Fanchette About monsieur ... The lawyer.

Fauvinard Do you mean Counsellor Tardivaut?

Fanchette That one. Yes.

Fauvinard And why should you want to warn her?

Fanchette In case she wanted to see monsieur ... the lawyer.

Fauvinard Certainly not! If my wife wishes to see a lawyer she can see me. In fact you can tell her that we are not to be disturbed. We have some very important — affairs to discuss. (*He winks and smirks at Tardivaut*)

Tardivaut Legal affairs. (*He winks and smirks back*)

Fauvinard Quite so! That will be all, Jacques!

Fanchette Right you are, monsieur. (*She curtsies to Tardivaut*)
Monsieur.

Fanchette goes

Fauvinard My dear Tardivaut, you've come just in time. Another five minutes and I'd have been out.

Tardivaut Where?

Fauvinard Seeing you. Or rather not seeing you. Because you would have been here seeing me, but not seeing me, because I would have been out, not seeing you here. And vice versa. So we wouldn't have seen each other.

Tardivaut Very well put.

Fauvinard Ah, you see, we lawyers have a knack for that sort of thing, don't we? Now then, what have you come to see me about? A case perhaps?

Tardivaut As a matter of fact, it's rather necessary for me to be free at nine o'clock this evening. You understand?

Fauvinard Ah, yes! Well, it so happens that it's rather necessary for me to be free at eight o'clock this evening. You follow me?

Tardivaut Well, I certainly do, don't I?

Fauvinard What ...? Oh, I see! Eight o'clock, nine o'clock. Follow you! Very amusing!

They laugh heartily

Tardivaut So that's what you wanted to see me about?

Fauvinard Yes. I was going to ask you to write me a letter, so that when I got it my wife would understand.

Tardivaut That you needed to be —

Fauvinard Out. Yes. On some sort of legitimate ... business.

Tardivaut Why? Does she have a suspicious mind?

Fauvinard No, but she has a very suspicious mother.

Tardivaut Say no more. My situation precisely, but without the mother-in-law. Exactly what I wanted you to do for me. Shall we write? Paper?

Fauvinard supplies paper ink and pen. They sit either side of the desk and begin to write

Fauvinard (*writing*) "My dear colleague ..."

Tardivaut } (*together*) "I feel I should remind you ..."

Fauvinard }

Tardivaut "I have the honour of reminding you ..."

Fauvinard (*rewriting*) "Honour". Yes. Much better! "... of reminding you ... That it is tonight at —" What time did you say?

Tardivaut Nine o'clock.

Fauvinard Ah, well, now, I'm eight o'clock. The early bird, you know!
(*He laughs*)

Tardivaut does not respond

Never mind. "... to remind you that we have a —" Now what shall we say — a discussion? Arbitration?

Tardivaut Consultation.

Fauvinard Consultation! Excellent! (*Writing*) "That we have a consultation ... On the ..." Er ... Something ... Case. What shall we call it?

Tardivaut The ... Veauradieux Case.

Fauvinard The Veauradieux Case? What's that?

Tardivaut I don't know. I heard it somewhere. But it sounds very...

Fauvinard Yes, it does doesn't it? Excellent!

Tardivaut } (*together, writing*) "... the Veauradieux Case."

Fauvinard

Tardivaut I've just had a thought. We'll need to have something to eat before we ... er ...

Fauvinard Yes. Quite!

Tardivaut Why not Bignon's?

Fauvinard Splendid! I was going to have to have dinner with my mother-in-law tonight.

Tardivaut That wouldn't have been correct. To have to have dinner with one's mother-in-law before ...

Fauvinard Precisely. Most improper!

Tardivaut Allow me to dictate.

They write

"It is therefore necessary that we should discuss this affair ... Er, case. I will be happy if you could give me the benefit of your valuable ..."
um —

Fauvinard "Expertise ..."

Tardivaut "Expertise over dinner this evening at seven o'clock precisely."

Fauvinard } (*together*) "I remain, monsieur, most respectfully yours et
Tardivaut cetera ... et cetera ..."

Tardivaut Envelope?

Fauvinard supplies the envelopes. During the following they are putting the letters in the envelopes, writing addresses etc.

Fauvinard Now, where shall we meet?

Tardivaut Well, we'll need to have a drink before dinner, won't we?

Fauvinard But of course!

Tardivaut So shall we say the Café Helder at six? The absinthe hour.

Fauvinard Very good idea. (*Writing*) The address: "Monsieur Tardivaut, advocate ..."

Tardivaut (*writing*) "Monsieur Fauvinard, advocate ..." Stamp?

Fauvinard supplies stamps which they apply

Your letter, please!

Fauvinard hands him his letter

I'll put them in the post.

Fauvinard And we should get them by five. Splendid. (*Shaking hands warmly with Tardivaut*) My dear Tardivaut.

Tardivaut My esteemed colleague Fauvinard! You know it's funny. I'd always thought of you as so respectable.

Fauvinard Oh, but I am! My wife Angèle is a most charming woman. I love her very much.

Tardivaut Of course! Whenever a man is caught *in flagrante* with another woman he always protests that he adores his wife.

Fauvinard There you are! It's a well-known fact. Infidelity makes the heart grow fonder.

Tardivaut Well, in a way. A husband may not cheat on his wife because he adores her; but he may come to adore the lady once he's cheated on her.

Fauvinard No. I don't understand that.

Tardivaut Anyway, as you say, you love your wife, but —

Fauvinard Angèle is an angel. She came to me with a large fortune too. Unfortunately she also came with a mother.

Tardivaut So *she* is the fly in the ointment.

Fauvinard More of a bull in a china shop.

Tardivaut Don't you mean cow?

Fauvinard My dear Tardivaut, please! Language!

Tardivaut I beg your pardon.

Fauvinard It's all her fault. You haven't got a mother-in-law, so you have absolutely no excuse for your conduct. It's different for me. If you knew her ... She is the most irritating woman imaginable. She's always after me.

Tardivaut Does she live with you?

Fauvinard No, but she might just as well. Always here, morning, noon and night. As soon as I go out she's rummaging through my papers, even in my pockets. When I'm in my study she drops in like some sort of great bomb, under the pretext that she's looking for her gloves, her handkerchief. In reality she just wants to know who I'm with, what I'm saying, what I'm up to ...

Laiguisier *(off)* Fauvinard!

Fauvinard Quiet! Here she is!

Madame Laiguisier enters, a formidable but not unattractive middle-aged woman

Laiguisier Ah, there you are! Have you seen my umbrella? *(She goes straight to Fauvinard's desk and starts rummaging through the books and papers there)*

Fauvinard It's not likely to be on my desk, is it?

Laiguisier How do I know until I've looked? *(She picks up a piece of paper. Examining it)* What's this?

Fauvinard *(snatching it back)* Well, it's not an umbrella is it, madame?

Laiguisier I know that. I'm not an imbecile. That's why I asked you what it was. *(Seeing Tardivaut)* And who is this?

Fauvinard A colleague.

Laiguisier Oh! *(Quietly to Fauvinard digging him in the ribs)* Introduce us.

Fauvinard What?

Laiguisier *(quietly but insistently to Fauvinard, digging him in the ribs)* Introduce us!

Fauvinard Oh, very well! Counsellor Tardivaut, my colleague, Madame Laiguisier, my mother-in-law.

Tardivaut Charmed, madame. *(He kisses her hand)*

Laiguisier *(coquettishly)* I do beg your pardon, Monsieur Tardivaut, but I seem to have mislaid my umbrella. So silly of me.

Tardivaut Not at all, madame.

Laiguisier Oh! Goodness me! What an empty-headed little thing I am! I remember now! I left it in the hall. Delighted to have met you, Monsieur Tardivaut.

Tardivaut *(bowing)* My pleasure entirely, madame.

Laiguisier *(as she goes, aside to Fauvinard with disapproval)* He's very cheerful for a lawyer, isn't he?

Fauvinard I can't help that, can I?

Laiguisier Did I say you could? *(She goes to the door, then to Tardivaut, smiling)* Monsieur!

Tardivaut Madame!

Laiguisier goes

Fauvinard (*shutting the door, still holding the piece of paper he snatched from her*) What a nightmare that woman is! You see! Every day it's the same. She'll end by turning me against my own wife. I'm sure she already suspects me of being unfaithful, and she hasn't a scrap of evidence.

Tardivaut What about that piece of paper?

Fauvinard Oh, that! It's just a bill. For a bracelet.

Tardivaut Jewellery? for your wife.

Fauvinard Not exactly. Occasionally she sends a bill for me to pay. Just to remind me what I owe her.

Tardivaut Her?

Fauvinard coughs

Oh, I see. For jewellery?

Fauvinard Always.

Tardivaut Same here. Just to remind me. Except with me it's music lessons. She's at the Conservatoire, you know.

Fauvinard What is she studying?

Tardivaut Everything, to judge by the bills. Oboe, viola, bassoon. Here, look! (*He produces a bill from his pocket and hands it to Fauvinard*)

Fauvinard (*reading*) "Piccolo lessons".

Tardivaut (*snatching it back*) Yes, well, that's just an example. More often than not it's the double-bass.

Fauvinard (*snatching it back*) Wait a minute! (*Reading*) The address on the top. It's Rue Saint-Lazare, number —

Tardivaut Eleven, as it happens. Why?

Fauvinard Number eleven Rue Saint-Lazare! That's the same as mine! This is appalling!

Tardivaut You at eight, me at nine!

Fauvinard How dare you — Wait! Which floor?

Tardivaut Second.

Fauvinard Thank heaven for that! I'm on the first.

Tardivaut You're below me. What a relief! Mind you, she could be on two floors. Hair colour?

Fauvinard Blonde.

Tardivaut Thank God for that!! Mine's brunette. How did you meet?

Fauvinard Oh, chance. It wasn't as if I was on the lookout or anything. I was on an omnibus. Pure chance.

Tardivaut My dear Fauvinard, in these cases chance is very seldom pure.

Fauvinard I'm shy, you know. But by a stroke of sheer luck, I sat on her little poodle.

Tardivaut On her poodle? In an omnibus?

Fauvinard Yes, you see it was raining in the Champs-Élysées. I was out in the Champs-Élysées, in the rain. There was an omnibus passing, so I hopped on. Standing room only. The omnibus was swaying about. I lost my balance and I fell over on to this girl's muff.

Tardivaut I thought you said it was a poodle.

Fauvinard Yes. It was. But the poodle was in the muff, you see.

Tardivaut Did you kill it?

Fauvinard No. But she was very upset.

Tardivaut The girl, or the poodle?

Fauvinard Both. I was lucky not to get bitten. By either. The poodle's called Niniche. The girl's called Césarine. They made a tremendous fuss, so the conductor threw us off, all three of us: me, the girl and the poodle. Very unfair. Anyway, the girl wouldn't speak to me, but she hailed a passing cab and I heard her give the address.

Tardivaut Eleven Rue Saint-Lazare.

Fauvinard So naturally I found a vet and went round there. The vet looked at the poodle and said it was just a sprain, but naturally I had to go there the next day and see how it was.

Tardivaut And how was it?

Fauvinard Delightful. No mother-in-law. Just me, the girl and the poodle. Mind you, I could have done without the poodle. It has a loud yap and a nasty nip.

Tardivaut Funny. With me it was a duck.

Fauvinard A duck?

Tardivaut Or rather two ducks. It was in the Botanical Gardens. I saw this girl walking along with an old gentleman. Her protector, I suppose. Sweet little thing, she was. I was watching her. And she took a great shine to these ducks on the pond. Chinese ducks, you know, with the fancy coloured plumage.

Fauvinard I know the ones.

Tardivaut So I bought a couple for her. Two hundred and fifty francs they cost me. But by the time I'd bought them off the park keeper, and had a duck safely tucked under each arm, the girl and the old man had left the pond. Luckily I spotted them again. I ran after them with my ducks and arrived just in time to see them getting into a cab. Luckily I heard the old man giving the address to the driver.

Fauvinard Eleven Rue Saint-Lazare?

Tardivaut Exactly. So I put the ducks in a box and sent them round to her with a note. She was delighted. Invited me to dinner the following evening.

Fauvinard What did you have?

Tardivaut Roast ducks.

Fauvinard *The* roast ducks?

Tardivaut Most expensive duck I've ever had. Still, it was worth it for the pudding afterwards. (*He looks at his watch*) Good Lord, is that the time? I must get to the post or we won't have our letters in time.

Fauvinard Till this evening, then. Six o'clock.

Tardivaut Café Helder.

Tardivaut goes off Entrance 1

(*Off*) Good-afternoon, madame!

Laiguisier (*off*) Ah, Monsieur Tardivaut!

Tardivaut (*off*) Excuse me, madame.

Fauvinard Good God! Her again! Is there no peace in this house!

Fauvinard goes off Entrance 3

The front door slams

Laiguisier (*off*) Goodbye, Monsieur Tardivaut! Most extraordinary!

Laiguisier enters with Angèle

Fauvinard! Not here. Most extraordinary!

Angèle Armand must have gone out.

Laiguisier He's always out. It's a bad sign. You must talk to him, Angèle.

Angèle Yes, Mother.

Laiguisier Be firm.

Angèle Yes, Mother.

Laiguisier Don't give in.

Angèle No, Mother.

Laiguisier I know men. Paris has the worst possible effect on men like Fauvinard. He is a lawyer, but he has no work, no cases. He'll ruin himself. He'll ruin you. We'll all be ruined.

Angèle Oh, Mother, you're frightening me.

Laiguisier He must leave Paris. He could become a local magistrate or something. If only he had clients, but he hasn't. And it's no use leaving his lamp on half the night in his study pretending he's got work to

do. He hasn't. Well, goodbye, my dear, and don't forget you're both dining with me tonight.

Angèle No, Mother.

Laiguisier goes off Entrance 1. Fauvinard puts his head round the door Entrance 3

Fauvinard Has she gone? (*He enters the room, half in evening dress, still adjusting his tie etc.*)

Angèle You were here all the time. Why didn't you come and say goodbye to Mother?

Fauvinard Angèle, my dear, you know I'd love to say goodbye to your mother.

Angèle Oh, Armand! That's not very kind.

Fauvinard I mean I'd said good-morning to her. I even embraced her. One can have too much of a good thing.

Angèle She's very fond of you, you know. She's always talking about you.

Fauvinard In the wrong hands I can be a very tedious topic of conversation.

Angèle (*sitting on the sofa and beckoning him to sit next to her*) Come and sit next to me. I want to talk about an idea we had this morning.

Fauvinard We? What idea is this? (*He sits next to Angèle*)

Angèle (*adjusting his tie, brushing his lapel etc.*) You know La Rénaudière?

Fauvinard Your mother's property near Orléans. Yes, of course I know it.

Angèle The people there are charming.

Fauvinard Hilarious. The priest, the vet, the deputy mayor. One's spoilt for exciting company.

Angèle And whist nearly every evening.

Fauvinard I know, I know. It's a continuous round of gaiety, and one goes to bed at nine, just like the hens. It's a sort of healthy grave.

Angèle So why don't we go and live there?

Fauvinard And leave Paris?

Angèle Why not?

Fauvinard Well, it's an idea. One of your mother's no doubt?

Angèle There's a position of Justice of the Peace going, and Mother says she's sure she can get it for you.

Fauvinard Will you thank your mother but I am not interested in anything she can offer me. I have a career to think of.

Angèle It's so expensive here. And you know what mother says: "Paris finds mischief for idle men to do."

Fauvinard I am not idle. I am a barrister, a lawyer.

Angèle But you haven't had a case. Two years we've been married and no briefs. Not a single one.

Fauvinard They'll come. Every day I go to the Palais de Justice. I wear my robe. I walk up and down. I make myself known.

Angèle That's all very well —

Fauvinard My dear Angèle, you mustn't worry your pretty little head about such things. You see, I am a Parisian. It's in my blood. I can't live in one hole in the provinces. In Paris it takes time to make your mark.

Angèle If only you had a case. Even if it was only a criminal one, Mother would be so pleased. You know how fascinated she is by criminals.

Fauvinard I'm sure it's mutual.

Angèle Just one case ...

Fauvinard Well, only today a colleague and I were discussing a case.

Angèle Only discussing?

Fauvinard But something may come of it. In fact I'm expecting any moment to hear from him.

Angèle What case?

Fauvinard The ... Veauradieux Case.

Angèle The Veauradieux Case!

Fauvinard (*alarmed*) You've heard about it?

Angèle Yes. But just the name. What's it about?

Fauvinard Well, it's a very complicated affair. I don't want to go into it now.

Angèle I think I heard Mother mention it.

Fauvinard Ah, I see. Well, I'd rather you didn't say anything about it to her ... I want it to be a surprise ... if it comes off.

Angèle If what comes off?

Fauvinard That's the surprise.

Laiguisier (*off*) How dare you! Will you be quiet!

Angèle Mother!

Fauvinard Still here!

Laiguisier enters through Entrance 2

Laiguisier Insolent young woman! Insolent young woman!

Fauvinard What is it, madame?

Laiguisier Fauvinard, I would be obliged if you would show your cook the door. This instant!

Fauvinard Not again!

Angèle What's happened?

Laiguisier I was just on my way out when I said to myself, I'll just go and cast an eye over the kitchen. Thérèse was not there. She seldom is.

Fauvinard She must have gone out.

Laiguisier (*pointedly*) Some people have a habit of being out. So, I thought I would conduct a thorough inspection. And do you know what I found? A letter in one of the saucepans. I had just begun to read it when she came in and —

Thérèse enters through Entrance 2, having been listening at the door

Thérèse And what right had you to read private letters?

Laiguisier What are you doing here? How dare you listen at the keyhole?

Angèle Leave us, Thérèse.

Laiguisier Anyway it wasn't your letter, Thérèse.

Thérèse I never said it was.

Fauvinard Then whose was it?

Laiguisier (*to Fauvinard*) It was addressed to you, Fauvinard.

Fauvinard What!

Thérèse There you are!

Laiguisier Then what was it doing in your saucepan?

Thérèse It had just arrived. Fanchette gave it to me but she had to go out so I was going to bring it up to monsieur, but then I had to go out and I forgot. And what right had you to read monsieur's letter?

Fauvinard Exactly!

Laiguisier (*to Fauvinard*) Be quiet! (*To Thérèse*) How dare you! Leave the room this instant!

Thérèse goes, but remains behind the door

Fauvinard Now then, what's all this about a letter of mine?

Laiguisier Ah, yes, I was going to ask you about that.

Fauvinard You ask me about my private correspondence, madame?

Laiguisier (*removing the paper from her corsage*) Doesn't look very private to me. It seems to be some sort of receipt for some jewellery.

Angèle Jewellery?

Fauvinard What? Oh! Yes! Let me see! (*He snatches it from Laiguisier. He looks at it*) Ah, yes, of course!

Laiguisier What?

Fauvinard It's to do with ... A case I'm working on. With my colleague Tardivaut. You met him just now.

Laiguisier Then what's he doing sending you messages when you've just seen him?

Fauvinard He didn't. This is evidence.

Laiguisier You never told me you had a case.

Fauvinard It's very confidential.

Angèle The Veauradieux Case!

Fauvinard *(to Angèle)* Shh!

Angèle I'm so sorry, Armand!

Fauvinard It's very confidential. *(He puts the paper on his desk)*

Laiguisier The Veauradieux Case! Ah, yes! I was talking about that only the other day. Do you remember Angèle? Now, what was I saying?

Fauvinard *(hastily)* Well, never mind about that now! Let's get back to the matter in hand. This business with Thérèse.

Laiguisier I was just about to tell you before you interrupted me. Now I was giving her the benefit of some helpful advice about how to do her job properly — in a perfectly friendly way — when she muttered something under her breath. You will not believe me when I tell you.

Angèle What was it, Mother?

Laiguisier She said — you will not believe this — she said ... *(hesitantly)* "old boiler".

Fauvinard Old boiler! I believe you. *(He suppresses laughter with a fit of coughing and goes to sit behind his desk)*

Thérèse appears from behind the door

Thérèse That's a dirty lie. I did not call you an old boiler.

Laiguisier Are you denying that you said "old boiler" under your breath?

Thérèse Oh, no!

Laiguisier Well, then!

Thérèse I may have said "old boiler", but I wasn't calling you an old boiler. I was just saying "old boiler". I was reminding myself that we've got an old boiler and that we could do with a new one, for the vegetables.

Laiguisier A likely story.

Thérèse I see! So you think it was more probable that I was calling you an old boiler. I wonder why that is!

Laiguisier Impertinence. Did you hear that? Thérèse, you are dismissed. Pack your things.

Thérèse Oh, yes! Who says? Who's the mistress in this house?

Laiguisier Angèle! Tell her who is mistress in this house!

Angèle *(meekly)* Thérèse, you are dismissed.

Thérèse *(to Angèle)* Oh, so you've dared to open your mouth have you? *(Taking off her apron and throwing it on the sofa)* Well, you won't find a replacement for me in a hurry.

Thérèse goes, Entrance 1

Laiguisier Servants! They're all the same.

Fauvinard I sincerely hope not. You'd be sacking them as fast as we could hire them. We now have no cook.

Laiguisier Could you have sat down to a meal prepared by a woman who had grossly insulted your wife's mother?

Fauvinard That would depend on what she had been cooking. She was rather a good cook ... as cooks go.

Laiguisier Fauvinard, you have no heart!

Fauvinard Perhaps not, but I do have a stomach.

Laiguisier (*ignoring him, to Angèle*) Now then, have you spoken to your husband?

Angèle Yes, Mother.

Laiguisier Well, then?

Fauvinard I absolutely refuse!

Laiguisier You must have some very good reasons for staying in Paris —

Fauvinard I do —

Laiguisier But I have yet to hear you plead your first case.

Fauvinard There is more to law than standing in front of a jury. There are consultations, arbitrations. Like this Veauradieux case for example, that I'm working on.

Laiguisier Ah, yes! I want to hear more about that.

Fauvinard It's confidential.

Laiguisier Now, what was it I was saying about the Veauradieux case only the other day?

Fauvinard (*hastily*) Yes, well any moment I am expecting my colleague Tardivaut to send me a note inviting me to dinner tonight to discuss the matter.

Laiguisier But you're dining with me!

Fauvinard Business before pleasure, I'm afraid, madame!

Laiguisier But you've only just seen Tardivaut.

Fauvinard We have a lot to discuss.

Laiguisier But if you know you're going to dine with him, why does he have to send you a note asking you?

Fauvinard Well, it's perfectly simple ... He said, "let's discuss this over dinner," so I said: "Invite me." So he said: "I'll write you a note." That's the proper thing to do. So he did. I mean he's going to. I mean, he probably has, but I don't know, do I? Why are you asking me all these questions?

Laiguisier You should have done your discussing here instead of wasting your money over dinner.

Fauvinard But we both had business to attend to, clients to see, that sort of thing.

Laiguisier Clients? What clients do you have?

Fauvinard Well ... Gatinet, for example.

Laiguisier Is he coming here?

Fauvinard He might be. I don't know, do I?

Laiguisier Anyway, he's not a client; he's your uncle.

Fauvinard I manage his affairs.

Laiguisier You bail him out when he's squandered all his money. He's a worthless old scamp, and he sets you a bad example.

Fauvinard He's very fond of you.

Laiguisier I can't help that, can I?

Fauvinard Did I say you could? That is my point. We can't help having relations. We are born with our uncles, our mothers ...

Laiguisier Oh, so you're a philosopher now. I tell you, I won't have him in this house.

Fauvinard You don't have to, but I will!

Gatinet enters through Entrance 1, a dissolute-looking, elderly gentleman

Uncle Gatinet!

Gatinet Ah! I let myself in. Someone seemed to be going out in a hurry, so I came in. *(He sees Laiguisier. His eyes light up. He goes to her, takes her hand and kisses it avidly)* Ah, madame! How delightful to see you!

Laiguisier Monsieur Gatinet!

Gatinet Ah, Fauvinard! What a lucky man you are to have such a mother-in-law. A fine figure of a woman! A fine figure of a woman!

Laiguisier *(backing away from him)* What are you doing here, Monsieur Gatinet?

Gatinet I have come to see you, madame! And I have some er ... business with my nephew. But it is for you that I long, madame!

Laiguisier *(backing away from him)* Do sit down, monsieur!

Gatinet No! I can't possibly do that! It would be fatal.

Fauvinard Why?

Gatinet Well, not exactly fatal, but ... It's a funny thing, you see, but nowadays, whenever I sit down I fall asleep. During the day that is. At night I'm fine usually. I'm often up all night. Doesn't seem to affect me. Then day comes and I have to stay standing, or — bang! — I'm out like a light. Only the other evening, I was saying to Zizi —

Laiguisier Zizi! And who is Zizi?

Gatinet (*pursuing her round the room*) Oh, madame! Do not be offended, but ever since you rejected my suit, I have been trying to forget. This Zizi, she means nothing to me, but she ... She helps me forget you!

Laiguisier (*backing away from him*) Oh, really!

Fauvinard (*aside*) Useful girl! I should like to meet her.

Laiguisier (*backing towards the door Entrance 2*) Well, we must leave you to your affairs. Angèle, we shall discuss this cook business and find you another.

Angèle (*following her*) Yes, Mother.

Gatinet Your servant, madame!

Laiguisier I think not, monsieur.

Fauvinard I doubt if you would enjoy the experience.

Laiguisier Fauvinard, don't let this man corrupt you, if he hasn't already done so. Come, Angèle!

Laiguisier goes off Entrance 2 with Angèle

Gatinet (*following her to the door. Looking after her*) Ah, that's a fine figure of a woman. Reminds me of my mother. I think I could make her very happy.

Fauvinard Only by leaving her alone. Forget it, Uncle. Sit down.

Gatinet Oh, thank you, dear boy — (*about to sit, then remembering himself*) No! No, I mustn't. I have a couple of things to talk to you about. The first thing ... I forget. But the second thing is, my allowance. Twenty-five thousand francs.

Fauvinard What about it?

Gatinet It's due.

Fauvinard I know it's due. I've already paid it to you.

Gatinet Oh. Have you? I don't remember. Well ... how about an advance?

Fauvinard I've already given you one of those, too.

Gatinet Have you? Oh. My memory's like a sieve. Ah! Wait a minute, I remember now!

Fauvinard You remember my giving you money?

Gatinet No, no! I remember the first thing I meant to say to you. I knew it should have come first. This'll soften him up, I said to myself. I've found you a client.

Fauvinard A client! With a case!

Gatinet First rate affair. Very rich lady — wants to chuck her husband.

Fauvinard A fashionable divorce! Splendid! This could be the making of me. (*Sitting at his desk, eagerly taking up his pen to make notes*) Now ... The lady's name.

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