The Romancers

by Edmond Rostand

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Title: The Romancers: A Comedy in Three Acts

Author: Edmond Rostand

Translator: Barrett H. Clark

Release date: January 23, 2006 [eBook #17581] Most recently updated: January 11, 2009

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/17581

Credits: Produced by Kent Cooper

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROMANCERS: A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS ***

Produced by Kent Cooper

THE ROMANCERS (Les Romanesques)

Comedy in Three Acts by EDMOND ROSTAND

Translated by Barrett H. Clark 1915

[[Untitled INTRODUCTORY NOTES from 1915 publication by Samuel French: Publisher, New York:

EDMOND ROSTAND

Edmond Rostand was born at Marseilles in 1868. Rostand is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant dramatic poets of modern times. "Les Romanesques"—"The Romancers"—was performed for the first time in Paris, at the Comedie Francaise, in 1894, and achieved considerable success. Its delicacy and charm revealed the true poet, and the deftness with which the plot was handled left little doubt as to the author's ability to construct an interesting and moving drama. But not until the production of "Cyrano de Bergerac" in 1897 did Rostand become known to the world at large. "L'Aiglon" (1900) was something of a disappointment after the brilliant "Cyrano." Ten years later came "Chantecler," the poet's deepest and in many ways most masterly play.

"The Romancers" is best played in the romantic atmosphere of the late Eighteenth century; the costumes should be Louis XVI. The stage-directions are sufficiently detailed.]]

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[Transcriber's note: "The Romancers" is the basis for the plot of the 1960 musical "The Fantasticks," with music by Harvey Schmidt, book and lyrics by Tom Jones.]

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THE ROMANCERS

Persons in the Play

SYLVETTE PERCINET STRAFOREL BERGAMIN (Percinet's father) PASQUINOT (Sylvette's father) BLAISE (A gardener) A WALL (Not a speaking part) Swordsmen, musicians, negroes, torch-bearers, a notary, four witnesses, and

other supernumeraries.

The action takes place anywhere, provided the costumes are pretty.

* * * * *

ACT I SCENE: The stage is divided by an old wall, covered with vines and flowers. At the right, a corner of BERGAMIN's private park; at the left, a corner of PASQUINOT's. On each side of the wall, and against it, is a rustic bench. As the curtain rises, PERCINET is seated on the top of the wall. On his knee is a book, out of which he is reading to SYLVETTE, who stands attentively listening on the bench which is on the other side of the wall.

SYLVETTE. Monsieur Percinet, how divinely beautiful!

PERCINET. Is it not? Listen to what Romeo answers: [Reading] "It was the lark, the herald of the morn, No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east. Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops: I must be gone"—

SYLVETTE. [Interrupts him, as she listens.] Sh!

PERCINET. [Listens a moment, then] No one! And, Mademoiselle, you must not take fright like a startled bird. Hear the immortal lovers:

"Juliet. Yon light is not the daylight, I know it, I, It is some meteor that the sun exhales, To be to thee this night a torch-bearer, And light thee on thy way to Mantua: Therefore stay yet, thou need'st not to be gone.

Romeo. Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death; I am content, so thou will have it so. I'll say, yon gray is not the morning's eye, 'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow; Nor that is not the lark, whose notes do beat The vaulty heaven so high above our heads: I have more care to stay than will to go: Come, death and welcome"—

SYLVETTE. No, he must not say such things, or I shall cry.

PERCINET. Then let us stop and read no further until to-morrow. We shall let

Romeo live! [He closes the book and looks about him.] This charming spot seems expressly made, it seems to me, to cradle the words of the Divine Will!

SYLVETTE. The verses are divine, and the soft air here is a divine accompaniment. And see, these green shades! But, Monsieur Percinet, what makes them divine to me is the way you read!

PERCINET. Flatterer!

SYLVETTE. [Sighing] Poor lovers! Their fate was cruel! [Another sigh] I think—

PERCINET. What?

SYLVETTE. Nothing!

PERCINET. Something that made you blush red as a rose.

SYLVETTE. Nothing, I say.

PERCINET. Ah, that's too transparent. I see it all: you are thinking of our fathers!

SYLVETTE. Perhaps—

PERCINET. Of their terrible hatred for each other.

SYLVETTE. The thought often pains me and makes me cry when I am alone. Last month, when I came home from the convent, my father pointed out your father's park, and said to me: "My dear child, you behold there the domain of my mortal enemy, Bergamin. Never cross the path of those two rascals, Bergamin and his son Percinet. Mark well my words, and obey me to the letter, or I shall cast you off as an enemy. Their family has always been at bitter enmity with our own." And I promised. But you see how I keep my word!

PERCINET. Did I not promise my father to do the same, Sylvette? Yet I love you!

SYLVETTE. Holy saints!

PERCINET. I love you, my dearest!

SYLVETTE. It's sinful!

PERCINET. Very—but what can we do? The greater the obstacles to be overcome, the sweeter the reward. Sylvette, kiss me!

SYLVETTE. Never! [She jumps down from the bench and runs off a few steps.]

PERCINET. But you love me?

SYLVETTE. What?

PERCINET. My dear child: I, too, sometimes think of us and compare you and me with those other lovers—of Verona.

SYLVETTE. But I didn't compare—!

PERCINET. You and I are Juliet and Romeo; I love you to despair, and I shall brave the wrath of Pasquinot-Capulet and Bergamin-Montague!

SYLVETTE. [Coming a little nearer to the wall] Then we love? But how, Monsieur Percinet, has it happened so soon?

PERCINET. Love is born we know not how, because it must be born. I often saw you pass my window—

SYLVETTE. I saw you, too!

PERCINET. And our eyes spoke in silence.

SYLVETTE. One day I was gathering nuts in the garden by the wall—

PERCINET. One day I happened to be reading Shakespeare. See how everything conspired to unite two hearts!

SYLVETTE. And a little gust of wind blew my scarf in your direction.

PERCINET. I climbed to the wall to return it—

SYLVETTE. [Climbing the wall again] I climbed too!

PERCINET. And since that day, my dear, I have waited at the same hour, here by this wall; and each time my heart beat louder and faster, until I knew by your soft laugh that you were near!

SYLVETTE. Now since we love, we must be married.

PERCINET. I was just thinking about that.

SYLVETTE. [Solemnly] I, last of the Pasquinots, do solemnly pledge myself to you, last of the Bergamins.

PERCINET. What noble recklessness!

SYLVETTE. We shall be sung in future ages!

PERCINET. Two tender children of two hard-hearted fathers!

SYLVETTE. But who knows whether the hour is not at hand when our fathers' hatred may end?

PERCINET. I doubt it.

SYLVETTE. I have heard of stranger things. I can think of half a dozen—

PERCINET. What, for instance?

SYLVETTE. Imagine that the reigning prince comes riding past some day—I run to him and kneel, and tell him the story of our love and of our fathers' hatred. The prince asks to see my father and Bergamin, and they are reconciled.

PERCINET. And your father gives me your hand!

SYLVETTE. Yes. Or else, you languish, the doctor declares you cannot live—

PERCINET. And asks: "What ails you?"

SYLVETTE. And you answer: "I must have Sylvette!"

PERCINET. And his pride is then forced to bend.

SYLVETTE. Yes. Or else: an aged duke, having seen my portrait, falls in love with me, sends a 'squire to sue for my hand, and offers to make me a duchess.

PERCINET. And you say, "No!"

SYLVETTE. He is offended, and some dark night when I am in the garden, meditating, he springs forth out of the darkness! I scream!

PERCINET. And I lose not a second in springing over the wall, dagger in hand. I fight like a tiger, I—

SYLVETTE. You lay low three or four men. Then my father rushes in and takes me in his arms. You tell him who you are. His heart softens, he gives me to my savior. Your father consents, for he is proud of your bravery.

PERCINET. Then we live together for years, happy and content!

SYLVETTE. This is not at all impossible, is it?

PERCINET. Someone's coming!

SYLVETTE. [Forgetting herself] Kiss me!

PERCINET. [Kissing her] This evening, at eight, then? As usual? You will come?

SYLVETTE. No.

PERCINET. Yes!

SYLVETTE. [Disappearing behind the wall] Your father! [PERCINET jumps quickly from the wall.]

[Enter BERGAMIN.]

BERGAMIN. Ah, ha, I find you here again, dreaming in this corner of the park!

PERCINET. Father, I love this old corner! I adore this bench over which the vines of the wall have so gracefully draped themselves. See, what graceful arabesques these festoons make! The air is purer here.

BERGAMIN. By the side of this wall?

PERCINET. I love it!

BERGAMIN. I see nothing lovable about it!

SYLVETTE. [Aside] He can't see why!

PERCINET. But it is charming, all covered with ivy and creeper. See here, what honeysuckle! This hundred-year-old wall, with its clinging vines, its constellations

of flowers, looking through the crannies, kissed by the summer sun, makes the bench a throne fit for kings!

BERGAMIN. Nonsense, you hare-brained youth! Do you mean to tell me that this wall has eyes?

PERCINET. Ah, what eyes! [Turns toward the wall.] Of soft azure, yet dazzlingly blue; let but a tear come to dim your brightness, or a single kiss—

BERGAMIN. But the wall hasn't eyes, you idiot!

PERCINET. See this vine, though! [He plucks part of the vine from the wall and graciously presents it to his father.]

SYLVETTE. [Aside] How clever!

BERGAMIN. How stupid! But I know now what has turned your silly head: you come here to read! [SYLVETTE starts as she hears this. PERCINET also shows signs of fear as his father pulls the book from the youth's pocket.] Plays! [He drops the book in horror.] And verse! Verse! That's what has turned your head. Now I see why you talk about eyes and honeysuckle. I tell you, to be useful, a wall doesn't have to be beautiful. I am going to have all this green stuff taken away, and the bricks re-laid and the holes stopped up. I want a white wall and a high one to keep the neighbors from looking into our park. I want no vines and honeysuckles. Along the top I'll sprinkle broken glass—

PERCINET. Pity!

BERGAMIN. No pity! I insist on it! Glass—all along the top of the wall! [SYLVETTE and PERCINET are in despair. BERGAMIN sits down on the bench.] And now, I have something to say to you. [He rises and examines the wall.] If the wall hasn't eyes, it may possibly have ears? [He is about to stand on the bench, when PERCINET takes fright and SYLVETTE clings close to her side of the wall, making herself as small as she can. BERGAMIN decides not to scale the wall, but motions to his son to do so.] See whether some curious listener—?

PERCINET. [Climbing to the top and leaning over so that SYLVETTE can hear him] Till to-night!

SYLVETTE. [Giving him her hand, which he kisses] I'll come as the clock is striking! I adore you!

BERGAMIN. [To PERCINET] Well?

PERCINET. [Jumping down—to his father] No one!

BERGAMIN. [Re-seating himself] Well, then, my boy, I should like to see you married.

SYLVETTE. [Aside] Oh!

BERGAMIN. What's that?

PERCINET. Nothing.

BERGAMIN. I thought I heard a cry?

PERCINET. [Looking into the air] Some wounded bird, perhaps.

BERGAMIN. I have given the matter my undivided attention, and have chosen a wife for you. [PERCINET whistles and walks away.] I tell you, I am in earnest and I intend to force you, if necessary. [PERCINET continues whistling.] Will you stop that confounded whistling! The young woman is rich—she's a jewel!

PERCINET. I want none of your jewels!

BERGAMIN. I'll show you, you young insolent!

PERCINET. [Grasping his father's cane, which is raised as if to strike him] Spring has filled the bushes with the songs of birds; the brooklets accompany the love-notes of wild birds.

BERGAMIN. Rascal!

PERCINET. [Still holding the cane] The whole world laughs and sings farewell to April. The butterflies—

BERGAMIN. Ruffian!

PERCINET. [As before] Wing their way across the meadows, to make love to the adored flowers! Love—

BERGAMIN. Villain!

PERCINET. Love opens wide the heart of all nature. And you ask me to consent to a marriage of reason!

BERGAMIN. Of course I do!

PERCINET. [Passionately] No, no, no, Father. I swear by this wall—which hears me, I hope—that my marriage will be more romantic than any dreamed of in the most poetic of the world's love stories! [He runs out.]

BERGAMIN. [Pursuing him] Ah, let me catch you—!

SYLVETTE. I can really understand now why Papa hates that odious old man!

[Enter PASQUINOT, left.]

PASQUINOT. Well, Mademoiselle, what are you doing here?

SYLVETTE. Nothing. Taking the air.

PASQUINOT. Alone? But, you silly girl, are you not afraid?

SYLVETTE. Not in the least.

PASQUINOT. Near this wall? I forbade you to come near it! You see that park over there? That belongs to my mortal enemy!

SYLVETTE. I know it, Father dear.

PASQUINOT. Why, here you are exposed to any insult, any—if those rascals knew that my daughter were walking alone in this park— Brr! It makes me shiver to think of! I'm going to have the wall repaired, and erect a huge iron grill on top of it.

SYLVETTE. [Aside] He'll never do it—it would cost too much!

PASQUINOT. Now go into the house—quick! [She goes out, PASQUINOT

glowering at her.]

BERGAMIN. [Heard from the other side of the wall, as he enters] Take this note at once to Monsieur Straforel.

PASQUINOT. [Running to the wall and climbing to the top of it] Bergamin!

BERGAMIN. [Doing likewise] Pasquinot! [They embrace.]

PASQUINOT. How are you?

BERGAMIN. Pretty well.

PASQUINOT. How's your gout?

BERGAMIN. Better. And how is your cold?

PASQUINOT. Still troubles me, devil take it!

BERGAMIN. Well, the marriage is arranged!

PASQUINOT. What?

BERGAMIN. I heard everything—I was hidden in the bushes. They adore each other!

PASQUINOT. Bravo!

BERGAMIN. We must bring matters to a head! [He rubs his hands.] Ha, ha! Now we can do as we had planned—

PASQUINOT. Yes, and tear down the wall.

BERGAMIN. And live together.

PASQUINOT. Joining our properties.

BERGAMIN. By marrying our children. But I wonder whether they would be so anxious if they knew we wished it? A marriage arranged beforehand is not so tempting to two young children so romantic as ours. That is why we kept our own wishes a secret. I felt sure that after they had been separated—Sylvette in the convent, Percinet at school—they would thrive on their secret love. That is how I

came to invent this hatred of ours. And you even doubted its success! Now all we have to do is to say Yes.

PASQUINOT. But how can it be done? Remember, I've called you a scoundrel, fool, idiot—

BERGAMIN. Idiot? Scoundrel was sufficient.

PASQUINOT. Now what pretext—?

BERGAMIN. Your daughter herself has given me an inspiration. This evening they are to meet here at eight. Percinet comes first. At the moment Sylvette appears, mysterious men in black will emerge from the shadows and start to carry her off. An abduction! She screams, then our young hero gives chase, draws his sword—the ravishers pretend to flee—I arrive on the scene, then you—your daughter is safe and sound. You bless the couple and drop a few appropriate tears; my heart is softened. Tableau.

PASQUINOT. A stroke of genius.

BERGAMIN. [Modestly] Yes—I think it really is. Look—see that man coming? It's Straforel, the bravado whom I wrote to a few minutes ago. He is to superintend the abduction.

[STRAFOREL, in an elaborate swordsman's costume, appears at the back of BERGAMIN's park, and swaggers down-stage.]

BERGAMIN. [Descending from the wall and bowing low to STRAFOREL] Allow me to introduce you to my friend Pasquinot.

STRAFOREL. [Bowing] Monsieur! [He raises his head and sees no PASQUINOT.]

BERGAMIN. [Pointing to PASQUINOT on the crest of the wall] There, on the wall!—Now, my dear master, does my plan meet with your approval?

STRAFOREL. It does. It is most simple.

BERGAMIN. You must act quickly, you understand?

STRAFOREL. And say nothing!

BERGAMIN. A make-believe abduction and stage-fight with swords.

STRAFOREL. I understand perfectly.

BERGAMIN. You must have skilful swordsmen—I can't have my boy hurt. He is my only child!

STRAFOREL. I will see to that myself.

BERGAMIN. Good. In that case, I shall fear nothing.

PASQUINOT. [Aside to BERGAMIN] Ask him the price?

BERGAMIN. For an abduction, Maestro, how much do you charge?

STRAFOREL. That depends, Monsieur, on the kind you wish; we have them at all prices. In an affair of this kind, however, nothing should be spared. If I were in your place, I should have a first-class abduction.

BERGAMIN. [Surprised] Then you have many classes?

STRAFOREL. Indeed I have. I have the ordinary vulgar abduction in a cab, with two men dressed in black—that's rarely used; the daylight abduction, the midnight abduction; the pompous abduction in a court carriage, with powdered servants—wigs are extra—with mutes, negroes, brigands, musketeers, anything you like! The abduction in a post-chaise, with two, three, four, five, horses, ad lib.; the discreet and quiet abduction, in a small carriage— that one's rather lugubrious; the rollicking abduction, in which the victim is carried away in a sack; the romantic abduction in a boat—but a lake is necessary!—the Venetian abduction, in a gondola—ah, you have no lagoon! Moonlight abduction, or the abduction on a dark and starless night—those moonlight abductions are quite the style, though they are a little dear!—Besides these, there is the abduction by torch-light, with cries and screams, and clash and shock of arms; the brutal abduction, the polite abduction; the classical one with masks; the gallant abduction to the accompaniment of music; but

the latest, most stylish, gayest of all, is the sedan-chair abduction!

BERGAMIN. [Scratching his head—aside to PASQUINOT] Well, what do you think?

PASQUINOT. Hm, what do you?

BERGAMIN. I think that we should do everything in the best possible way, no expense spared. Let us give our young romancers something they'll not soon forget. Let's have it with masks, dark mantles, torches, music, and a sedan-chair!

STRAFOREL. [Taking notes] A first-class, then, with all extras.

BERGAMIN. That's it.

STRAFOREL. I shall return soon. [To PASQUINOT] Remember, Monsieur, to leave open the door of your park to-night.

BERGAMIN. Very well, it shall be done.

STRAFOREL. [Bowing] My compliments. [Turning to go] One first-class—with extras. [He goes out.]

PASQUINOT. The honest man, he went without telling us the price!

BERGAMIN. Everything is arranged. Now we'll live together, after demolishing the wall.

PASQUINOT. And in winter we'll have but one hearth and home!

BERGAMIN. Our dearest wishes are about to be realized!

PASQUINOT. And we'll grow old together!

BERGAMIN. Dear old Pasquinot!

PASQUINOT. Dear old Bergamin! [They embrace. SYLVETTE and PERCINET enter, from each side of the stage and, seeing their fathers embrace]

SYLVETTE. Oh!

BERGAMIN. [Aside to PASQUINOT] Your daughter!

PERCINET. Oh!

PASQUINOT. [Aside to BERGAMIN] Your son!

BERGAMIN. [Aside to PASQUINOT] We must pretend to fight! [Their embrace is transformed into a struggle.] Rascal!

PASQUINOT. Fool!

SYLVETTE. [Pulling her father's coat-tails] Papa!

PERCINET. [Doing the same with his father] Papa!

BERGAMIN. Let us be!

PASQUINOT. He insulted me!

BERGAMIN. He struck me!

PASQUINOT. Coward!

SYLVETTE. Papa!

BERGAMIN. Thief!

PERCINET. Papa!

PASQUINOT. Bandit!

SYLVETTE. Papa!! [SYLVETTE and PERCINET finally succeed in separating the fathers.]

PERCINET. [Dragging his father away] Go in now, it's late.

BERGAMIN. [Trying to go to the wall again] I can't control myself. Just let me—! [PERCINET takes him out.]

PASQUINOT. [Also trying to return to the wall] I'll kill him!

SYLVETTE. [Dragging PASQUINOT out] The air is so damp! Think of your rheumatism! [They go out.]

[Little by little it grows dark. For a moment the stage is empty. Then, in PASQUINOT's park, enter STRAFOREL and swordsmen, musicians, and

torch-bearers.]

STRAFOREL. I see one star already. The day is dying. [He places his men about the stage.] Stay there—you there—and you there. The hour is near. You will see, as the clock strikes eight, a figure in white enter on this side. Then I whistle—[He looks at the sky again.] The moon? Splendid! Every effect is perfect to-night! [Examining the costumes of his band] The capes and mantles are excellent. Look a little more dangerous, over there! Now, ready? [A sedan-chair is brought in.] The chair over there in the shade. [Seeing the negroes who carry the chair] The negroes are good! [Speaking at a distance] Torches, there, you understand you are not to come until you receive the signal? [The faint reflection of the torches is seen at the back of the stage, through the underbrush. Enter the musicians.] Musicians? There— at the back. Now, a little distinction and life! Vary your poses from time to time. Stand straight, mandolin! Sit down, alto! There. [Severely to a swordsman] You, first mask, don't look so harmless—I want a villainous slouch! Good! Now, instruments, play softly—tune up! Good—tra la la! [He puts on his mask.]

[PERCINET enters slowly from the other side of the stage. As he speaks the following lines, the stage becomes darker, until at the end, it is night.]

PERCINET. My father is calmer now. The day is dying, and the intoxicating odor of the elders is wafted to me; the flowers close their petals in the gray of the evening—

STRAFOREL. [Aside to the violins] Music!

[The musicians play softly until the end of the act.]

PERCINET. I tremble like a reed. She is coming!

STRAFOREL. [To the musicians] Amoroso!

PERCINET. My first evening meeting—I can scarcely stand! The evening breeze sounds like the fluttering of her dress. Now I can't see the flowers, but I can smell them. Ah, this great tree, with a star above it—Music? Who—? [A pause.] Night has come. [After another pause, a clock strikes eight in the distance. SYLVETTE

appears at the back of her park.]

SYLVETTE. The hour has struck. He must be waiting.

[A whistle is heard. STRAFOREL rises in front of SYLVETTE, and torch-bearers appear in the background. SYLVETTE screams. The swordsmen seize and put her into the sedan-chair.]

SYLVETTE. Help! Help!

PERCINET. Great Heavens!

SYLVETTE. Percinet, they are carrying me off!

PERCINET. [Leaping to the wall] I come! [When he reaches the top of the wall, he draws his sword, jumps down on the other side, and engages four or five swordsmen in combat. They flee before him.] There, and there, and there!

STRAFOREL. [To the musicians] Tremolo!

[The violins now play a dramatic tremolo.]

STRAFOREL. Per Bacco, he's the devil, that child! [PERCINET now engages STRAFOREL in a duel. STRAFOREL, after a few thrusts, puts his hand to his breast.] I—I'm mortally wounded! [He falls.]

PERCINET. [Running to SYLVETTE, who sits in the sedan-chair] Sylvette! [He kneels to her.]

SYLVETTE. My savior!

PASQUINOT. [Entering] Bergamin's son! Your savior? Your savior? I give you to him!

SYLVETTE and PERCINET. Heavens!

[BERGAMIN now appears on his side of the wall.]

PASQUINOT. [To BERGAMIN, who is seen on top of the wall] Bergamin, your son is a hero! Let us forget our quarrels, and make these children happy!

BERGAMIN. [Solemnly] I hate you no more!

PERCINET. Sylvette, don't speak loud: I know I am dreaming. But don't wake me!

BERGAMIN. Our hatred is ended in the marriage of our dear ones. [Indicating the wall] Henceforth let there be no Pyrenees!

PERCINET. Who would have believed that my father could change so!

SYLVETTE. I told you everything would turn out happily! [While the lovers go up-stage with PASQUINOT, STRAFOREL rises and hands a folded paper to BERGAMIN.]

BERGAMIN. [Aside] What is it? This paper—your signature? What is it, if you please?

STRAFOREL. [Bowing] Monsieur, it's my bill! [He falls down again.]

Curtain

* * * * *

ACT II SCENE: The same, except that the wall has disappeared. The benches which were formerly against it are removed to the extreme right and left. There are a few extra pots of flowers and two or three plaster statues. To the right is a small garden table, with chairs about it.

As the curtain rises, PASQUINOT is sitting on the bench to the left, reading a paper. BLAISE is at the back, busy with his rake.

BLAISE. So the notary comes to-night, Monsieur Pasquinot? It is pleasant, now that the wall is down, and you living together this past month. It was high time, I'm thinking. The little lovers must be happy!

PASQUINOT. [Raising his head and looking about] So you like it without the wall, Blaise?

BLAISE. The garden is superb!

PASQUINOT. Yes, my property has increased a hundred per cent! [Poking a tuft of

grass with his foot] Have you watered the grass? [Furiously] You have no business doing that during the day!

BLAISE. But Monsieur Bergamin told me to!

PASQUINOT. Ah, I see! He seems to think that the more grass is watered the better it becomes. Well, take those plants out of the green-house. [As BLAISE begins arranging plants which he gets from the green-house—just off-stage—enter BERGAMIN at the back.]

BERGAMIN. [Watering some flowers from a large watering can] Dear me, these plants never get enough water! [To a tree] Hey there, old man, you never get enough to drink, do you? There's for you! [Laying down the watering can, he looks about him with satisfaction.] Yes, it is better now. Very pretty—those statues there are a decided improvement. [Catching sight of PASQUINOT] How are you? [No answer.] How are you? How are you? [PASQUINOT raises his head.] Well?

PASQUINOT. My friend, why ask that? We see each other all the time!

BERGAMIN. Oh, very well. [Seeing BLAISE arranging the plants] Will you take those plants back?! [BLAISE, not knowing what to do, takes them back immediately. PASQUINOT raises his eyes, shrugs his shoulders, and then resumes his reading. BERGAMIN walks back and forth, and finally sits down near PASQUINOT. There is a pause.] I used to come here every day, in silence—

PASQUINOT. [Laying aside his paper] I, too—it was most amusing!

BERGAMIN. And our secret!

PASQUINOT. The very danger was amusing.

BERGAMIN. And the things we had to say of each other—!

PASQUINOT. Very amusing.—Bergamin?

BERGAMIN. Pasquinot?

PASQUINOT. Something's lacking now.

BERGAMIN. The idea! [After a moment's reflection] Yes, I agree with you. Funny—are you losing your sense of the romantic? [He looks at PASQUINOT and says, aside] His waistcoat often lacks a button! It's disgusting! [He rises and walks back and forth.]

PASQUINOT. [Looking over his paper—aside] He looks like some immense beetle. [He pretends to be reading as BERGAMIN passes him.]

BERGAMIN. [Aside] See the ridiculous way he reads! [He whistles as he walks away up-stage.]

PASQUINOT. [Aside] Whistling! Oh, Heavens! Don't do that, whistling makes me nervous.

BERGAMIN. [With a smile] Remember the mote in your neighbor's eye. You, too, get on my nerves sometimes.

PASQUINOT. I?

BERGAMIN. You tell the same story twenty times a day.

PASQUINOT. Why, I—

BERGAMIN. And when you sit down you swing your foot like a pendulum. At meals you roll your bread in a most disgusting manner.

PASQUINOT. Ha, you take me to task for my irritating mannerisms! But let me tell you, you are no less unpleasant. You are ridiculous and thoroughly selfish. I know now what the trouble is: the wall— with it, we were happy, now we don't live at all.

BERGAMIN. We didn't do this for ourselves, did we?

PASQUINOT. No, we did not!

BERGAMIN. It was for our children.

PASQUINOT. For our children, yes. Let us therefore suffer in silence, and regret our former liberty.

BERGAMIN. Sacrifice is the lot of parents.

[SYLVETTE and PERCINET appear at the left, up stage, arm in arm.]

PASQUINOT. Sh—the lovers!

BERGAMIN. [Looking at them] See them! How they love each other! Like the old pilgrims of love, they return each day to the sacred spot.

[The lovers, who have meantime disappeared, re-appear on the opposite side of the stage, and come down toward the old men.]

PASQUINOT. If they are talking as they usually do, their conversation will be well worth listening to!

[BERGAMIN and PASQUINOT retire behind a tree.]

PERCINET. I love you.

SYLVETTE. I love you. [They stop.] Here is the famous spot.

PERCINET. Yes. He fell here, that big fellow, pierced to the heart.

SYLVETTE. There was I, like Andromeda.

PERCINET. And I was Perseus!

SYLVETTE. How many were there against you?

PERCINET. Ten!

SYLVETTE. Oh, there were twenty at least, not counting the big leader.

PERCINET. Or thirty—there must have been!

SYLVETTE. Tell me once more how it was accomplished?

PERCINET. They fell—like cards in a row!

SYLVETTE. Our story should be put into a poem!

PERCINET. It shall be.

SYLVETTE. How I love you!

PERCINET. I adore you!

SYLVETTE. A realized dream. How my heart beats! I would never think of marrying a commonplace little husband picked out by my father!

PERCINET. Indeed?

SYLVETTE. No, no, not the way husbands are usually given to young girls.

PERCINET. No, you would never have thought of marrying the son of your father's best friend.

SYLVETTE. [Laughing] Indeed not. Have you noticed how our fathers have lately—?

PERCINET. Yes, like two dogs.

BERGAMIN. [Aside] Hm!

PERCINET. And I know the reason why. This new arrangement is not the best thing for their property. Our fathers are very good people, you know, but they haven't much soul, and our brilliant adventure rather throws them into the shade—

PASQUINOT. [Aside] How's that?

SYLVETTE. You see, they are fathers of celebrated lovers. Poor fathers, how they have been deceived!

PASQUINOT. [Aside] Ha, ha!

PERCINET. Yes, fate has been with us!

BERGAMIN. [Aside] Ha, ha!

SYLVETTE. And to-night the marriage-contract is to be signed!

PERCINET. I must have musicians.

SYLVETTE. Then go quick.

PERCINET. I fly!

SYLVETTE. [Calling him back] I'll take you as far as the gate. [They go up-stage, arm in arm.] We are at least as great as the most celebrated lovers.

PERCINET. We shall take our place with Romeo and Juliet!

SYLVETTE. Aminta and her shepherd.

PERCINET. Pyramus and Thisbe.

SYLVETTE. And so many others! [They disappear, but their voices are heard outside.]

Voice of PERCINET. Francesca and Paolo.

Voice of SYLVETTE. Petrarch and Laura.

[BERGAMIN and PASQUINOT emerge.]

PASQUINOT. See how well your plan has succeeded! Our children are quite mad, thanks to you!

BERGAMIN. Your daughter, with her famous abduction, is most aggravating.

PASQUINOT. Your son thinks he is a hero. He gets on my nerves.

BERGAMIN. But the worst of it all is that they think we are two idiotic old fools whom they have deceived. I don't like it at all.

PASQUINOT. Why didn't you think of it before, wise man? I'm going to tell them everything.

BERGAMIN. No, please don't do that—at least not until after the signing of the contract. Let us not say a word until then.

PASQUINOT. Very well. But meantime, here we are caught in the net of your own making.

BERGAMIN. But my dear friend, you admired the plan!

PASQUINOT. A fine plan, in truth!

[SYLVETTE enters gaily, with flowers in her hand. She waves to PERCINET in the distance, then comes down-stage.]

SYLVETTE. Good-day, Papa. Good-day, Father-in-law to-be!

BERGAMIN. Good-day, daughter-in-law to-be!

SYLVETTE. My, my, what a bad humor you are in!

BERGAMIN. It's Pasquinot's fault—he—he—

SYLVETTE. [Waving her flowers in BERGAMIN's face] Sh! Please don't quarrel. Of course, I understand, you can't behave quite as old friends, and you like to quarrel a little, in a friendly way—

BERGAMIN. Of course, our hatred was so great!

SYLVETTE. A mortal hatred, too! When I think what you've said about Papa—oh, dear! I used to sit by the wall and hear every word! And to think you never once suspected that I came there to meet Percinet—

PASQUINOT. [Ironically] Ah, I—

SYLVETTE. We came every day at the same hour. [To BERGAMIN] Ha, ha, I can still hear Percinet telling you that he was going to marry—"most romantically"! And he kept his word!

BERGAMIN. [Put out] Really? And do you think that if I had wished—?

SYLVETTE. Now, now, now! I know lovers' dreams are always realized, and that fathers who are mortal enemies always end by falling into each other's arms.

PASQUINOT. Oh, let me laugh!

SYLVETTE. But we proved it!

BERGAMIN. I could say something—

SYLVETTE. What?

BERGAMIN. Nothing!

SYLVETTE. [To BERGAMIN] You seem changed. What do you mean?

BERGAMIN. I mean—

PASQUINOT. Why, with one word, we could— [Aside] I can't tell her! [He walks

up-stage two or three steps.]

SYLVETTE. Well, if you have nothing to say, why not keep still?

PASQUINOT. [Angrily] Keep still? Nothing to say? Do you imagine that everything just happened? How do you think people could come into my park through the iron gates?

BERGAMIN. Do you imagine for one instant that young ladies are carried off like that nowadays?

SYLVETTE. Do I—? What are you saying?

BERGAMIN. That will do! It is high time you knew the truth. I tell you, the victory was on the side of the old men!

SYLVETTE. But—

PASQUINOT. In old plays the father was always the dupe. Nowadays, we do the duping! Would either of you have loved the other if you had been told to do so? No.

SYLVETTE. Then perhaps you suspected—?

PASQUINOT. Of course we did.

SYLVETTE. Our meetings?

BERGAMIN. I heard you every time!

SYLVETTE. But the benches?

PASQUINOT. We put them there on purpose.

SYLVETTE. The duel?

BERGAMIN. A trick—prepared beforehand.

SYLVETTE. The bravadoes?

PASQUINOT. Actors!

SYLVETTE. Then my abduction—? It was all a joke!

BERGAMIN. [Searching in his pocket] Joke? Here's the bill!

SYLVETTE. [Snatching the bill from him] Give it to me! [She reads] "Straforel, Confidential affairs: One abduction, setting and scenery—for purposes of bringing about a marriage—" Oh! "Eight assistants at five francs a head; eight masks—"

BERGAMIN. [To PASQUINOT] I think we told her too soon!

SYLVETTE. [Continuing] "One sedan-chair, with porters; latest style, with red trimmings—" [Laughing, she throws the bill on the table.]

PASQUINOT. Then she isn't angry?

SYLVETTE. [Graciously] A charming idea! But, truly, Monsieur Bergamin, do you think I love Percinet merely because of your trick?

PASQUINOT. She takes it very well.

BERGAMIN. [To SYLVETTE] You're not offended?

PASQUINOT. Are you going to tell Percinet?

SYLVETTE. Oh, no. Men are so stupid!

BERGAMIN. Very sensible. But I had an idea— [Taking out his watch] Now we must see about the contract. [Offering his hand to SYLVETTE] We are still good friends?

SYLVETTE. Of course!

BERGAMIN. [Turning about once more before he goes out] You don't blame me, do you?

SYLVETTE. [Sweetly] Not in the least! [BERGAMIN and PASQUINOT go out. As they leave, SYLVETTE bursts into a rage.] How I hate that Monsieur Bergamin!

[Enter PERCINET.]

PERCINET. Still here? Ah, I see; you did not want to leave this sacred spot—

SYLVETTE. [Sitting on the bench to the left] Outrageous!

PERCINET. There is where you saw me, like Amadis, put to flight thirty of the

ruffians!

SYLVETTE. No: ten!

PERCINET. [Going to her] Dearest, what is the matter? Are you troubled? Your eyes are not so bright as they were. I know! This marvelous place makes you sad sometimes. Are you sad because our balcony—our Verona balcony—is destroyed?

SYLVETTE. [Impatiently] Oh, dear!

PERCINET. But does not the wall still exist in our memories? That wall which cradled our love—

SYLVETTE. [Aside:] Will he never end!

PERCINET. You remember not long ago, you said our story should be put into a poem?

SYLVETTE. Yes?

PERCINET. Well, I have occasionally written verses.

SYLVETTE. Are you going to write our story?

PERCINET. Listen to this; I thought it out when I was walking. "The Fathers who are Mortal Enemies." First canto—

SYLVETTE. Oh!

PERCINET. [Ready to declaim] Er—

SYLVETTE. Oh!

PERCINET. What is the matter?

SYLVETTE. I imagine I am too happy—I'm nervous—I don't feel well. [She bursts into tears.] I'll be well in a moment. Let me be! [She turns her back and hides her face in a handkerchief.]

PERCINET. [Surprised] I'll leave you for a moment. [Aside] On a day like this, it's only too natural— [He goes to the right, sees the bill on the table, takes a pencil

from his pocket, and sits down.] I'll just jot down those lines. [He picks up the bill, and starts to write; notices the writing and reads aloud] "I, Straforel, having pretended to be killed by a sword-thrust from a foolish young blade, hereby render account for torn clothes and wounded pride: forty francs." [Smiling] What is it? [He continues reading to himself, and his smile dies away.]

SYLVETTE. [Wiping her eyes] He would fall from the clouds if he knew! I must be careful!

PERCINET. [Rising] Well, well, well!

SYLVETTE. [Going toward him] What is it?

PERCINET. [Hiding the bill] Nothing. [Aside] Now I see why the body was never found!

SYLVETTE. [Turning around to show PERCINET her dress] You've said nothing about my dress to-day?

PERCINET. [Preoccupied] Blue is not becoming. I always prefer you in pink.

SYLVETTE. [Aside] What is the matter? Can he have found out? [She looks toward the table.] The bill? [She runs to the table.]

PERCINET. What are you looking for?

SYLVETTE. Nothing.—Now let me hear your poem.

PERCINET. No.

SYLVETTE. Please!

PERCINET. No.

SYLVETTE. But I want to hear it.

PERCINET. The verses are not good.

SYLVETTE. Oh! [Aside] I think he knows!

PERCINET. [Aside] I think she knows!

BOTH. [Each to the other] You know!? [After a pause, they laugh.] Ha, ha, ha!

PERCINET. Isn't it funny?

SYLVETTE. Very.

PERCINET. We were made to play a farce—our fathers were the best of friends all the time!

SYLVETTE. Good neighbors.

PERCINET. I'll warrant they are cousins, too!

SYLVETTE. [Bowing] I am about to marry my cousin!

PERCINET. My cousin!

SYLVETTE. How nice and respectable!

PERCINET. Classic!

SYLVETTE. Of course, I had dreamed of a marriage more—but it is comforting to know that our love coincides with our—duty!

PERCINET. And the material interests of our fathers.

SYLVETTE. An excellent marriage, in short: a marriage of convenience! And our poor idyl!

PERCINET. Gone.

SYLVETTE. Gone! So I'm the good little girl of the family!

PERCINET. And I the obedient little son! But it was only as Romeo that I appealed to you!

SYLVETTE. Well, you are no longer that!

PERCINET. And do you think you are Juliet?

SYLVETTE. Now you're bitter.

PERCINET. And you cynical.

SYLVETTE. If you were ridiculous, is it my fault?

PERCINET. I at least had a partner!

SYLVETTE. I, too! Poor Blue Bird, you are beautifully plucked!

PERCINET. [Bitterly] A pre-arranged abduction!

SYLVETTE. Farce, all of it!

PERCINET. And I your savior! All our poetry was bought and paid for. Our beautiful bubble is now a tiny fleck of soap. Farewell, Shakespearean lovers—we have nothing in common with you!

SYLVETTE. Nothing!

PERCINET. In place of a divine drama, we played an infamous parody.

SYLVETTE. Our nightingale was a sparrow!

PERCINET. And the immortal wall a punch-and-judy theater. We were the puppets, worked by our fathers.

SYLVETTE. But how much more ridiculous we should be if we loved each other less than we do!

PERCINET. We must now love more than ever.

SYLVETTE. But we do—we adore—

PERCINET. The word is not a bit too strong.

SYLVETTE. Love can console us. Can it not, my treasure?

PERCINET. Certainly, my jewel.

SYLVETTE. Good-bye then, my dearest.

PERCINET. Good-bye, my darling.

SYLVETTE. I shall dream of you, my heart.

PERCINET. And I of you.

SYLVETTE. Good-night. [She goes out.]

PERCINET. So this is how I have been treated!— But who is this? See the long

moustaches—I don't know him—

[STRAFOREL enters and walks majestically toward PERCINET.]

STRAFOREL. [With a profound bow] I have come to collect a small bill.

PERCINET. Are you an upholsterer?

STRAFOREL. Run along, young man, and tell your papa I am waiting for him.

PERCINET. What is your name?

STRAFOREL. My name is Straforel.

PERCINET. [With a start] He?! This is too much!

STRAFOREL. [Smiling] Then you know, young man?

PERCINET. [Throwing the bill in STRAFOREL's face] Wretch! It was you!

STRAFOREL. It was, Per Bacco!

PERCINET. I have you at last.

STRAFOREL. The people you kill, you see, are in the best of health.

PERCINET. [Drawing his sword and making a pass at STRAFOREL] You will see!

STRAFOREL. [Parrying with his arm, like a fencing-master giving a lesson] Hand high! Foot out! Monsieur, at your age, you should know better than that! [He takes the sword from PERCINET with his naked hand, and returns it as he bows.] What, are you stopping your fencing-lesson so soon?

PERCINET. [Exasperated, as he takes back the sword] I'm going away. Here I am treated like a child. I shall have my revenge. I am going to seek my romance—true romance: love-affairs, duels, and—Ah, Don Juan, I will scandalize your ghost! I will elope with actresses! [He dashes out, brandishing his sword.]

STRAFOREL. Very well, but who is going to pay me? [Looking in the distance] Stop there! Here's someone else.

[Enter BERGAMIN and PASQUINOT, their hair and clothes ruffled, as if they had

been fighting.]

PASQUINOT. [Readjusting his clothes and holding BERGAMIN's wig] Here's your wig!

BERGAMIN. And here's yours!

PASQUINOT. After this, you can't imagine I'll—?

BERGAMIN. I would no more live with you now than—

[Enter SYLVETTE.]

PASQUINOT. My daughter!—Say nothing about this!

SYLVETTE. [Throwing her arms about her father's neck] Papa, I can't marry Percinet!

[Enter the NOTARY and four WITNESSES.]

BERGAMIN. The witnesses! The devil!

WITNESSES. What—?

STRAFOREL. [In the midst of the tumult] My bill! Who is going to pay me? Ninety pistoles!

[Enter the GUESTS and three FIDDLERS, who play.]

BERGAMIN. What's all this? The guests? Music?

[The FIDDLERS continue their minuet.]

STRAFOREL. [To BERGAMIN] Well?

BERGAMIN. See Pasquinot.

STRAFOREL. [Reading] "For the purpose of bringing about a marriage—"

BERGAMIN. Well, there is to be no marriage! Therefore I owe you nothing!

[Enter BLAISE.]

STRAFOREL. [To PASQUINOT] But, Monsieur—

PASQUINOT. What? Pay you now that it is broken off!

BERGAMIN. [To whom BLAISE has just whispered] My son—run away?

SYLVETTE. Run away?

STRAFOREL. Well! Well!

BERGAMIN. Quick, follow him! [He runs out, followed by the NOTARY and the WITNESSES.]

SYLVETTE. Gone!

STRAFOREL. [Coming down-stage] Why can't I straighten all this out?

SYLVETTE. This is too much! [She goes out, followed by PASQUINOT.]

STRAFOREL. Straforel, my son, if you want your ninety pistoles, you must patch up this marriage! [He goes out. The three FIDDLERS, left alone, continue their minuet, as the curtain falls.]

Curtain

* * * * *

ACT III SCENE: The scene is the same except that the wall is being rebuilt. Bricks and sacks of plaster lie about.

As the curtain rises, the MASON is seen at work with his trowel. His back is turned to the audience. BERGAMIN and PASQUINOT, each on his own side of the wall, watch the progress of the work.

The MASON. [Singing at his work] Tra la la—

BERGAMIN. These masons are so slow!

PASQUINOT. Good!

BERGAMIN. How he slaps the mortar!

PASQUINOT. There goes another brick!

[The MASON sings a number of trills.]

PASQUINOT. Sings well, but works very slowly! By to-morrow the wall will be at least two feet high!

BERGAMIN. I'm impatient to see it higher!

PASQUINOT. What is that you say, Monsieur?

BERGAMIN. I was not addressing you. [A pause.] What do you do evenings after dinner?

PASQUINOT. Nothing—and you?

BERGAMIN. Nothing. [Another pause. They bow and walk about again.]

PASQUINOT. [Stopping] Any news from your son?

BERGAMIN. No—he is still away.

PASQUINOT. He will return soon: his money will surely give out.

BERGAMIN. Thank you. [They bow again, and walk.]

PASQUINOT. Now that the wall is being built again, Monsieur, I should be glad to see you from time to time.

BERGAMIN. Thank you. Perhaps I shall come. [They bow.]

PASQUINOT. Tell me, now, will you play piquet?

BERGAMIN. I beg your pardon—I don't know—

PASQUINOT. I invite you!

BERGAMIN. To tell the truth, I prefer besigue—

PASQUINOT. Then come at once.

BERGAMIN. [Following PASQUINOT, who goes out] You owe me ten sous from the last time. [Turning round] Work hard, mason!

The MASON. Tra la la la la!

PASQUINOT. Beautiful voice! [They disappear.]

[When they are gone, the MASON turns round, and takes off his hat: he is

STRAFOREL.]

STRAFOREL. Now for the work of reconstruction! [He sits down on the row or two of bricks.] The young man is still off on his quest for adventure and romance. Life must be giving him a splendid bath of disillusion. I can see him as he returns, his tail between his legs. Now I am working on Sylvette—she, too, will soon be cured. [He takes a letter from his pocket and puts it in the hollow of a tree-trunk. SYLVETTE appears at the back.] It's she! Now to work!

SYLVETTE. [Looking anxiously about] Not a soul. [She lays her muslin scarf on the bench to the left.] Will the letter be there to-day as usual? [She goes toward the tree.] Every day some gallant has left one for me. [She thrusts her hand into the hollow.] Ah, here is my mail! [She takes the letter, opens it and reads.] "Sylvette, heart of marble, this is the last letter you will find in this tree. Why have you not answered me?" Ah, what style! "The love that gnaws at my vitals!" Monsieur Percinet has gone forth into the great world, and he is right. I shall do as he has done. How can I possibly stay here and die of ennui? Now let him come, I am ready to fly with him! I almost love him already!

STRAFOREL. [Rising from his work, and in a voice of thunder] Here am I!

SYLVETTE. [Screaming] Help! Percinet! Man, not another step!

STRAFOREL. [Gallantly] Why this hostile attitude? I am the man whose letter you love, I am he whose words have had the honor of pleasing you, and upon whose love you just called. Come, fly with me!

SYLVETTE. [Not knowing what to do] Man!

STRAFOREL. You think I am a mason? Charming! Know, then, that I am the Marquis D'Astafiorquercita. My heart is languishing for you, I seek to color my drab existence with a few pigments from your own. I must travel—but with you. That is why I have penetrated into your garden, disguised as a mason! [He throws off his workman's clothes and hat, and appears in a dazzling costume. His wig is powdered

and his moustache bristles.]

SYLVETTE. Monsieur!

STRAFOREL. I learned your story from a man named Straforel. I felt at once a mad, unreasoning love for the victim of that unfortunate affair.

SYLVETTE. Marquis!

STRAFOREL. Don't be afraid of me. That fellow who played the trick on you—I killed him!

SYLVETTE. Killed him!

STRAFOREL. With a single blow!

SYLVETTE. Monsieur!

STRAFOREL. I understand you, you who have never been understood. You want romance, do you not? Romance at any price?

SYLVETTE. But, Marquis—

STRAFOREL. To-night we elope!

SYLVETTE. Monsieur!

STRAFOREL. We shall go away, never to return.

SYLVETTE. Monsieur!

STRAFOREL. My dream is realized. You consent! To-night! If your father objects, so much the worse for him!

SYLVETTE. Monsieur!

STRAFOREL. Let them follow us—I know how to deal with pursuers. In some far land, at last, we shall live happily in a little cottage!

SYLVETTE. But I—

STRAFOREL. For I am poor. I have nothing. We shall live on bread soaked in sweet tears!

SYLVETTE. But, I tell you—

STRAFOREL. We shall thrive on misfortune—with you I shan't care for anything else. A tent, perhaps—

SYLVETTE. A tent?

STRAFOREL. Of nothing at all—just the stars!

SYLVETTE. Oh, I—

STRAFOREL. Why, you're trembling—possibly you don't want to go so far away? Then we shall hide somewhere—

SYLVETTE. But, Monsieur, you are mistaken!

STRAFOREL. Let people say what they will!

SYLVETTE. Good Heavens!

STRAFOREL. I shall spend every moment of my time telling you how I love you!

SYLVETTE. Monsieur—

STRAFOREL. Ours shall be a long life of poetry. And I shall be furiously jealous!

SYLVETTE. Monsieur—

STRAFOREL. Are you afraid now?

SYLVETTE. Heavens, what a lesson for me!

STRAFOREL. Ha, now you look like a little boarding-school miss. Tell me, shall we fly together, or shall I go alone?

SYLVETTE. Monsieur—

STRAFOREL. I understand. I see you are strong: we shall go together. I shall throw you across my saddle. No sedan-chair— they are used only in make-believe abductions! I return soon! [He goes up-stage.]

SYLVETTE. Monsieur, let me tell you—

STRAFOREL. I must get my horse and my mantle!

SYLVETTE. [Deeply distressed] Monsieur!!

STRAFOREL. [With a sweeping gesture] We shall travel from land to land. My dream at last. I shall return and take you away, never to return!

SYLVETTE. [Gasping] Never to return!

STRAFOREL. You shall live by the side of your adored one, by the side of him who loved you before he set eyes on you. [As he is about to leave, she falls onto the bench, and he says aside] It's now time for you, Percinet! [He goes out.]

SYLVETTE. [Opening her eyes after a moment] Monsieur le marquis— No, not across the saddle, please. I couldn't do that! Please, please let me stay home. I am a little boarding-school miss! Why—he's gone! Marquis! Heavens, what an awful dream! [Another pause, then she rises.] Romance? Was it not romance that you craved not so long ago? It has come, and are you afraid? Love, stars, a cottage. Yes, I did want it—but only a little—like seasoning in a stew! This is too much—I couldn't stand it. [The sun is setting. SYLVETTE takes up her scarf, which she had left on the bench, and puts it over her head.] Who knows whether—?

[PERCINET appears. He is in rags, and his arm is in a sling. He looks ill, and can scarcely walk.]

PERCINET. [Not seeing SYLVETTE] I have had nothing to eat since yesterday—I can hardly walk. I'm not proud now! I want no more adventures. [He sits down on the wall. His hat falls from his eyes, and reveals his identity. SYLVETTE sees him.]

SYLVETTE. You?! [He rises, and stands looking at her.] What has happened to you? Can it be—?

PERCINET. [Piteously] It can!

SYLVETTE. [Wringing her hands] Heavens!

PERCINET. I resemble somewhat the prodigal son, do I not? [He totters.]

SYLVETTE. You can't stand up!

PERCINET. I am so tired.

SYLVETTE. [Looking at his arm, with a cry] Wounded!

PERCINET. Can you pity the ungrateful?

SYLVETTE. [Severely] Only fathers kill fatted calves. Still, that wounded arm?

PERCINET. Oh, I assure you it's not serious.

SYLVETTE. But what have you been doing, Monsieur Vagabond, all this while?

PERCINET. Nothing very creditable, Sylvette. [He coughs.]

SYLVETTE. You are coughing?

PERCINET. Walking the damp roads at night.

SYLVETTE. What strange clothes you have!

PERCINET. Mine were stolen, and the thieves left me these.

SYLVETTE. [Ironically] How many fortunes did you find?

PERCINET. Sylvette, please say nothing about that.

SYLVETTE. You must have scaled many a balcony?

PERCINET. [Aside] I nearly broke my neck once!

SYLVETTE. Guitar in hand! And what nocturnes and serenades you must have sung!

PERCINET. Which earned for me more than one bucket of water!

SYLVETTE. But I see you have been wounded in a real duel?

PERCINET. It came near being mortal.

SYLVETTE. And now you return to us—?

PERCINET. Thoroughly worn-out.

SYLVETTE. Yes, but you have at least found romance and poetry?

PERCINET. No—I was seeking afar what was here all the time. Don't make fun of

me: I adore you!

SYLVETTE. Even after our disillusion?

PERCINET. What difference does that make?

SYLVETTE. But our fathers played an abominable trick on us.

PERCINET. What of it? What I feel in my heart is real.

SYLVETTE. They pretended to hate each other.

PERCINET. Did we pretend that we loved?

SYLVETTE. The wall was a punch-and-judy theater—you said so yourself.

PERCINET. I did, Sylvette, but it was blasphemy. Ah, wall, you gave us a divine setting, with moonlight and stars, flowers and vines, the four winds for music, and Shakespeare for prompter! Yes, our fathers made us go through the motions, but it was Love that made us speak: it pulled the strings!

SYLVETTE. [Sighing] That's true, but we loved because we believed it was wicked!

PERCINET. And it was! Only the intention counts, and thinking we were guilty, we were!

SYLVETTE. Really?

PERCINET. Really, my dear, we were infamous. It was wrong of us to love.

SYLVETTE. [Seating herself beside him] Very wrong? [She changes her tone, as she rises and goes away.] Still, I wish the danger had been a little more real.

PERCINET. It was real, because we believed it so.

SYLVETTE. No: my abduction, like your duel, was false.

PERCINET. Was your fear false? If you were afraid then, it was as if you were really being abducted.

SYLVETTE. No, the dear remembrance is gone. All those masks and torches, the soft music, the duel; it is too cruel to think that Straforel prepared it all.

PERCINET. But who prepared the spring night? Was that Straforel? Did he also sprinkle the sky with stars? Did he plant roses, did he create the gray of evening and the blue mists of night? Did he have anything to do with the rising of that huge pink star?

SYLVETTE. No, of course—

PERCINET. Was it his doing that we were two children of twenty, on a spring night, and that we loved each other? We loved, that was the charm—all the charm!

SYLVETTE. All the—? That's true, yet—

PERCINET. A tear? Am I then—forgiven?

SYLVETTE. I have always loved you, my poor dear.

PERCINET. At last I have you again! [He takes SYLVETTE's scarf and plays with it.] What beautiful shades and lights in this gorgeous satin.

SYLVETTE. What satin?

PERCINET. Oh, nothing! Nothing!

SYLVETTE. But it's only muslin!

PERCINET. [Kneeling and kissing her hand] No, it is everything!

SYLVETTE. [Falling into his arms] See? I know now that poetry and romance are in the hearts of lovers; they have nothing to do with other things.

PERCINET. That is true, Sylvette. I have seen what ought to be poetry and romance, but it wasn't—to me!

SYLVETTE. And what was prepared for and arranged beforehand was real, though it was contrived for us by others.

PERCINET. We can weave realities on a false frame.

SYLVETTE. How foolish we were to seek elsewhere for romance, when it was our own hearts!

[STRAFOREL appears, followed by the two fathers, and shows them SYLVETTE and PERCINET in each other's arms.]

STRAFOREL. Ah!

BERGAMIN. My son! [He embraces PERCINET.]

STRAFOREL. Now do I get my money?

PASQUINOT. [To his daughter] Do you love him?

SYLVETTE. Yes.

STRAFOREL. [To BERGAMIN] Shall I have my money?

BERGAMIN. You shall.

SYLVETTE. [Trembling as she hears STRAFOREL's voice and recognizes it] But—that—voice—the Marquis D'Asta—fior—

STRAFOREL. [Bowing] —quercita. Yes, my dear Mademoiselle. 'Tis Straforel. Pardon my excessive zeal. I have at least taught you how tiresome and hollow and useless real adventures are. You might, like this young man, have had your share, but I allowed you to see them in prospect through the magic-lantern of my imagination.

PERCINET. What is this?

SYLVETTE. [Quickly] Nothing, nothing. I love you!

BERGAMIN. [Pointing to the wall] And to-morrow we shall knock down these few rows of bricks!

PASQUINOT. Yes, away with it!

STRAFOREL. No, let us finish it; it is indispensable.

SYLVETTE. [Gathering them all about her] Let us say no more about it!

Curtain

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROMANCERS: A

COMEDY IN THREE ACTS ***

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