

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

Translated and Adapted from Crispin, Rival of His Master By Alain-Rene Le Sage

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By Frank J. Morlock C 1986

Etext by Dagny

CHARACTERS

Original French Names

Mr. Touchwood	M. Oronte
Mrs. Touchwood	Mme. Oronte
Angelica	Angelica
Worthy	Valere
Mr. Richly	M. Orgon
Lucy	Lisette
Bendish	Crispin
Bellamy	La Branche

Five men, three women

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

Worthy

Ah, there you are, jackass!

Bendish

Let's speak without intruding personalities!

Worthy

You scoundrel!

Bendish

Let's leave our attributes out of this. I beg you, what are you complaining about?

Worthy

What am I complaining about, Judas! You asked me for eight days leave, and I haven't seen you for a month. Is that a way for a valet to behave?

Bendish

I beg your pardon, sir, but I serve you in the same manner as you pay me. No pay, no work. We neither have much to complain about.

Worthy

I'd like to know what you've been doing.

Bendish

I've been making my fortune.

Worthy

How's that?

Bendish

By levying a tax on those who are not skilled at poker.

Worthy

Well, you're just in time. I'm out of money and I propose to draw on your exchequer.

Bendish

Sorry, sir: we didn't have a good catch. Too many fish saw the hook.

Worthy

Never mind, Bendish. I'll forgive you. I need your help.

Bendish

How fine of you, sir.

Worthy

I'm in a scrape.

Bendish

Your creditors are after you?

Worthy

No.

Bendish

Oh, I see. The generous person of quality that cosigned your tailor's bill, has discovered that we padded it?

Worthy

It's not that either. I've fallen in love!

Bendish

Oh, no! Who is it, by the way?

Worthy

Angelica.

Bendish

Oh, I know the lady. Has a rich father—

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Worthy

Well—to—do. He owns three mansions.

Bendish

The adorable Angelica!

Worthy

And, he's got a lot of ready money.

Bendish

Ah, now I understand the extent of your passion! But, are you in with her? Does she know how much you want her?

Worthy

I've had free access to her the last eight days, and I've done my business so well that she looks on me favorably—but Lucy, her maid, told me something yesterday, that has upset me completely.

Bendish

Eh? What has this upsetting little Lucy told you?

Worthy

That I have a rival. That her father has given his word to marry her to some provincial hick who may arrive at almost any moment.

Bendish

And, who is this rival?

Worthy

That's what I don't know yet. Lucy was called away just as she was about to tell me, and I was obliged to leave without learning his name.

Bendish

Well—it looks as though we won't be the lucky owners of three stately mansions.

Worthy

Go find Lucy and talk to her for me. Find out. After that, we will make our plans.

Bendish

Leave it to me.

Worthy

I'll wait for you. (exits)

Bendish (to himself)

That I am stationed in life as a valet! Well, it's my own fault. I'm too frivolous—still, I'd be a brilliant financier. I'd have gone bankrupt at least once

(Enter Bellamy.)

Bellamy

Isn't that Bendish?

Bendish

Isn't that Bellamy?

Bellamy

It is Bellamy, or I'm a goner.

Bendish

What a lucky meeting. Let me hug you, my friend. You know, not seeing you for so long, I was afraid something had happened to you.

Bellamy

I've been in jail.

Bendish

What! What did you do?

Bellamy

One night, I was civil enough to ask a foreigner on the street for news of his own country. He didn't speak a word

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of English and thought I was trying to rob him. He yelled thief, and I was arrested.

Bendish

For how long?

Bellamy

Seven months. I'd be there still if it hadn't been for the niece of a laundress.

Bendish

Really?

Bellamy

They were terribly prejudiced against me. But the laundress was the mistress of a judge, and so my innocence was demonstrated.

Bendish

It's nice to have powerful friends.

Bellamy

This little adventure has given me a lot to think about.

Bendish

I believe you. You're no longer curious about foreign countries?

Bellamy

Not in the least. Content to stay at home forever. Anyway, I'm back in service. And, what are you doing?

Bendish

I'm an honorary criminal, like you. I work in the service of a gentleman of no means who supposes that a valet works for love, not wages. I'm not too happy with my condition.

Bellamy

Mine is all right. I work for a hick called Richly. He's a likeable young kid: he loves gambling, drinking, and fast women. An accomplished gentleman. He's saved me from a life of crime.

Bendish

Innocent life!

Bellamy

Really.

Bendish

Quite. But tell me, Bellamy, why've you come to London? Where are you going?

Bellamy

I'm going into that house.

Bendish

The Touchwood mansion?

Bellamy

His daughter's engaged to Richly.

Bendish

Angelica is betrothed to your master?

Bellamy

His father and Angelica's father are old buddies. And they arranged this marriage to suit themselves.

Bendish

It's all concluded?

Bellamy

Signed and sealed. The dowry is twenty thousand pounds in ready money. They're just waiting for Richly to come so they can settle up.

Bellamy

Well, that being the case, my master, Worthy, had better seek his fortune elsewhere.

Bellamy

What? Your master?

Bendish

He is in love with the same Angelica—while Richly—

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Bellamy

Don't worry, Richly isn't going to marry Angelica. There's a minor difficulty.

Bendish

Heh! What?

Bellamy

While his father was busy marrying him, he was busy marrying himself.

Bendish

How did it happen?

Bellamy

He loves a lady who has bestowed so many favors on him that she's in a delicate condition. Richly has to marry her.

Bendish

Well, it's a whole new ball game.

Bellamy

I've been sent to straighten things out and explain everything.

Bendish

Explain everything?

Bellamy

That's what brings me here. Old man Richly is ashamed to do it himself. Afraid they'll be mad. So he sent me. No goodbyes, Bendish. We'll see each other again.

Bendish

Wait, Bellamy, wait my boy. I've just had an idea. Tell me, is your master known to Angelica's father?

Bellamy

They've never met.

Bendish

Wow! If you're willing, there's a beautiful job to be done. But, after your spell in jail, you probably lack the nerve?

Bellamy

No, no. Me lack nerve! Never. I used to be scared of prison. Not any more. You behold a finished gentleman, Bendish. I suppose you want your master to impersonate Richly and marry the lady?

Bendish

My master? Think again! He would be a pleasant booby for a girl like Angelica. I destine her for someone better—

Bellamy

Who might that be?

Bendish

Myself, of course.

Bellamy

Well, to say the least, you've got brass.

Bendish

I'm also in love with her.

Bellamy

I bless you both.

Bendish

I will take the name Richly. I will marry Angelica.

Bellamy

If you're asking my consent, I'll give it.

Bendish

I will take the dowry.

Bellamy

Better still.

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Bendish

And I will vanish before it comes to an explanation.

Bellamy

Repeat that?

Bendish

Why?

Bellamy

You speak of vanishing with the dowry. That plan needs a small, but important correction.

Bendish

I don't see why.

Bellamy

It makes no mention of me.

Bendish

Oh! WE will vanish with the dowry. Together, my boy.

Bellamy

Oh, on that condition, I am your willing accomplice. But, where will we hide the dowry?

Bendish

In a land, far, far away.

Bellamy

The best place in the world. When do we start?

Bendish

We'll see. Tell me about Angelica's father.

Bellamy

A merchant, pure and simple. A little on the testy side.

Bendish

And his wife?

Bellamy

Still in her teens, although close to sixty—vain, and very changeable.

Bendish

Enough! All that is necessary is to—

Bellamy

Adopt the manners and clothes of my master. You know, you're really almost the same figure.

Bendish

Hum! Then, you say he's good looking?

Bellamy

Someone's coming out. Now, that's my cue to go in, and put our plans in effect.

Bendish

While you're doing that, I'll neutralize Worthy by persuading him to stay away from Angelica for a few days.

(Exit Bellamy to the house and Bendish in another direction. Enter Angelica and Lucy.)

Angelica

Oh, Lucy, since Worthy has disclosed his passion to me, I feel, I feel, as if—I feel as if—I feel if I marry Richly, I'll never be happy in my life.

Lucy

Worthy is a dangerous man.

Angelica

Woe is me. Help me, Lucy. What should I do? Tell me, I beg you.

Lucy

What advice can I give you?

Angelica

The kind of advice that comes from the interest you take in everything I do.

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Lucy

There are only two kinds of advice I can give you. One, forget Worthy. Two, rebel against your father. You're too much in love to forget Worthy, and I really can't counsel you to rebel against your father when I take his money. It's a wash, as you see.

Angelica

Oh, Lucy, you break my heart.

Lucy

Wait! Maybe there's some advice I can give you that will help you, and won't burden my conscience. I have it. Let's find your mother.

Angelica

But, what will we say to her?

Lucy

Tell her everything. Pour your heart out to her. She likes to be flattered and stroked. Flatter and stroke her. She cares for you as much as a vain thing like that can care for anyone—and she will force your papa to withdraw his promise.

Angelica

You're right, Lucy, but I'm afraid.

Lucy

Why?

Angelica

You know my mother. Her spirit is in a perpetual ferment.

Lucy

It's true, she's always of the opinion of the person who spoke to her last. Never mind. We can't afford not to make her an ally. But, I see her coming. Hide for a minute, and come back when I give you the high sign.

(Exit Angelica.)

Lucy

To be sure, Mrs. Touchwood is one of the kindest ladies in England.

Mrs. Touchwood (entering)

You're a flatterer, Lucy.

Lucy

Oh, Madame, I didn't see you! What a fright you gave me! What you overheard was the end of a conversation I was having with your daughter. I was explaining to her about this marriage. I told her that her mother is the most reasonable of mothers.

Mrs. Touchwood

You're right. I'm not like most women. I'm always dispassionate.

Lucy

Without a doubt.

Mrs. Touchwood

I don't let myself get carried away.

Lucy

Absolutely. The most understanding mother in the world. If your daughter didn't want to marry this Richly, I know you wouldn't force her.

Mrs. Touchwood

Me! Force her? Me, torture my daughter? Never. May God forbid I should ever do that to my daughter. Tell me, Lucy, does she dislike Mr. Richly?

Lucy

Oh, but—

Mrs. Touchwood

Don't hide anything from me.

Lucy

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

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Since I can't keep things from you, Madame,—yes—she abhors the marriage.

Mrs. Touchwood

And perhaps, she loves another?

Lucy

You've got it.

Mrs. Touchwood

Just like me! I would never have married her father if my colonel hadn't met an untimely death. Who is the gallant young soldier who has won her heart?

Lucy

The young boy who's been coming around lately.

Mrs. Touchwood

Who? Worthy?

Lucy

The same.

Mrs. Touchwood

That reminds me. He looked at Angelica and me yesterday with such pleading eyes. Are you sure it's my daughter he's in love with?

Lucy (signing to Angelica)

Oh, yes, Madame, he told me so himself.

Mrs. Touchwood

Well, if it's really true—

Angelica (entering hastily)

Forgive me, mother, if my feelings aren't as you would wish, but you see—

Mrs. Touchwood

I know it's impossible for a young girl to control her feelings. I know how difficult it is. I sympathize. In a word, we must get Mr. Worthy for you.

Angelica

I can't tell you how much I owe your kindness.

Lucy

It's not enough, Madame. Mr. Touchwood is a trifle opinionated. If you don't—

Mrs. Touchwood

Oh, don't worry. I can manage your father. Just watch me.

(Enter Mr. Touchwood.)

Mrs. Touchwood

You've come just in time, my dear; I have to tell you that I am no longer part of your scheme to force Angelica to marry Richly.

Mr. Touchwood

Ah! Ah! May one ask, my dear, why you've changed your mind?

Mrs. Touchwood

I've found a better husband for her. Worthy wants her. True, he isn't as well off as Richly, but he's a gentleman—and, and, we ought to overlook his poverty because of his very fine blue blood.

Lucy

Wonderful!

Mr. Touchwood

I think very highly of Mr. Worthy. I would willingly give him to Angelica, without regard to his comparative poverty, if I could do so honorably,—but it can't be done, my dear.

Mrs. Touchwood

Why not, I'd like to know?

Mr. Touchwood

Why not? Do you want us to break our word to our dear old friend Richly? You don't dislike him for some reason,

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do you?

Mrs. Touchwood

No.

Lucy

Courage. Don't weaken.

Mr. Touchwood

Well, if you don't dislike him, how can you think of putting such an affront on him? Remember, the agreement is signed and sealed, the invitations have been sent out, and we are only awaiting the arrival of the groom. The whole thing is too far advanced now to break it off, or so it seems to me.

Mrs. Touchwood

I didn't think of all that.

Lucy

Goodbye. The weathercock turns.

Mr. Touchwood

You're too reasonable, my dear, to wish to break off this marriage.

Mrs. Touchwood

Who said anything about breaking it off? Out of the question!

Lucy

She's killing me! Isn't she a woman? Isn't she a woman? Why can't she be unreasonable and contradict everything?

Mrs. Touchwood

You see, Lucy, I've done everything I can for Worthy.

Lucy

Indeed. A whole lot of good.

Mr. Touchwood

I see young Richly's valet coming.

(Enter Bellamy.)

Bellamy

Your very humble servant, sir and Madame. And to you, Miss Angelica. Hi Lucy.

Mr. Touchwood

Well, Bellamy, what's the latest news?

Bellamy

Mr. Richly, your son-in-law and my master has just come from Oxford. He's right behind me, so to speak, and I am come to prepare you.

Angelica

Oh, heavens!

Mr. Touchwood

I can't wait to see him. But, he didn't need to send you—he should have come along himself. On the terms we are, he shouldn't be so formal.

Bellamy

Oh, sir, he's a real gentleman, with exquisite manners. I say it, even though I am his valet—there isn't another gentleman like him in the entire kingdom.

Mrs. Touchwood

Is he smooth? Is he well educated?

Bellamy

Oh, completely, Madame. He was raised with the best of the nobility. My God! He's extremely sensitive.

Mr. Touchwood

And, his father isn't with him?

Bellamy

No, sir. A bad case of the gout prevents his coming.

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Mr. Touchwood

The poor gentleman.

Bellamy

Here's a letter he wrote you.

Mr. Touchwood (reading)

“To Dr. Croaker at Gravesend—”

Bellamy

Oh, that's not it, sir.

Mr. Touchwood

Brr! I wouldn't want to be his patient.

Bellamy (pulling out several letters)

I've got several letters to deliver. Let's see here. To lawyers Lawless and Crookshank in Gallows Road. That's not it either. To Messers Gourmand, Pudding Lane. Damn it! I will never find it, I think. Ah, to Mr. Touchwood. Here it is.

Mr. Touchwood

Hard to read.

Bellamy

He wrote it in a hand trembling with gout. You probably won't recognize the handwriting.

Mr. Touchwood

No, it doesn't look like his handwriting at all. Poor fellow.

Bellamy

Gout is a terrible disease. Heaven preserve us from it.

Mr. Touchwood (reading)

“I wanted to come but the gout prevents me. However, a father needn't be present at a wedding and I don't want the wedding delayed because of my illness. Above all things, it will be a comfort in my old age. I send you my son—be a father to him, and give him away properly. I know you will know how to do it. Your affectionate friend, Richly.” It makes me feel for him. But who is this young man coming? Can it be young Richly?

Bellamy

It's himself. What do you think, Madame? Doesn't he have an ingratiating bearing?

Mrs. Touchwood

He's not bad looking—that's a fact.

(Enter Bendish.)

Bendish

Bellamy.

Bellamy

Sir?

Bendish

Is this Mr. Touchwood, my illustrious father-in-law?

Bellamy

Yes. You've got the original before you.

Mr. Touchwood

Welcome, son-in-law. Give me a hug.

Bendish

My joy is too great to express. (to Mrs. Touchwood) No doubt, this is the child I am to marry?

Mr. Touchwood

No, no, my boy. That's my wife. Here's my daughter, Angelica.

Bendish

Damn it all! What a gorgeous family. I'd willingly marry one and make my mistress of the other.

Mrs. Touchwood

Oooh! What a gallant gentleman. (to Lucy) He appears to have you know what, Lucy.

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

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Lucy

And good taste, too, Madame.

Bendish

What an air, what grace, what noble pride. Madame, you are adorable. My father told me: You will see in Mrs. Touchwood a most striking beauty.

Mrs. Touchwood

Get away with you!

Bendish

He said, "I wish she were a widow. I'd be remarried in a minute."

Mrs. Touchwood

Well, I am—! Much obliged.

Mr. Touchwood

I really value your father tremendously, and I'm quite put out he couldn't come with you.

Bendish

It kills him not to be at the wedding. He had promised himself a dance with your darling wife.

Bellamy

He begs you to celebrate the wedding without delay because he is furiously impatient to have it done.

Mr. Touchwood

Everything's ready. All we have to do is pay the dowry.

Bendish

Pay the dowry? Oh, that's a good idea. Let me give Bellamy some instructions. Go to the Marquis— (low) Get the horses ready, tonight, understand? (aloud) —and tell him I kiss his hands.

Bellamy (exiting)

I fly.

Mr. Touchwood

Getting back to your father. I'm very sorry about his indisposition. But I wish you'd satisfy my curiosity—give me some news of his law suit.

Bendish

Bellamy—

Mr. Touchwood

You seem troubled—something wrong?

Bendish

Out of the question. I have forgotten to instruct Bellamy. (low) He should have told me about the law suit.

Mr. Touchwood

He'll be back. Well now, about the case—has it gone to trial?

Bendish

Yes, thank God, it's over.

Mr. Touchwood

And, did you win?

Bendish

With interest.

Mr. Touchwood

I'm delighted, I assure you.

Bendish

My father took it to heart. It almost drove him crazy.

Mr. Touchwood

My word, it must have cost him a lot of money.

Bendish

But justice cannot be bought.

Mr. Touchwood

I agree. I meant the litigation must have been costly, troublesome.

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

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Bendish

You can't conceive. He was tied up with the most unreasonable man.

Mr. Touchwood

Men? I thought his adversary was a woman?

Bendish

Yes—it was a woman. Right. But, the woman had a certain old Scotsman who advised her. This old man caused my father all sorts of trouble. But, let's talk of something else. I prefer to talk of the wedding, and the pleasure of seeing your wife.

Mr. Touchwood

Well, let's go, my boy. Come on in. I am going to send for the minister.

Bendish (giving Mrs. Touchwood his hand)

Madame.

Mrs. Touchwood (to Angelica)

You have nothing to complain of, my dear. Richly is a very worthy, delightful young man.

(Exit Bendish, Mr. Touchwood, and Mrs. Touchwood into the house.)

Angelica

Oh, lord, what's going to become of me?

Lucy

You're going to become Mrs. Richly—that's not hard to figure out.

Angelica (crying)

Oh, Lucy. You know how I feel. Show me that you care.

Lucy (crying)

Poor child.

Angelica

Are you so hard hearted as to leave me to my fate?

Lucy

You break my heart.

Angelica

Lucy, my dear Lucy.

Lucy

Say no more. I am so touched, that I'm going to give you some bad advice—and you're just crazy enough to take it.

Worthy (returning, low)

Bendish told me not to put in an appearance here for several days— because he's got a plan—but he didn't explain it to me. I can't live with this kind of tension.

Lucy

Worthy's coming.

Worthy (low)

No—I'm not just deceiving myself. It's Angelica. Beautiful Angelica. (aloud) Tell me my fate. What will happen? But what, you're both in tears.

Lucy

Oh, yes, sir. We are both in tears—we have no hope—your rival has come.

Worthy

What do I hear?

Lucy

And, he marries my lady tonight.

Worthy

Just heaven.

Lucy

At least, after the marriage, she'll live in London for a while. You can sometimes get together.

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Worthy

I'll die. But Lucy, who is this rival who has taken from me all I care about in this life?

Lucy

His name is Richly.

Worthy

Richly.

Lucy

He's from Oxford.

Worthy

I know everybody from there, and the only Richly I know is the son of Squire Richly.

Lucy

Exactly. The son of Squire Richly is your rival.

Worthy

Oh, if we have only that Richly to fear, there's nothing to worry about.

Angelica

What do you say, Mr. Worthy?

Worthy

Let's stop tormenting ourselves, charming Angelica. Young Richly has been married for at least a week.

Lucy (whistling)

Whew!

Angelica

Don't jest, Worthy. Richly is here, ready to receive my hand.

Lucy

He's this very minute closeted with ma and pa.

Worthy

Richly is one of my friends—and he wrote ma a week ago. I have his letter at home.

Angelica

What did he tell you?

Worthy

That he secretly married a lady of quality.

Lucy

Married secretly. Let us announce this little affair. It should be worth the trouble. Go, sir. Go fetch the letter, and don't waste a minute.

Worthy (exiting)

I'll be back immediately.

Lucy

And, as for us—let's not neglect to make use of this news. I'll be very surprised if we can't make good use of it. It ought, at least, to delay your marriage. I see your father coming. Run to your mother, and tell her while I work on your father.

(Exit Angelica. Enter Mr. Touchwood.)

Mr. Touchwood

Worthy just left you, Lucy?

Lucy

Yes, sir. He just told us something which I swear will surprise you.

Mr. Touchwood

And, what might that be?

Lucy

My word! Richly is a nice fellow, to want two wives, while some honest men have trouble getting one.

Mr. Touchwood

What are you talking about?

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

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Lucy

Richly is married. He has secretly married a lady of quality.

Mr. Touchwood

Good. And, that's all, Lucy?

Lucy

Nothing is more true, sir. Richly himself has written about it to Mr. Worthy, who is his friend.

Mr. Touchwood

You are telling me a big fib. And, I tell you—

Lucy

No, sir, I assure you. Worthy has gone to fetch the letter—it only remains for you to see it.

Mr. Touchwood

Another put up job. I cannot credit what you say.

Lucy

Eh, sir, why don't you believe it? Aren't people capable of almost anything these days?

Mr. Touchwood

It's true, the world's more corrupt than it was in my day—

Lucy

How do you know this Richly isn't the type of scoundrel who doesn't mind collecting more than one dowry? Now, the wife he has already married, being a woman of rank—this may have results not altogether agreeable to you.

Mr. Touchwood

What you say makes a bit of sense, and is worthy of careful consideration.

Lucy

Huh—careful thought! If I were in your place, before I'd deliver up my girl, the least I'd do is insist on an explanation.

Mr. Touchwood

Right. I see Richly's valet coming. I must sound him to the depths. Withdraw, Lucy, and leave me alone with him.

Lucy

If only this news can be confirmed.

(Exit Lucy. Enter Bellamy.)

Mr. Touchwood

Come here, Bellamy, come on. I find you have the look of an honest man.

Bellamy

Oh, sir, in all modesty, I'm even more honest than I look.

Mr. Touchwood

I'm sure of it. Listen, your master has the bearing of a true gallant.

Bellamy

By Jove, he's a fine fellow. The women are mad about him. He has a certain freedom in his bearing that charms them. By marrying him, his father assures the tranquility of at least thirty households.

Mr. Touchwood

In that case, it doesn't surprise me that he's taken in a certain lady of quality.

Bellamy

What are you talking about, sir?

Mr. Touchwood

It's necessary, my friend, for you to tell me the truth. I know everything. I know that Richly is married.

Bellamy

Ouf!

Mr. Touchwood

You look upset. I see I was told the truth. You are a swindler, too.

Bellamy

I, sir?

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Mr. Touchwood

Yes, you—gallows—bird! Your whole plan has been discovered to me, and I am going to have you punished as an accomplice to a criminal plan.

Bellamy

What criminal plan? May I die if I know what you are talking about.

Mr. Touchwood

Go ahead, feign innocence, blockhead—but if you don't quickly confess everything to me, I'm going to have the law on you!

Bellamy

Do what you please, sir. I have nothing to confess to you. I don't know what your complaint is against me.

Mr. Touchwood

You won't talk, eh? Hey, someone—fetch a policeman.

Bellamy

Wait, sir—no need for a lot of trouble. Innocent, though I am, you are taking a tone which makes it hard for me to prove it. Calmly, now. Who told you my master is married?

Mr. Touchwood

Who? He has written so himself, to his friend, Worthy.

Bellamy

To Worthy, you say?

Mr. Touchwood

To Worthy. What do you say to that?

Bellamy

Nothing. God, it's an excellent trick. So, Mr. Worthy, your trick takes.

Mr. Touchwood

What—what do you mean?

Bellamy

They told us that sooner or later, we'd be faced with something like this.

Mr. Touchwood

I don't see your point.

Bellamy

You're going to see it, you're going to see it. First of all, this Mr. Worthy loves your daughter. I will lay a bet.

Mr. Touchwood

I am well aware of that.

Bellamy

Lucy is in his interests. She is in all his plans. I am going to venture, she is the one who told you that lie?

Mr. Touchwood

She told me, yes.

Bellamy

In the debacle caused by the arrival of my master, what could they do? Simple. They say Mr. Richly is married. Worthy himself presents the supposed letter that he says he received from my master—and only to prevent or delay the marriage.

Mr. Touchwood

What you say is very plausible.

Bellamy

And, while you are engaged in this brouhaha, Lucy fortifies the spirit of her mistress—and will make her do something wild—after which you will HAVE TO marry her to Mr. Worthy.

Mr. Touchwood

Whew! It's likely enough to happen as you say.

Bellamy

But, by Jove, the deceivers are deceived. Mr. Touchwood is a man who can think, and knows how to play their games.

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

Mr. Touchwood

Right, right.

Bellamy

You know all these tricks that a lover employs to beat his rivals out.

Mr. Touchwood

And, I say—I can see quite plainly it's a trick. Let's admire Worthy's trick. He says he's an intimate friend of Richly's—and I'm going to bet they don't even know each other.

Bellamy

Without a doubt! Whew! Sir, you are insightful. Nothing escapes you.

Mr. Touchwood

I'm seldom deceived in my deductions. I see your master coming. I want to joke with him over his supposed marriage. Ha, ha, ha.

Bellamy

Ha, ha, ha—he, he, he.

(Enter Bendish.)

Mr. Touchwood

You'll never guess, son-in-law, what they're saying of you. Oh, is it funny! They warn me—warn me, as if it were a certainty—that you are married. They say you've secretly married a woman from Oxford. Ha, ha, ha—don't you find that funny?

Bellamy (making signs to Bendish)

Really, that's hilarious, ha, ha, ha.

Mr. Touchwood

Somebody else would be stupid enough to believe it. Not me!

Bellamy

Mr. Touchwood is so deep.

Bendish

I would like to know who the author is of such a ridiculous slander!

Bellamy

Mr. Touchwood says it's a gentleman called Worthy.

Bendish

Worth—who is he?

Bellamy (low to Touchwood)

You see, sir, he doesn't know him. (aloud to Bendish) He's your intimate friend, right?

Bendish

Oh, I know who he is. He's my rival. He ought to give up, but he prefers to dream on of sleeping with your daughter. His creditors ardently wish him married.

Mr. Touchwood

They'll have to wait, truly, they'll have to wait.

Bellamy

He isn't stupid, this Worthy, he isn't stupid.

Mr. Touchwood

And I am not dumb either. No, by Jove, I'm not. And to show him, I'm going right now to my attorney. But, before I go—I promised your father to give you twenty thousand pounds cash—but if you like, I'll give you instead a house I own on this very street worth thirty thousand.

Bendish

I'm always a sharp bargainer—but in this case, I prefer the cash.

Bellamy

Money's portable.

Mr. Touchwood

As you like.

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

Bendish

Yes. It's easier to put in a bag. I want to buy some land in Oxford.

Bellamy

If it's the property I'm thinking about, you'll love it there.

Bendish

I can buy it for fifteen and in five years, I'll sell it for forty.

Bellamy

At least, at least. Hmm. Without speaking of the rest, it has two lakes from which they take out a big catch of fish.

Mr. Touchwood

Well, don't let such a good thing go by. Listen, I have fifty thousand pounds I've been saving to buy a country estate from a nabob who's recently gone bankrupt. Let me give you that to invest—

Bendish

What beneficence! I'll never forget you. My heart will forever—I can't express my gratitude.

Bellamy

Mr. Touchwood is a paragon of fathers-in-law.

Mr. Touchwood

I am going to fetch this money. But, before I go, I must have a word with my wife.

Bendish

Worthy's creditors can go hang.

Mr. Touchwood

Yes, let them hang. I want you to marry Angelica within the hour.

Bendish

Ah, what a joke that will be.

Bellamy

Yes, it will be very funny.

(Exit Touchwood.)

Bendish

Apparently, my master has had an explanation with Angelica and he knows Worthy.

Bellamy

So well that they write to each other, as you see. But, thanks to my efforts, Mr. Touchwood is prejudiced against Worthy, and I hope we can get our hands on the dowry before he is disabused.

Bendish

Oh, heaven.

Bellamy

What's wrong, Bendish?

Bendish

My master is coming here.

Bellamy

Goddamn rotten luck—infuriating.

(Enter Worthy, at a distance, with a letter in his hand.)

Worthy

I'm going to take this letter to Mr. Touchwood. (seeing Bendish, but not recognizing him) But, I see a man. Is it Richly? Wait a minute— I'd better be sure. Heavens! It's Bendish.

Bendish

It's me. What the devil are you doing here? Didn't I forbid you to come to this house? You're going to ruin everything I've accomplished for you.

Worthy

It's no longer necessary to employ any stratagem for me, my dear Bendish.

Bendish

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

Why?

Worthy

I know the name of my rival. He's called Richly. I have nothing to fear from him. He's married.

Bendish

Richly is married? (showing Bellamy) Wait a sec, sir—here's his valet, whom I've enlisted in your cause. He is going to tell you some news.

Worthy

Is it possible that Richly has written me something untrue? But, why would he write me in these terms? (reading) “You know, my dear friend, I was married, here in Oxford a few days ago. I secretly married a lady of quality. Soon, I am coming to London, where I intend to give you a viva voce account. Richly.”

Bellamy

Ah, sir, now I understand. When my master wrote you this letter, he regarded himself as almost married—you understand he had received the last favor from the lady—but Old Richly, instead of approving the match, prevented it.

Worthy

Richly really isn't married?

Bellamy

Right!

Bendish

He isn't married.

Worthy

My dear friends, I beg your help. Bendish, what plan have you formed? I see you don't want to tell me yet. But, don't leave me in all this anxiety. I can't bear it. Why this disguise? What do you plan to do for me?

Bendish

Your friend and rival is not yet in London. In fact, he won't get here for two days. In the mean time, I plan to make Mr. Touchwood rue the day he ever made this engagement.

Worthy

How?

Bendish

By pretending to be Richly. I've already behaved like a perfect idiot. I talk and act foolishly. Both mother and father are disgusted. You know what Mrs. Touchwood is like—she eats up flattery. Well, I've said some things to her that wouldn't flatter a whale.

Worthy

Really?

Bendish

Really. I do and say all kinds of stupid things—and if all goes well, they'll soon throw me out, and marry Angelica to you.

Worthy

And Lucy, is she in it, too?

Bendish

Yes, sir—she's making music with us.

Worthy

Oh, Bendish, I owe you everything.

Bendish (showing Bellamy)

Ask this fellow here, if I'm playing my part to the hilt?

Bellamy

Oh, sir, you've got one smart valet. He's the biggest cheat in London. He orchestrates the whole thing. But, truthfully, I don't play a bad second. If our little game succeeds you'll owe it as much to me as to him.

Worthy

You can both count on my remembering this—I promise you.

Bendish

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

Never mind the promise. I know you'll never forget us. But think that, if you are seen with us, all will be lost. Get out of here, and don't come back today.

Worthy

I'm going. Goodbye, my friends. I rest in your hands.

Bendish

Rest easy, sir. Now, leave quickly. Leave your fate to us.

Worthy

Remember that—my fate—

Bendish

No more talk.

Worthy

—depends on you.

Bendish (pushing him off)

Get out of here, right now.

(Exit Worthy.)

Bellamy

Finally, he's gone.

Bendish

I can breathe again.

Bellamy

We've had a narrow escape. I would have died if Mr. Touchwood had surprised us with your master.

Bendish

Me, too. But, now we have nothing to fear. We can be certain of success. Now, as to the escape route. Have you secured the horses?

Bellamy

Yes.

Bendish

Great! I suggest we take the Dover road.

Bellamy (distracted)

The Dover road. Very good. Well thought out. My idea exactly.

Bendish

What are you looking at with so much concentration?

Bellamy

I am looking—yes—no—hell and damnation—is it him?

Bendish

Is it who?

Bellamy

Uh—oh—it looks exactly like him.

Bendish

Like who?

Bellamy

Bendish, my poor Bendish—it's old man Richly.

Bendish

Richly's father?

Bellamy

Himself.

Bendish

Cursed old man.

Bellamy

I believe that all the devils in hell are against us.

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

Bendish

He's coming here. If he gets into Touchwood's house, the game is over.

Bellamy

We've got to prevent him if possible. Go wait in the park. Now what I fear most is that Touchwood may put in an appearance while I'm bamboozling Richly.

(Enter Richly.)

Richly

I don't know what kind of reception I'm going to get from Mr. and Mrs. Touchwood.

Bellamy

You aren't yet there. Your servant, Mr. Richly.

Richly

Oh, I didn't see you, Bellamy.

Bellamy

Well, this is a surprise. What are you doing in London?

Richly

I left Oxford a little after you, because, after thinking about it, it seemed better that I speak for myself. It's pretty shameful to withdraw my solemn word through the mouth of a valet.

Bellamy

I see you really have a delicate sense of honor. And so, you intend to deliver this message to Mr. and Mrs. Touchwood?

Richly

That's my intention.

Bellamy

Thank heaven for sending me here in time to prevent you from doing it.

Richly

What! You've already seen them, Bellamy?

Bellamy

Oh—yes—have I seen them! I just left them. Mrs. Touchwood is in a horrible rage with you.

Richly

Against me?

Bellamy

Against you. "Oh, what," she said, "Mr. Richly has broken his word to us. Who would've believed it. My daughter is beside herself."

Richly

What wrong can it do her daughter?

Bellamy

That's what I told her. But what woman in a rage listens to reason? She doesn't believe for a minute that your son has already married a girl from Oxford. She thinks you decided you could make a better match.

Richly

This is awful. How can she imagine I would do such a thing?

Bellamy

She's out of her head. She rolls her eyes—she doesn't recognize anybody. She took me by the throat, and I had quite a time freeing myself from her claws.

Richly

And her husband?

Bellamy

Oh, as for Mr. Touchwood, I found him moderation itself. He only hit me twice.

Richly

You astonish me, Bellamy. How can they act so wild? You certainly cannot have explained all the circumstances.

Bellamy

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

I beg pardon, sir. I told them that your son had already celebrated his nuptials before the marriage ceremony, and that you consented only to avoid a law suit.

Richly

And that didn't calm them?

Bellamy

Oh, it calmed them. They became murderously calm. If you'll take my advice, you'll return to Oxford as fast as you can.

Richly

No, Bellamy, I wish to see them and explain things to them.

Bellamy

I'm not going to let you do it. I won't permit you to enter and be mutilated. If you absolutely insist on speaking to them, wait at least, until they've had time to cool off.

Richly

That makes sense.

Bellamy

Put off your visit until tomorrow. They will be in a better frame of mind to receive you.

Richly

Right—they'll be less violent. Let's go—I am going to take your advice.

Bellamy

No, sir, do what you please. You are the master.

Richly

No, no—come Bellamy. I will see them tomorrow.

(Exit Richly.)

Bellamy

I'll be right along. (low) Right after I see Bendish. We are at the very crisis of all our problems. I have a little scruple on the subject of the dowry. It irritates me to share with Bendish. After all, Angelica was supposed to marry my master—so why should Bendish have any of it? How can I cheat Bendish out of it? Suppose I convince him to spend the night with Angelica? A wife for one night only—he's attracted to her, and he's nutty enough to follow my advice. While he's amusing himself, I will be off with what really counts—money. But no—it's a bad idea. No use getting in a brouhaha with someone as sly as myself. Someday he'd have his revenge. Besides, it would be against the law—the law of thieves. Our laws are more exacting than those of honest men.—Here comes Touchwood, going to see his solicitor.

(Enter Mr. Touchwood, accompanied by Lucy.)

Bellamy (leaving)

What a satisfaction, to have gotten Mr. Richly out of the way.

(Exit Bellamy.)

Lucy

And I repeat, sir, Worthy is an honest man, and you ought—

Mr. Touchwood

You are not too clever, Lucy. I know you're in Worthy's interest, and I'm angry with you for having invented this pretended marriage to divide me from Richly.

Lucy

What! Sir, do you imagine that I—

Mr. Touchwood

No, Lucy. I don't imagine. I'm easy to deceive. I'm the easiest fellow in the world. Go, Lucy. Tell Worthy that he will never marry my daughter—and he can tell his creditors that, too.

Lucy

Listen, what is all this about? There's something going on that's beyond me.

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

(Exit Mr. Touchwood and enter Worthy from a different direction.)

Worth Despite what Bendish told me, I can't wait quietly to see how his trick will work. After all, he didn't explain why it's so important that I stay away. How my being here will spoil things, I can't figure out.

Lucy

Ah, sir.

Worthy

Well, Lucy?

Lucy

You've been awfully slow. Where's that letter?

Worthy (taking the letter from his pocket and showing it to her)

Here it is. But it will be useless to us now. Tell me, Lucy, how's the game going?

Lucy

What game?

Worthy

The game that Bendish has devised.

Lucy

Bendish—who the devil is Bendish?

Worthy

Why—my valet.

Lucy

I don't know him.

Worthy

This is pushing the dissimulation too far, Lucy. Bendish told me you were in on it.

Lucy

Sir, I don't know what you're talking about.

Worthy

Oh, no. This is too much. I lose patience. I am in despair.

(Enter Mrs. Touchwood and Angelica.)

Mrs. Touchwood

Well, I'm glad to find you, Worthy. Really! A nice young man like you, to forge letters.

Worthy

Forge? Me? Who can have told you such a lie?

Lucy

Oh, ma'am, Mr. Worthy isn't a forger. He's deceived in this affair. (seeing Mr. Touchwood) But, here is Mr. Touchwood, returning with Old Richly. Now we're going to find out the truth.

(Enter Mr. Touchwood and Richly.)

Mr. Touchwood

There's some kind of skullduggery involved here, Mr. Richly.

Richly

We've got to get to the bottom of it!

Mr. Touchwood (to his wife)

Madame, I've just met Mr. Richly while going to my solicitor. He comes, he says to London, to withdraw his promise. Young Richly is actually married.

Angelica

What do I hear?

Richly

Unfortunately, it's true, Madame,—and when you know all the circumstances, you will forgive—

Mr. Touchwood (to his wife)

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

Mr. Richly was forced to consent, but what I don't understand is that he swears his son is still at Oxford.

Richly

Positively.

Mrs. Touchwood

Well, we've got a young rascal here who says he's your son.

Richly

An imposter!

Mr. Touchwood

And Bellamy, the same valet who was here with you two weeks ago, calls him his master—

Richly

Bellamy, you say? Ah! The gallows-bird! Now I understand why he prevented me from seeing you. He told me you were both in an uncontrollable rage with me, and that he was mistreated here.

Mrs. Touchwood

The lair!

Lucy

I'm beginning to see the light.

Worthy

So, the little traitor is playing games with me!

Mr. Touchwood (seeing Bellamy and Bendish)

We're going to find out soon enough. Here they both come.

(Enter Bellamy and Bendish.)

Bendish

Well! Mr. Touchwood, everything is in readiness—our marriage— (seeing Richly and Worthy) Ouf! What do I see?

Bellamy

Yipes, all is discovered. Run for it!

(Bellamy and Bendish run, but Worthy catches them both.)

Worthy

Oh, no, you don't escape, you pirates, and you will be punished as you deserve.

(Mr. Touchwood and Richly grab Bellamy.)

Mr. Touchwood

Ah! Ah! We've got you, you cheats.

Richly (to Bellamy)

Tell us, who is the scalawag you've been passing off as my son?

Worthy

It's my valet—Bendish.

Mrs. Touchwood

A valet! By the lord! A valet!

Worthy

A false creature, who made me think he was in my interests, only to deceive me, using the dirtiest of dirty tricks.

Bendish

Easy, sir, easy. Don't judge simply by appearances.

Richly

And you, asshole—what did you do with the money I gave you?

Bellamy

Gone, sir, gone—but if you please, don't condemn people without giving them a chance to speak.

Richly

What! You pretend you're not a world class cheat?

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

Bellamy (crying)

I am a cheat! Very well, see the results of serving you too loyally.

Worthy (to Bendish)

You don't agree either, that you're a cheat and a swindler?

Bendish

Cheat! Swindler! What the devil, sir, you use words that I can't agree with at all.

Worthy

We're wrong to suspect you of disloyalty—right, traitors?

Mr. Touchwood

What have you to say to justify yourselves, wretches?

Bellamy

Wait, Bendish is going to explain everything.

Bendish

In two words, Bellamy will clear up the whole thing.

Bellamy

Say something, Bendish. Make them see we are innocent.

Bendish

Say something yourself, Bellamy. You will soon straighten them out.

Bellamy

No, no—you are better at disentangling things.

Bendish

Well, I'm going to explain everything just as it is. I took the name Richly in order to prejudice Mr. and Mrs. Touchwood against him because of my ridiculous behaviour. Unfortunately, my manners, which were utterly deplorable, were somehow overlooked, and to tell the truth, found agreeable. That's really not my fault.

Richly

Now, if we hadn't stopped you, you'd have gone through with the game, and actually married my daughter—right?

Bendish

No, sir. We were coming here to tell you everything. Ask Bellamy.

Worthy

Not good enough! While Richly was married, there was no need to impersonate him.

Bendish (falling on his knees)

To tell the truth, gentlemen, while we are not quite innocent, be gracious enough to pardon us. We implore you.

Bellamy

Yes, we ask your clemency.

Bendish

Frankly, the dowry tempted us. We're used to cheating people. Forgive us. It was merely a matter of habit getting the best of us.

Mr. Touchwood

No, no. Your audacity has to be punished.

Bellamy

Oh, sir. We beg you, by the beautiful eyes of Mrs. Touchwood.

Bendish

By the tenderness you should feel for everyone—because you have such a charming wife and daughter.

Mrs. Touchwood

There pretty fellows awake my pity. I don't know why, but I like them. Pardon them.

Lucy

What smooth, clever cheats they are.

Richly

You're very lucky, gallows-birds, that Mrs. Touchwood intercedes for you.

Mr. Touchwood

SCENE: The street before Mr. Touchwood's house.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

I really want to punish you for the good of society—but since my wife will have it so—forget the past. So today, I give my daughter to Worthy. As for you two, I pardon you, and if you will promise to improve in the future, I will make your fortune.

Bendish

Oh, sir, we promise you, we'll reform.

Bellamy

Yes, sir. First thing. We are mortified not to succeed in our little scheme. So disgraced that we will renounce all cheating forever.

Mr. Touchwood

That's the spirit. But, it's necessary to insure your good behaviour. I'll set you up in business.

Bellamy

Thank you, sir, with all my heart.

Bendish

I'll never forget you.

Mr. Touchwood

As for you, Bendish, I'm going to marry you to the daughter of a friend of mine, a rich bureaucrat.

Bendish

I will try to merit what you have done for me.

Mr. Touchwood

Let's not stay outside any longer. Come on in. I hope that Mr. Richly will honor us with his presence at my daughter's wedding.

Richly

I am going to dance with Mrs. Touchwood.

(All go into the house. The curtain is about to go down, and hesitates as Angelica enters, weeping, followed by Lucy.)

Angelica

Oh, Lucy, since Bendish has disclosed his passion for me, I feel as if—I feel as if—I feel if I marry Worthy I'll never be happy in my life.

Lucy

Miss Touchwood! What are you saying? You can't be in love with a valet?

Angelica

I can. I am. Woe is me. Help me, Lucy. What should I do? Tell me, I beg you.

Lucy

The only thing I can think of is to talk to your mother. Like mother, like daughter.

CURTAIN

*** Translator's Note:

LE SAGE'S play ends here. I could not resist adding the remaining speeches when Angelica reenters until the final curtain.

FJM