

# **The Spirit of Contradiction**

Riviere Dufresny



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# The Spirit of Contradiction

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**translated by Frank J. Morlock**

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THE SPIRIT OF CONTRADICTION  
BY DUFRESNY  
Translated and adapted  
By Frank J. Morlock

Characters	French names
Mr. Townly	M. Oronte
Mrs. Townly	Mme. Oronte
Lucas, the gardener	Lucas
Angelica	Angelique
Edward Richly	Valere
Mr. Nelson	M. Thibaudois
Lawyer	Notary
Lackey	Lackey

Six men, two women

The scene is a garden before Mr. Townly's house in London. Lucas, the gardener enters in a rage.

**Lucas:**

To hell with that bitch and her contradictory nature!

**Townly:**

There, there, Lucas, softly.

**Lucas:**

No, sir. I can no longer put up with your wife's temperament.

**Townly:**

You have to forgive her, because the spirit of contradiction is natural to her.

**Lucas:**

When she contradicts you like crazy,—you, her husband—that's natural, huh? Well, maybe. But it isn't natural that she should contradict my garden.

**Townly:**

Patience, Lucas, patience.

**Lucas:**

To be perfectly frank I don't like being gardener here—or anywhere there are women. A woman in a garden

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causes more damage than a million hedgehogs.

**Townly:**

You're right and my wife is in the wrong.

**Lucas:**

Everything I've planted is torn up. She's replanted all the weeds I tore out when I was grafting. She said they're wildflowers. Then when I planted the cabbages she said she now wants lettuces. Nothing is done by her order that doesn't reverse something I've done. Yesterday she half buried my prunes under melons. I believe, God pardon me! that it would be better for me to plant watermelons in the grape arbor.

**Townly:**

She's unreasonable, but let's forget about that, Lucas. Let's talk about marrying my daughter. I need your advice about that matter.

**Lucas:**

I haven't got an idea in my head because I've been fighting with Madam. That puts me in an uncultivated state—me and my garden. And besides, she's just discharged me.

**Townly:**

Don't worry about it. Never mind. I'll take care of you.

**Lucas:**

How are you going to take care of me against her—when you can't take care of yourself? Hey! did I ever tell you that you're too easy with her? As soon as she says yes or no, you say the same.

**Townly:**

What do you want, Lucas? I love my wife. She has no other pleasure than to do exactly the opposite of what I want. So I provide her with that small satisfaction.

**Lucas:**

You do that if that's what you like. But don't worry, her humour is too settled for it to give her any satisfaction. So much for that, sir. As to your daughter, I'll be what help I can—but what do you intend to do?

**Townly:**

Well, you see I've got to get my wife to agree—

**Lucas:**

Well, it's not up to me. I've tried to revive your spirit, but you won't do anything against her.

**Townly:**

Look, you're more imagination than I do. And more sense than philosophers—who haven't any, really.

**Lucas:**

Wait, sir. There are peasants who are sharp about acquiring money—but my philosophy is to govern the world like a careful gardener. You for example, want to marry your daughter but you don't know to whom. But me, I've seen it all in my garden. As I tell Madam, trees benefit from the sun; plants from the shade. So you see if your daughter is ready to benefit from marriage, your wife will put her in a convent.

**Townly:**

You've said it exactly. If my daughter wishes to get married she'd better not show it.

**Lucas:**

Madam has already tried to worm it out of me. "But Lucas," she said to me, "what do you think of this marriage?" "I think nothing, Madam." "But my daughter, for her part—" "Nothing." "But my husband, for his part—" Silence. "And because they know I can't breathe when I'm contradicted, they hide it from me. But it won't work. And I have tricks for figuring out when I'm being contradicted. It's a blind alley." What a woman. Very well. Leave it to me to put everything right. She's coming.

**Townly:**

I will wait for you in the arbor.

(Exit Townly)

**Lucas:**

I'd be very much put out to leave the employ of that bourgeois. His bourgeois money shines forth more splendidly than the money of noblemen who have a great deal more.

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**Mrs. Townly:** (entering)

Have you just put yourself under the protection of my husband? He can tell me to keep you, but I am not going to obey him. Come quickly, give me the keys and then I will give you your wages.

**Lucas:** (in a whining tone)

I am very upset about losing my situation with you.

(Then roaring)

Ha! Ha! Ha!

**Mrs. Townly:**

You are laughing, eh?

**Lucas:** (crying)

It overwhelms me.

(Roaring)

Ha, ha, ha!

**Mrs. Townly:**

What are you getting at?

**Lucas:**

Nothing, nothing, ha, ha, ha.

(Sadly)

Here, Madam, I am giving you the keys.

**Mrs. Townly:**

I know why you're laughing.

**Lucas:**

Ha, ha, ha, ha. I can't hold myself in. How nice to be thrown out. I'm not afraid of you. Ha, ha. I laugh like a merry go round at what you have done. Ha, ha, ha. Quite frankly, this is something that I expected for a long time from your difficult temperament and I hope you are inexorable. I have said to myself, if Madam sees that I want to take my leave, she won't hear of it. If I ask for my wages, she'll let me fish for them rather than be of my opinion. Oh, it's much better if I anger her so she will throw me out.

**Mrs. Townly:**

What! Who says I'm throwing you out?

**Lucas:**

I have quarrelled with you, ha, ha, ha. I'm giving you back your keys willingly enough.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Oh, I see. To get even you have decided to leave me without a gardener.

**Lucas:**

That's precisely what I'm going to do.

**Mrs. Townly:**

You can go when I have another.

**Lucas:**

You can have three right away.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Stay at least until tomorrow.

**Lucas:**

Tomorrow you'll no longer be in the mood to throw me out. I want to quit today.

**Mrs. Townly:**

No! It won't be said that I am your dupe. You wish to leave me and I do not wish you to leave.

**Lucas:**

One cannot keep people against their will. And you are of such a disposition.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Listen! Is my disposition really so horrible?

**Lucas:**

More than I care to suffer.

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**Mrs. Townly:**

At bottom, I'm really no good?

**Lucas:**

To be fair; I know that it isn't from malice that you torment the whole world—but your will is naturally contrary and never agrees with the will of any other person.

**Mrs. Townly:**

You hold a strange opinion of me—for of all the women in the world, there isn't one who contradicts less than I do.

**Lucas:**

There's nobody like you, it's true.

**Mrs. Townly:**

I never contradict except for good reason. But I don't like being contradicted. For example, I'm angry with you for your obstinacy. Why do you obstinately hide from me that which I wish to know? Don't I know that you are the advisor, the oracle of my husband? Without a doubt he has taken you into his confidence in the plan he has for Angelica.

**Lucas:**

Hey! He did speak to me about that.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Ha! Tell me about it.

**Lucas:**

I considered the matter of Miss Angelica very thoroughly.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Yes.

**Lucas:**

I know what I would tell myself about that matter.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Well, Lucas?

**Lucas:**

But my thoughts, your husband's thoughts, your daughter's thoughts—I'm not going to tell you. Not even if you cry.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Lucas, I beg you, tell me.

**Lucas:**

You're not going to find out a thing. I see you coming. You're always trying to find out the yes and the no. I will marry her. I will not marry her. What did he say? What did she say? and all that just so you can see the road others are taking so you can cross them.

**Mrs. Townly:**

On the contrary, I am always going the right way, and each of you turns away from me from malice. And in a word I know they have made some plan contrary to mine. But I see my daughter coming and I must talk to her again. Halloo, Angelica, halloo. Come here for a minute.

**Lucas:** (exiting)

I am going to see Mr. Townly in the arbor.

**Angelica:** (entering)

What do you want me for, mother?

**Mrs. Townly:**

To speak to you again, daughter.

**Angelica:**

I'm always ready to listen to you.

**Mrs. Townly:**

I can complain about you every way because you are a dissimulator, while I am good, and reasonable. Since I have to dispose of you one way or another I want to consult your inclinations. Speak sincerely for once in your

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life. Do you want to marry or not?

**Angelica:**

I've already told you mother, I am duty bound not to have any will in this matter.

**Mrs. Townly:**

But you do nevertheless—admit it. I have no end other than your satisfaction. Open your heart to me; speak naturally. You think that marriage can make a girl happy?

**Angelica:**

I see some wives who praise their situation.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Ah, now I begin to understand.

**Angelica:**

But I see others who complain.

**Mrs. Townly:**

I don't understand you. Speak to me a little. You've seen this newlywed who goes from door to door boasting about her good luck. Do you hear her with pleasure?

**Angelica:**

Yes, indeed, mother.

**Mrs. Townly:**

You wish then, to be married?

**Angelica:**

Not at all. For this same woman the other day afflicted by her complaints the same assembly that she had recently regaled the day before with praises of her husband.

**Mrs. Townly:**

So you mean you're afraid to take the risk of getting married?

**Angelica:**

I didn't say that, mother.

**Mrs. Townly:**

What are you saying? Either you think marriage is good or bad—you long for it or you dread it.

**Angelica:**

I don't long for it and I don't dread it. I've only voiced some simple reflections without taking one side or the other. The pros and cons seem pretty well balanced to me. That's what has suspended my choice up to now.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Your indecision begins to make me impatient. You have too much character to remain in a situation so indolent.

**Angelica:**

That's the situation a young girl ought to remain in until her mother can decide for her without difficulty.

**Mrs. Townly:**

But if I decided to marry you?

**Angelica:**

My reasons for marrying would become stronger for the reason that my duty would make me forget all the contrary arguments.

**Mrs. Townly:**

And if I decide to keep you single.

**Angelica:**

Then the reasons against marriage would appear to me to be the best.

**Mrs. Townly:**

What talk, what a tractable spirit. I cannot get it out of you. What? You won't give me the pleasure of knowing your inclination.

**Angelica:**

My inclination is to follow yours.

**Mrs. Townly:**

She won't give up her opinion.

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**Angelica:**

I will obey you to the death.

**Mrs. Townly:**

What obstinacy, what an opinionated—

**Angelica:**

It's not obstinacy.

**Mrs. Townly:**

What, you contradict me without stopping?

**Angelica:**

To wish what you wish is to contradict you?

**Mrs. Townly:**

Yes, yes, yes, because I want you to express your will and you won't do it.

**Angelica:**

But Mom!

**Mrs. Townly:**

You make me beside myself. Shut up. They will all say I'm wrong again. Now it's you—yes, it's your spirit, one can call it that indeed—a spirit of contradiction. I don't know how I can live with you. A daughter like this is a real domestic calamity. I want to get rid of you for sure. Yes, miss—I will marry you off today. The two candidates are Edward Richly on one side and Mr. Nelson on the other. I will not give you the honor, I will not give you the choice. You will take the one I choose. I will speak to your father one more time. If his ideas are reasonable, I will agree. If not, no.

(Exit Mrs. Townly in a rage)

**Angelica:** (sighing)

What violence is necessary to turn me into a dissimulator with all the world. I am naturally sincere. But where my mother is concerned I don't dare confide in any one if I'm in a situation where I can see what's happening.

(Enter Mr. Edward Richly)

**Edward:**

Here I am again young lady, and I've resolved not to return to Oxford without having first had an explanation with you. I swear to you your manners make me beside myself. I am furious, worse, I'm no longer in possession of myself. When I think that since the last time I came here neither my love, nor my respect, nor my prayers, nor my reproaches, have succeeded in getting one word out of you. (pause) I can't make any sense out of it. When I spoke to you of the most violent passion that ever was, you listened to me with a tranquility, a languor that was incomprehensible. For women react either with love or scorn or anger to such emotions. Just Heavens, what am I to think of a silence so obstinate?

**Angelica:**

Only that I am prudent and nothing more.

**Edward:**

Do you approve of my love or forbid it?

**Angelica:**

I can't say.

**Edward:**

Always the same indifferent tone.

**Angelica:**

You haven't been able to tell whether I have any inclination for you, right?

**Edward:**

That's what upsets me.

**Angelica:**

Nor have you seen any aversion?

**Edward:**

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No indeed. But that's not satisfactory.

**Angelica:**

It satisfies me. For I have need to be impenetrable to your curiosity. Didn't I tell you that I have formed a project to secure my freedom, and that to implement this project, it is necessary that my mother be unable to tell whether I love you or someone else? My father must also be kept from the truth—and therefore you also must be kept in the dark—for if you know it, my father, my mother, and any one who sees you will be well informed.

**Edward:**

You're trying to tell me I'm indiscreet?

**Angelica:**

No, but your vivacity takes the place of indiscretion.

**Edward:**

I know how to control my temperament. For example, from the moment I saw you I felt possessed to such a degree that you wouldn't think it possible. And I swear to you that a word of enlightenment—one little word from you, will make me just as tranquil as you are.

**Angelica:**

But suppose the word is that I have no intention of marrying you?

**Edward:**

Ah, so that is what you dare to tell me? How can I listen to such infamy? Just Heaven!

**Angelica:**

You're not tranquil: would you feel better if I promised never to marry anyone but you?

**Edward:**

If you promised me that—ah! I'd die of delight. Yes, my joy would be so great—

**Angelica:**

So that you would publish that, too. See how your transports of joy or despair give away everything! They would divulge my secret, and from them my mother would know what I want to do: then she would cross me furiously. Thus I find that I am wise to keep you ignorant of my true intentions.

**Edward:**

I can't be ignorant of them, ingrate. They are so plain. So I tell you, I've just learned you will be betrothed to Mr. Nelson, today.

**Angelica:**

That is possibly true.

**Edward:**

And that's why I came here.

**Angelica:**

Well go away, then.

**Edward:**

And that is what has made me understand all your politics. I see you've managed me up to this point because I am friends with your mother. You fear that, irritated by your refusal, I will prevent this marriage.

**Angelica:**

Prevent this marriage! I believe you are a very gallant man to prevent me from securing my advantage.

**Edward:**

No, cruel woman, no. Don't worry. If you are happy with another, I will die, but I will not prevent you.

**Angelica:**

You are ruining my plans already. But I do believe that if I had no inclination for you, you wouldn't try to force my feelings. Do what I want you to do. Don't see either my father or my mother today. I forbid you to appear here. So go, I beg you.

**Edward:**

I obey you blindly, but if you betray me—

**Angelica:**

I cannot betray you, because I've promised you nothing.

**Edward:**

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If you betray me you are the most cruel, the most—

**Angelica:**

Oh, if you are going to berate me, wait till I've done something. And I will do something very soon perhaps. Don't be so impatient.

**Edward:**

WHAT! You mean—

**Angelica:**

Here is my father. Leave quickly.

(Exit Edward)

(Enter Mr. Townly from another direction)

**Townly:**

Rejoice, little girl, rejoice. You will be married according to my wishes. I have triumphed and put it over on your mother.

**Angelica:**

Ah, poor papa, I am afraid indeed that—

**Townly:** (dancing around)

I put it over on her I tell you. She just insisted herself that I do what I wish. And I had to appear not to like it for fear she'd change her mind.

**Angelica:**

Once she gets an idea, action soon follows.

**Townly:**

Yes, my darling daughter, the great wealth of Mr. Nelson is as pleasing to my wife as it is to myself. A rich merchant is a treasure for a girl like you who hasn't a romantic thought in her head. True, he's a bit rustic and crude, but he's open, honest.

**Angelica:**

I pardon this crudeness in favor of his honesty.

**Townly:**

Some say he lacks good qualities, but I find he has many. If only he could get away from the habit of saying things which have neither rhyme nor reason. He's a little too familiar, especially with women he's never met before.

(Enter Mr. Nelson sporting a large gold vest, huge cuffs, a big belly; his fingers are covered with rings)

**Nelson:**

Hey, neighbour—well, well, your old lady says that—what didn't she say, that woman? Ha! There's your daughter. Well, well, when shall we get married, honey?

**Angelica:**

I have no idea.

**Townly:**

Not everything's ready yet.

**Nelson:**

Ready, ready, I'm ready. Yes, yes, Angie, I give you my word. Take the biggest ring from my finger—it's yours.

**Angelica:**

We aren't at the altar yet.

**Townly:**

We have to consider.

**Nelson:**

Let's consider, let's consider.

**Angelica:**

We must take precautions.

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**Nelson:** (grabbing her hand)

Take, take.

**Angelica:**

While you are deliberating it's better that I stay with my mother.

**Townly:**

Go quickly. We haven't any time to lose.

**Nelson:**

Time is pressing, yes. (squeezing her) Wait, wait, I want to see you again. It makes me feel good. Let's talk about any old thing. Tell me a story.

**Angelica:**

What sort of story do you want me to tell you?

**Nelson:**

Well, tell me, tell me—you're cute, sweet—tell me a little story—

**Angelica:**

It's time that I should go—

**Nelson:** (still holding her by the arm)

Ho, I want you to tell me— Ah, I love you with all my heart—tell me a little love story.

**Angelica:**

You love me, and I'm obliged to you for that. Story's over.

**Nelson:**

Well, the story's over. Why did you tell me that story? Tell me instead—

**Townly:** (separating them)

Oh, let her go. It really is important that her mother not see her with us.

**Nelson:**

Go then. Go darling. Get ready to be my wife.

(Exit Angelica)

**Townly:**

Let's discuss a little how we are going to manage my wife. For that's the difficulty in our little business.

**Nelson:**

What's the problem?

**Townly:**

Not really a problem, but—

**Nelson:**

Because it's not a problem for me—

**Townly:**

Do you have some expedient to—?

**Nelson:**

Sure, sure. Leave that to me. Tell me, what are you going to do?

**Townly:**

That's the problem, I tell you.

**Nelson:**

You, you, you, are a poor planner. Nothing is so easy.

**Townly:**

Instruct me then!

**Nelson:**

Nothing is so easy. Now how do you intend to go about it?

**Townly:**

That's what puzzles me.

**Nelson:**

But, but, but, me too— She's a terrible woman, your wife.

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**Townly:**

I see we're both too clever and cunning to figure out what to do. But, by luck, I have a gardener who has more clever ideas than anybody in the world. He should be a statesman. A real good head on his shoulders.

**Nelson:**

I've got a good head, too. Have him here and we'll figure it out.

**Townly:**

Here he is now.

(Enter Lucas)

**Townly:**

Well, Lucas, have you been thinking about our business—have you considered what I said to you?

**Lucas:**

Shh!

**Townly:**

Shh?

**Nelson:**

Shh!

**Lucas:**

This gentleman here wishes to marry Miss Angelica, Angelica also, Madam does, you do, and so do I. So the matter's settled.

**Nelson:**

See—it's settled.

**Lucas:**

I say it's not settled. For from the moment she sees that we want it, too—she won't stand for it, not her!

**Townly:**

That's the trouble.

**Nelson:**

That's the trouble.

**Lucas:**

Oh, I ask you if—

**Townly:**

Certainly.

**Nelson:**

What a question.

**Lucas:**

I ask you then if she were unaware that we agree—

**Nelson:**

That's a good idea.

**Townly:**

Very good, Lucas.

**Nelson:**

That's my advice.

**Lucas:**

That's good advice. You must tell everybody so that your opinion's spread by rumor. For my part, I know that your wife's temper is like a whirligig that's always turning one way then another in the wind. Therefore, we must make the wind appear to blow from the West so she'll blow to the East. Ah, there must be two winds blowing about Miss Angelica. Nelson on one side, and Young Richly on the other. We have only to say that it's Richly we want and she will force this gentleman on us just to cross us. That's my pronouncement.

**Townly:**

That will tie it up.

**Nelson:**

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That's the trick. Here are a hundred pounds, Lucas.

**Lucas:**

It's necessary to tie two knots to do the job right. For there remains the little matter of putting Madam in the mood to cross you.

**Townly:**

Let's try to do it immediately—our lawyer has been called, the marriage contract is ready.

**Lucas:**

Yes, but to finish this properly she must be put into a rage. I know the secret of irritating her. When she comes to inspect my garden I will pretend not to say a word. Instead, I will scrape the ground with my shovel—that will infuriate her. I will shake my head—she'll take that for opposition and begin to argue; the fire will ignite, and when her spirit is aflame—she will remember that she is an honest woman and that she told you and you deceived her. And here she is now. I will get her going, then you come in and announce you've decided on Young Richly.

(Exit Nelson and Townly, then enter Mrs. Townly)

**Mrs. Townly:**

You were there quite a while with my husband. Apparently, he knows the one he wants for a son-in-law. Is it Mr. Richly or Mr. Nelson, as I advised him?

**Lucas:** (turning his hat)

HMMM!

**Mrs. Townly:**

You turn your hat. That means my husband didn't take my advice.

**Lucas:** (shaking his head)

PRRR!

**Mrs. Townly:**

Mr. Nelson, you say is not to my husband's taste—and he prefers Richly?

**Lucas:**

Heh, heh, heh.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Because he is younger? Or because Richly is more pleasing to my daughter?

**Lucas:**

Oh, well—

**Mrs. Townly:**

What! You think that the solid wealth of Mr. Nelson is not preferable—

**Lucas:**

Well—

**Mrs. Townly:**

I get mad when I hear nonsense like this.

**Lucas:**

But, but, but—

**Mrs. Townly:**

False reasoning, all of it.

**Lucas:** (striking the ground with his foot)

The devil!

**Mrs. Townly:**

And everything you have told me is what my husband told you?

**Lucas:**

Pah fan goo.

**Mrs. Townly:**

So you've told me word for word everything he said. Well, let me tell you, in spite of him—

**Lucas:**

Han.

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**Mrs. Townly:**

Yes, in spite of him. In his teeth.

**Lucas:**

Pao.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Yes. He takes a high handed tone like that with me.

**Lucas:**

Pa, ta, ta.

**Mrs. Townly:**

He will see that I am the boss.

**Lucas:**

Puff.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Oh, that's too much. Husband, you cross me, you insult me, you outrage me!

(Lucas signals Townly to come in and places Townly beside his wife; Lucas exits)

**Mrs. Townly:** (seeing him after a moment in Lucas' place)

Continue, sir, continue. I really want to know where you get the things you say to me.

**Townly:**

I didn't say a word.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Go ahead, be brave. It takes a lot to get me worked up.

**Townly:**

It's true that I've come to speak to you.

**Mrs. Townly:**

To speak to me without reason, without sense, that Mr. Nelson wouldn't be good for my daughter.

**Townly:**

Still, Richly—

**Mrs. Townly:**

Don't say another word—

**Townly:**

I ask you to consider Richly.

**Mrs. Townly:**

No, sir. Richly presents nothing worthy of my consideration.

**Townly:**

Well, for my sake then—

**Mrs. Townly:**

>From today, I give my daughter to Mr. Nelson.

**Townly:**

But the reason.

**Mrs. Townly:**

The reason is that I wish it. And to prove that I am right it's going to happen as I wish and immediately. Mr. Nelson is here. Get ready to sign the papers.

(Exit Mrs. Townly to the house, and after a moment enter Lucas)

**Townly:**

Well—did I play my part well?

**Lucas:**

Like an expert this time. She is going to do what we want willingly and for the first time in her life.

**Townly:**

There—is the lawyer here?

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**Lucas:**

I'll go see. And when I see her, I am going to tell her I like Richly better. To add a little fuel to the fire.  
(Exit Lucas)

(Enter Angelica)

**Townly:**

We've done wonderfully, daughter.

**Angelica:**

I've heard. I was under the swing with the lawyer—he's just come. It's time and he's on schedule.

**Townly:**

I am going to speak to him. Go quickly and rejoin your mother.  
(Exit Townly)

**Angelica:**

Things are at the point where I wish them. And the measures I have taken will succeed. Watch and see what happens.

(Exit Angelica; after a moment enter Mrs. Townly and a Lackey)

**Mrs. Townly:**

Tell me child, where did you get this letter from? Who is your master?

**Lackey:**

I am forbidden to tell you that—and to prevent you from forcing it out of me, I am leaving right away.  
(Exit Lackey)

**Mrs. Townly:**

Now what's this mystery?

(Reading low)

Hmm, hmm, hmm. "I advise you that your daughter is in communication with Mr. Nelson and wants to marry him and to make you sign the wedding contract, they have a lawyer ready who will appear as if by chance." Indeed, that's the lawyer I just saw with Angelica. The warning is obviously true. "In a word your husband pretended not to want Nelson so you would prefer him." So! Mr. Nelson is the choice of my husband.

(Enter Lucas and Townly)

**Lucas:**

Courage, sir. Tell her quickly that I am against Mr. Nelson.

**Townly:**

Listen, my dear wife—

**Lucas:**

I tell you that—

**Townly:**

I want you to know that—

**Lucas:** (to Mrs. Townly)

That I and your husband—

**Townly:**

You say that you want Mr. Nelson for a son-in-law, right? I tell you that my daughter doesn't want him.

**Lucas:**

The matter is a little delicate.

**Mrs. Townly:**

It isn't my daughter's will or mine that ought to decide—it's yours my husband—and in this and in everything else, you are master.

## The Spirit of Contradiction

**Lucas:**

As for me, I think—

**Mrs. Townly:**

You're a good advisor, Lucas, and I willingly listen to your advice.

**Townly:**

In a word, my wife, you have proposed Mr. Nelson to me, and I don't want him.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Let's speak softly. I love peace and harmony. I will do whatever you find most agreeable.

**Townly:** (aloud)

What's agreeable to me is

(low)

not to have such complaisance about this.

**Mrs. Townly:**

To me it's to have a husband that I love and respect.

**Townly:**

You're joking, but I tell you Mr. Nelson is not to my taste.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Your taste determines mine and I tell you I won't give another thought to Mr. Nelson.

**Townly:**

Lucas?

**Lucas:** (low)

Try harder. Her contradictory spirit isn't on fire yet.

**Townly:**

Tell me, Madam, are you making fun of me?

**Mrs. Townly:**

But what makes you think that when I give you my word?

**Lucas:**

Good! Your word comes and goes like the air.

**Mrs. Townly:** (sweetly)

Wait till you see.

**Lucas:**

You can't make up your mind.

**Mrs. Townly:**

To prove my sincerity and my submission, I am going this moment to forbid Mr. Nelson to set foot in this house.

(Exit Mrs. Townly)

**Townly:**

I believe she's going to do it. What should have caused this miracle?

**Lucas:**

Listen, it must be that—

**Townly:**

It would be, just my luck. The only time in her life she doesn't contradict me it's to contradict me.

**Lucas:**

For her to obey you is not natural.

**Townly:**

I am going to see what's happening. I still don't believe it.

(Exit Townly)

**Nelson:** (entering)

Well, well, Lucas. We are going to sign the contract. Here's the money I promised you—

**Lucas:**

## The Spirit of Contradiction

Madam is going to give you your walking papers—she's looking for you to do just that.

**Nelson:**

She doesn't want me, you say?

**Lucas:**

Something has happened, I don't know exactly what. Wait for me here, I'm going to see for myself.

(Exit Lucas)

**Nelson:**

I love waiting for this little Angelica—but I'm joking about that. If I don't marry her, I can marry at least four others.

(Enter Angelica followed by Edward who is determined to fathom her tricks)

**Nelson:**

Well, well, poor girl, it's bad for you. You won't get married.

**Angelica:**

What an irritating thing.

**Nelson:**

It makes me mad, but I'm easy. You're crying because you love me, and that's swell. Don't cry, come on, don't cry. You'll make me do it, too.

**Angelica:**

Go quickly, join my father, second him, speak together to my mother. Beg her. Press her.

**Nelson:**

Shh! Shh! There's your other lover who's listening.

**Angelica:**

Ha—are you there, Mr. Richly?

**Edward:**

What I've just heard, what you've just said, has exposed you to me. The lawyer I've just been with proved sufficiently your betrayal, but you aren't worthy of my reproaches. I will take the way of scorn and silence.

(Shouting)

Don't wait for me, nor beg, nor reproach—ingrate! No, faithless one, no traitress—

**Nelson:**

Do you call this the way of silence?

**Edward:**

Just Heaven—

**Nelson:**

What are you complaining of? That she promised you something?

**Edward:**

Nothing at all, Mr. Nelson. I would like to know indeed, sir, by what right you insult me? How, I beg you, can you have any hope? First of all, my father has as much money as you—and the little merit that you have—

**Nelson:** (showing his hand)

Why, do you see this hand? These five fingers alone are worth more than all your father's wealth.

**Angelica:**

For me, I prefer Mr. Nelson's good nature to this wild passion which you never give up—

**Nelson:**

Fie! He's crazy in love—like in a novel.

**Angelica:**

His kind words touch me more than your despairing face.

**Nelson:**

I've heard it said that women don't care for the affected, but I pity him. Go young man, go—console yourself. I will lend you some money.

**Edward:**

## The Spirit of Contradiction

Why, damn you, sir—

**Angelica:** (taking Edward by the arm)

You're beside yourself. Go away, I beg you. I don't like to be bothered like that.

**Nelson:**

Hey, me either. I'm going to rejoin your father.

(Low to Angelica)

I order you to get rid of him. Give him his walking papers and come find me.

(Exit Nelson)

**Edward:**

Your procedure seems to me so outre that I cannot believe that you are feigning. I don't flatter myself, but if you were pretending because Nelson was around—now he is gone—justify yourself!

(Enter Mrs. Townly)

**Mrs. Townly:** (aside)

My daughter alone with Richly!

**Edward:**

Justify yourself—or admit you have betrayed me. Speak, we are alone.

**Angelica:**

I will speak to you just as I spoke in the presence of Mr. Nelson. My father wants me to marry him and I tell you I am delighted.

**Edward:**

Oh! I give up. No more explanations. I am going to find your mother.

**Angelica:**

Go, sir, go, you can tell her that I want no part of you.

**Edward:** (seeing Mrs. Townly)

Have you heard, Madam? I am betrayed, Madam. For it is no longer time to hide from you my love for this ingrate—you see she has betrayed me.

**Mrs. Townly:**

I feel sorry for you, sir. You see father and daughter plotted against you and me, too. I enter into your feelings because I always sympathize with the feelings of others.

**Edward:**

No. After what she's done, I never wish to speak of her again.

**Mrs. Townly:**

I swear to you I have no objection to your proposing to my daughter.

**Edward:**

You propose her to me in vain.

**Mrs. Townly:**

But to prove to you, a reasonable man, that reason alone guides me in all I do—I wish to offer you—

**Edward:**

I refuse your offers, Madam. I am not a man to force her inclinations.

**Mrs. Townly:**

So that I may have the pleasure of avenging you on my husband, on my daughter—on all those who conspire to contradict me—I beg you, sir.

**Edward:**

Can't do it.

**Mrs. Townly:**

What! You contradict me, too? Oh, I will do so much for you, if you will marry my daughter!

**Angelica:**

What! Mother! You wouldn't marry me against my will?

**Mrs. Townly:**

## The Spirit of Contradiction

Against your will, daughter? Don't think of it—because you have no will, remember?

**Angelica:**

Alas, when I spoke to you thus, I didn't speak sincerely. Why will you prevent a rich match with Mr. Nelson?

**Mrs. Townly:**

He's got more wealth than you deserve.

**Angelica:**

Hey, mother, I beg you—

**Mrs. Townly:**

Shut up! I know all your tricks. The lawyer told me everything. You wanted to betray me. To expose me to the will of a husband! To punish you I will make you sign the contract you drew up against me. Only, I'm going to fill in the name of Richly.

(Exit Mrs. Townly)

**Edward:**

No, Madam, I will never sign. I prefer to die rather than marry your daughter.

**Angelica:** (imitating him)

I prefer to die rather than marry your daughter— You say it very naturally.

**Edward:**

As I feel it, ingrate.

**Angelica:**

And as I wished it. For if you had done it to persuade my mother it wouldn't have worked for it wouldn't have sounded right. You could not have deceived her if you hadn't been deceived yourself.

**Edward:**

Explain yourself.

**Angelica:**

To make my mother agree to what I want it was also necessary to deceive my father. He tried to trick her naturally enough, and when I saw how they were working for Mr. Nelson, by pretending the contrary, I sent her an anonymous letter explaining what they were up to. And it did the trick. Seeing all the world against you, she has taken your part—and wishes to make us marry to contradict them—and you, too.

**Edward:**

Can what I hear be true? Misfortune overwhelms me, and joy confounds me. But I don't know which.

**Angelica:**

I don't want you to show it until after the signature. I fear some indiscreet transport of joy. No, Edward, don't believe yet that I love you.

**Edward:** (wildly)

Ah! Darling, Angelica—divine lady—

**Angelica:**

Someone's coming. Keep pretending.

(Enter Lucas)

**Angelica:**

No, Edward, no. I will not be married to you against my will.

**Lucas:**

No, dammit, it will not be against your will—for you'll marry him with joy. But it may not happen yet for I doubt you can both scheme together or that you can pretend to be pretending. Your mother's on her way, but I've warned you so that you may deceive her.

**Angelica:**

Ah! Heavens.

**Edward:**

How wretched you are!

**Lucas:**

## The Spirit of Contradiction

For you it will be wretched. For Madam changes her mind quickly if she suspects for a minute that you want it too. That's too bad cause, Mr. Nelson promised me a hundred pounds.

**Edward:**

You rogue. Why didn't you ask for two hundred from me?

**Lucas:**

There's no time. Madam knows all. Meanwhile, if I take your money it will be true that Madam knows all—for dammit she knows nothing.

**Angelica:**

Ah, my poor Lucas.

**Edward:**

Wait, take my purse.

**Lucas:**

And here comes Madam returning. I am going to assist you.

(Enter Mrs. Townly, Mr. Townly, Mr. Nelson, and the lawyer)

**Lucas:**

Come quickly, Madam, see the young folks are fighting. Come quickly, separate them. They find everything the other one says enraging—so much so that I would think they are already married.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Does my daughter revolt against me! Insolent! You here, too, sir.

(To Nelson)

Leave instantly.

**Nelson:**

Go, go. I am more complacent than you. You kick me out and I'm leaving.

**Mrs. Townly:**

You're a brute.

**Nelson:**

Goodbye old battle cruiser.

**Mrs. Townly:**

A booby, a simpleton.

**Nelson:**

I never contradict anyone.

(Exit Nelson)

**Townly:**

Really, my dear wife—

**Mrs. Townly:**

Shut up, my dear husband—

**Lawyer:**

May I dare explain to you, Madam—

**Mrs. Townly:**

I am delighted that you are all against Young Richly. He lacked only you. Give me the contract that I may sign—  
(signing) Come, Angelica, sign after me. Obey me.

**Angelica:** (signing)

I still can't be married, because my father won't sign, so there.

**Mrs. Townly:** (to Edward)

To oblige you, sir, I have put a gift for you in the contract.

**Edward:** (signing)

Hey! I didn't do it because of the gift. Go ahead, sir, don't waste a minute for fear Madam will change her mind.

(Townly pushed by his wife, signs)

## The Spirit of Contradiction

**Lawyer:**

These proceedings are closed. (Folds up the contract, bows and exits)

(Lucas whispers to Mrs. Townly)

**Mrs. Townly:**

What do you say?

**Lucas:**

I wish to say simply that they love each other.

**Townly:**

And I only wanted to marry her. No matter to whom.

**Mrs. Townly:**

I've been betrayed.

**Angelica:**

I throw myself at your feet, mama.

**Edward:**

A thousand pardons, Madam.

**Mrs. Townly:**

I will never pardon you in my life.

**Townly:**

You signed.

**Mrs. Townly:**

Yes, but I will disinherit her. I will never see my son-in-law again. I will divorce my husband. I will hang Lucas and the lawyer. I am going crazy.

(Mrs. Townly runs out in a fury)

**Edward:**

We'd better bring her back before she does something dangerous.

**Townly:**

So much for the spirit of contradiction.

CURTAIN