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by Jean-Francois Regnard, translated by Frank J. Morlock
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THE UNFORSEEN RETURN
Comedy in One Act

BY REGNARD

Translated and adapted
By Frank J. Morlock

Characters French names

Mr. Edward Richly	(Clitandre)
Belinda	(Lucile)
Clarissa	(Cydalise)
Squire	(Marquis)
Lucy	(Lisette)
Mrs. Prim	(Mme. Bertrand)
Roger	(Merlin)
Jeremy	(Jacquinet)
Mr. Andre	(M. Andre)
Mr. Richly	(M. Geronte)

Six men, four women

The scene is a street before Richly's house. Lucy, a maid is approaching from one side and encounters Mrs. Prim.

Mrs. Prim:

Ah, there you are! I'm very glad to meet you. Let's take the opportunity to have a little serious conversation, Miss Lucy.

Lucy: (easily)

Just as serious as you please, Mrs. Prim.

Mrs. Prim:

You know perfectly well that I am displeased with the behavior of my niece.

Lucy:

Really Madam. And what's she done wrong, may I ask?

Mrs. Prim.

She does nothing but wrong--and to make it worse she surrounds herself with a wench like you who gives her the worst possible advice and who pushes her over the precipice--where she's heading if she hasn't already fallen.

Lucy:

Well, Mrs. Prim, this is at the very least, a serious conversation as you put it--and if I were to respond as seriously I don't know where it might end. But the respect I have for your age, and for the aunt of my mistress prevents me from responding to you without respect.

Mrs. Prim:

My age! You're a model of moderation!

Lucy:

It would be nice if you were, too, Madam. You are not the first to spread scandal about your niece; remarks that have no foundation except in your disordered imagination.

Mrs. Prim:

My disordered imagination! What impudence. (furiously) It's the disorder of your actions which make me speak out--and there is nothing worse than the life you are living.

Lucy:

How is that--what's wrong with our life if you please?

Mrs. Prim:

What? Is there anything more scandalous than the expenditures Belinda is constantly making--a girl without a penny in income.

Lucy:

You have credit, Madame.

Mrs. Prim:

Just what she needs to maintain a large house and extravagant tastes.

Lucy:

Is she forbidden to make her fortune?

Mrs. Prim:

And how is she to make her fortune?

Lucy:

Very innocently. She drinks, eats, sings, laughs, gambles, walks to

take the air--and wealth comes to us while we sleep, I assure you.

Mrs. Prim:

And meanwhile her reputation evaporates. She'll learn. She won't have a penny of mine. My brother, who wanted her to be a nun will disinherit her. Patience, patience, she won't always be young.

Lucy:

Very true, that's why we must put our time to good use.

Mrs. Prim:

Oh, very well--and all the profit you will get from that will be to die in a charity ward: both dishonored.

Lucy:

Oh, for that, no Madam. A successful marriage will prevent that prophecy from being fulfilled.

Mrs. Prim:

A successful marriage. She's going to get married?

Lucy:

Yes indeed.

Mrs. Prim:

Just in time! But I won't be a party to it. I won't help her make anyone think she's either respectable or rich. I renounce her as my niece, and I will not aid her to deceive anyone; goodbye.

Lucy:

Don't trouble yourself--we know our business better than you.

Mrs. Prim:

I believe this will be some grand alliance!

(Exit Mrs. Prim in a huff)

Lucy:

This will be a fine marriage and when it is consummated you will be honored to receive her and be her aunt. (shouting after Mrs. Prim) You just wait and see! (Lucy is annoyed, stung by Mrs. Prim's remarks. She would like to say more but cannot.)

Roger: (entering)

Good day, child. Who was that old lady you were talking with?

Lucy:

Who? That was Mrs. Prim, my mistress's aunt.

Roger:

I didn't recognize her. I wasn't paying much attention.

Lucy:

The old girl's very well off. She owns a lot of property in London.
Belinda is very well connected, at least.

Roger:
But she hasn't any money of her own.

Lucy:
There's no reason to give up. Money will come. If her three uncles,
two aunts, three cousins and two nephews die--she will have a very
large inheritance. Ha, ha! Do you know that if the Plague were to
strike again, Belinda would cut quite a figure.

Roger:
She has a nice figure already.

Lucy:
Her beauty carries all before it.

Roger:
My master is absolutely determined to marry her.

Lucy:
And she is absolutely determined to marry him.

Roger:
There would perhaps be some trouble if our good father were to return
--but he won't for a while. We'll have the time to prepare and my
master will be happy--except for the chagrin of marrying Belinda.

Lucy:
What--what are you trying to say?

Roger:
Marriage is subject to its ups and downs.

Lucy:
You are very polite to think that Mr. Edward would ever repent of
marrying Belinda, a young lady that I have brought up myself.

Roger:
So much the worse.

Lucy:
A pretty girl, young and well developed.

Roger:
That part doesn't reassure me.

Lucy:
A girl easy to live with.

Roger:
Most girls are not hard to live with--at first.

Lucy:

A young lady who is wise and virtuous.

Roger: (wonderingly)

And you say you raised her?

Lucy: (furiously)

Why don't you go ahead and say what you want to say wiseacre?

Roger:

Well do you want me to speak openly? I don't like this alliance at all. And I foresee that it won't benefit anyone. Mr. Edward spends his money because he is in love and love makes a man open handed: marriage ruins love. If my master becomes a miser where will we be?

Lucy:

He's of too prodigal a nature ever to turn miser. Has he given orders for today's feast?

Roger:

Let's see. Three cooks arrived with their set ups. Leonard, the famous Leonard marched at their head. The illustrious Florel has sent six bottles of Champagne--he made it himself.

Lucy:

So much the better. I love expensive stuff--but here is Mr. Edward.

(Edward Townley enters from the house. He is youthful, open, and expensively dressed.)

Edward:

Ha! Good day, my dear Lucy--how are things with you, child? And how is your beautiful lady?

Lucy:

She's at home with Clarissa.

Edward:

Go, run, my dear Lucy: beg her to come here as soon as possible. I have no happy moments except those I pass with her.

Lucy:

You two are made for each other. When you're not around she's bored to death. She won't delay I promise you.

(Exit Lucy)

Roger:

Well, sir! You're really going to get married? Very soon you will have finished your love affair and your money. Not the best way to finish the business. But if you are going to do it so be it. What will we tell your father when he returns from his business trip to Spain?

Edward:

You always have inopportune thoughts. Look my friend: frolic in the present, have no regret for the past; and don't whatever you do read irritating portents in the future. That's the secret of happiness. By the way, haven't you received any money for me in the past few days?

Roger:

In the last three weeks I've obtained a half year's rent on the farm in advance. In return you've given Farmer Small a quittance for the entire year.

Edward:

Excellent!

Roger:

Last week I received 1,800 pounds for those two paintings your father refused to sell for thirty thousand.

Edward:

Fine!

Roger:

Fine! Also, I got 200 pounds for that tapestry your father purchased for five thousand two years ago.

Edward:

Better!

Roger: Yes, yes, we've had a real white sale during his absence haven't we?

Edward:

It's a little nourishment that we must take sometimes; and we will work together on more nourishment in the future.

Roger:

Work by yourself because I have a bad conscience about being the instrument of your ruin. It's with my help you've been able to dissipate 10,000 pounds, not to mention another ten thousand you owe here and there to usurers and money lenders, who are just waiting to fall on us and gobble everything up when the day comes to pay them back.

Edward:

The one who disturbs me the most and causes me the most embarrassment is this Mr. Andre. He persecutes me and I only owe him a hundred pounds!

Roger:

He isn't only after that. You also gave him a promissory note for 500 pounds. Four days ago he took out a judgement on the note. And it won't be pleasant if you spend your wedding night in jail.

Edward: (calmly)

We will find a way to deal with him.

Roger:

What way? We have no cash at all. All your income is taken in advance and spent as received. The townhouse furniture has been sold for a song--we've cut down the timber at the country house under the pretext of using it for fuel. As for me, I swear to you that I see no way out.

Edward:

If my father can be kept from returning another five or six months I will have plenty of time to repair by my economy the expensive disorders of my youth.

Roger:

Assuredly. And your esteemed father, for his part--hasn't he worked hard to amass all this wealth?

Edward:

Without a doubt.

Roger:

It's better that you practice this foolishness while he's still alive. After he's dead he won't be in a position to straighten things out.

Edward;

You're right, Roger.

Roger:

Sir, you're not so bad that you can't, at least, speak well. Your father will have made a huge profit from his trip--and you will have made a huge expenditure in his absence. Of what can he complain when he returns? It will be as if he had never gone, and at worst it will be his fault for having been so foolish as to make the trip.

Edward:

You're really talking some sense today, Roger.

Roger:

Between you and me, your father is not very bright. I've led him by the nose and you know it. I can make him believe anything I want to. And when he comes back this time I think I still have power enough to pull you out of this sorry mess. Let's go sir. Good cheer and a warm fire. Courage returns to me. How many for dinner tonight?

Edward:

Five or six.

Roger:

And your dear friend the self styled Squire who has helped you to gobble up so much of your wealth so stylishly--will he be here?

Edward:

He promised me he would, but here is the charming Belinda and her cousin--

(Enter Belinda, Clarissa and Lucy)

Belinda:

The precautions you make me take, Edward, can only be justified by the success they are having--and I will be entirely lost in worldliness if our marriage doesn't end all the pleasure parties I'm used to.

Edward:

I have never had any other sentiments, pretty Belinda--and here is your friend who can bear witness to it.

Clarissa:

I guarantee the goodness of your heart if you must take this moment to justify yourself; but I, who never get mixed up in anything adventurous and who haven't seen the conclusion of this affair--what kind of role must I play--and what will people say of it, I pray?

Roger:

They'll say that people are known by the company they keep--and that the company made you get married. My master has so many friends--you have only to pick.

Lucy:

Take one, madame. The crazier things are--the more fun. Come on--make a choice!

Clarissa:

I'll marry the devil. Now that you mention it, I think I'll marry off Lucy--because of the company. It's a very contagious example.

Edward:

I wish you'd follow our example. I have a young friend who is alienated from his family. That's the way to recommend him. Has he told you of his feelings?

Clarissa:

No. This sort of marriage doesn't interest me. I don't follow anyone's lead. I want to take a husband as independent as I am.

Edward:

Well said. My friend isn't the type to let you put a bridle on him.

Roger:

But here is the Squire who comes to see you. I am going to see if everything is ready for your supper.

(Exit Roger to the house)

Squire: (entering from the street)

Your servant, my friend. Ah, ladies, I am delighted to see you. You are waiting for me and that's very proper. I am the very soul of your parties, I admit. The premier mover in your pleasures, I know it. Where are we now? Is the supper ready? Are we getting married? Shall we abandon ourselves to wine? Come on, bring on the gaiety--I've never been in such a mood, in such spirits--I defy you to bore me.

Clarissa:

Truly, Squire, you were wise to wait.

Lucy:

It would be silly if a Squire were the first to come! One would think he had nothing to do.

Squire:

I assure you ladies that my coach cannot fly faster. It's less than three quarters of an hour since I left Saint James. You know I usually use arabian horses. There are simply no better horses for a quick rendezvous.

Edward:

What affair is so pressing?

Squire:

If we didn't have flying carriages like that we'd miss half our opportunities.

Melinda:

And since when, Squire, are you mixed up with going to court? It seems that you ordinarily stay at Oxford.

Squire:

Well, what of it, my dear.

(To Edward)

Here you are awash in pleasure--you swim in delights. You know the interest that I take in all that concerns you. What happiness when two well tested hearts approach the long awaited moment--there one sees the ending of--a novel. This is a great day for you.

Edward:

I feel my happiness in all this talk.

(To Squire)

But tell me, I beg you, have you been, as you promised, to the jeweler for the diamonds?

Squire: (to Clarissa)

And you pretty cousin, what is it? Your heart says nothing to you? The example should encourage you--don't you wish, in marrying, to pay your debts to love and nature? It is terrible to be useless in this world.

Clarissa:

I am not bored yet with my virginity.

Squire:

Whenever you please we will take the same momentous step--hearts united. I am made for the ladies, and, in all modesty, the ladies are made for me. May I be damned if you are not to my taste. I am ready to love you one day to the point of adoration--to the point of madness! But not to the point of marriage. I like amours without consequences--you understand me, I'm sure?

Lucy:

Truly, this speech is so plain it needs no commentary. What! Squire! For shame!

Squire:

You can't know how much this little fellow shames me. It is true this little bourgeois hasn't an equal, and that I treat him like family, introduce him into society, teach him to gamble, educate his taste in manners, furniture, and horses. I lead him a little astray--but these little gentlemen are not very happy unless one inspires them with the manners of the court and they learn to ruin themselves in two or three years.

Lucy:

Have you many scholars?

Squire:

Where is Roger? I don't see him here. He's a pretty fellow. I love him. I find him admirable as a trickster, to keep off creditors, to calm usurers, to persuade and pacify merchants. To sell all the furniture in a house quietly and quickly. How fashionable, how witty of your father, how prudent, to leave you a governor so wise, an economist so knowing. This rogue values twenty thousand pounds rent, the same way a baby does a half penny.

(Enter Roger)

Roger:

Ladies and gentlemen, when you wish to enter supper is ready.

Squire:

Yes. Well said. We mustn't lose time. I told you that Roger was a pretty fellow. I feel in a praiseworthy mood to drink wine. You will see if I remain in that mood. Come ladies--those who love me--follow me.

Edward:

Moments are very precious to lovers. Let's not lose any time.

(Exit all but Roger into the house)

Roger:

Well, thank God, business is good, our lovers are happy. May Heaven

make it last a long while! But what do I see? There, I believe comes
Jeremy, the valet of our absent master.

(Enter Jeremy)

Jeremy:
At last I'm home. Hey, good day, Roger--the prodigal returns. How are
you?

Roger:
And you--dreadful apparition, how are you?

Jeremy:
As you see, couldn't be better. A little tired, but we had a very
successful trip.

Roger:
What! "We" had a very successful trip? You didn't come alone?

Jeremy:
What a question. Of course not. Came with my master. He went to the
customs house with the merchandise while I came with the personal
baggage and the joyous news for his son that he is returned in perfect
health.

Roger:
News like that will certainly rejoice him.

(Low)
What are we going to do?

Jeremy:
Something wrong? You don't look well--and you don't seem very glad to
see us.

Roger:
I'm not. This is most troublesome. All is lost. Now tell me--will he
be kept at the custom house long?

Jeremy:
No--he'll be here any minute.

Roger:
In an minute? I think I'll go nuts.

Jeremy:
But what the hell's the matter with you?

Roger:
I don't know. Oh, the cursed old man. To return at such a bad time--
and not to forewarn us. What a treacherous bastard.

Jeremy:

You must be up to something deep; this unexpected return hasn't upset your plans too much, has it?

Roger:

Oh, no! They'll all mixed up--by all the devils in hell!

Jeremy:

Too bad.

Roger:

Jeremy, my poor, Jeremy, help me to arrange things, I beg you.

Jeremy:

Me-- What do you want me to do?

Roger:

Go--rest. Go in. You'll find good company--nothing to upset you. They'll make you drink Champagne.

Jeremy:

Not hard to get me to do that.

Roger:

Tell Mr. Edward that his father is back--but not to worry, I will wait for him here--and try to do all I can. I will sell myself to the devil if I know what! Tell him not to worry, and as for you, begin by getting drunk and go to bed.

Jeremy:

I will obey your orders exactly, don't fret.

(Exit Jeremy into the house)

Roger:

Come, Roger, pull yourself together my boy: courage! Here we have a violent father returning impromptu from a long trip; a son in the midst of an orgy; the house in disorder full of cooks and caterers in preparation for an impending wedding--and all we have to do is prevent this from being discovered. Ah, here comes the old man. Let's stand aside a little and think of a way to prevent him from entering his own house.

(Enter Mr. Richly)

Richly:

Now after all my work and all the risks I've run-- See: by Heaven's grace, my voyage has a happy ending. I return to my dear old home and I believe my son will be very happy to see me back and in good health.

Roger: (aside)

Not as happy as we would be to know you are well--but elsewhere.

Richly:

Children owe a good deal to fathers who work tirelessly to leave them well off.

Roger: (aside)

Yes; but not to those who return so inopportunistly.

Richly:

I don't wish to delay anymore entering home and giving my son the pleasure of knowing I'm safely returned. I believe the poor boy will die of joy to see me.

Roger: (aside)

It wouldn't surprise me if he's already half dead just knowing you're here. But it's necessary to meet him.

(Aloud)

What do I see? Just Heaven--am I awake--is it a ghost?

Richly:

I believe if I am not deceived, that it's Roger.

Roger:

Indeed, it is Mr. Richly himself--or else the devil in his shape. Seriously speaking, is it you, my dear master?

Richly:

Yes, it's me, Roger. How've you been?

Roger:

As you see, sir, very much at your service like a faithful servant, bright eyed and bushy-tailed--and always ready to obey you.

Richly:

That's good news. Let's go in.

Roger:

We weren't expecting you and I assure you, you have fallen on us from the clouds, as it were.

Richly:

No, I came by carriage from Portsmouth where my ship happily arrived several days ago. But now--

Roger:

How well you look! What a face! How stout! The air in Spain must do wonders for men of your age. You ought to stay there, sir--for your health--

(Low)

and our safety.

Richly:

And how is my son? Has he taken good care of the business? Is it

profitable under his management?

Roger:

Oh, as to that, why I tell you, he has done so well--you wouldn't believe how he's into money. Your business is in a state that would astonish you--my word on it.

Richly:

You really make me happy, Roger, to give me such fine news. He's stored up a big pile of money, eh?

Roger:

Not at all, sir.

Richly:

Not at all? How's that!

Roger:

No, I tell you this boy is the best manager you could wish. He follows your footsteps. He drives your money like a race horse. If he can make a buck he will work day and night.

Richly:

That comes from setting kids a good example. I'm dying with impatience to hug him. Come along, Roger.

Roger:

He's not inside, sir, and if you are in a hurry to see him, I suggest--

(Enter Mr. Andre)

Andre:

Good day, Roger--

Roger:

Your servant, Mr. Andre, your servant.

(Low)

Here's a villainous loan shark who picks a fine time to come demand his money.

Andre:

You know, Mr. Roger, I've been here everyday lately without finding your master. If he cannot pay me today, tomorrow I will swear out a warrant against him and you know it very well.

Roger: (aside)

This will ruin us.

Richly:

What's this all about?

Roger:

I will explain everything to you when we are alone. Nothing to be concerned about!

Andre:

A mere business of one hundred pounds owed to me for which I have a receipt and a judgement which I intend to put into execution.

Richly:

What's he talking about, Roger?

Roger:

He's a fiend who will do just what he says.

Richly:

Edward owes you--?

Andre:

Yes, indeed, Mr. Edward Richly, a child whose father is off somewhere and who will be pleasantly surprised on his return when he learns of the life his son has led in his absence.

Roger:

This doesn't look too good.

Andre:

The son is a gambler, a spendthrift, and a wench, while they say the father is a villain, a miser, and a tightass.

Richly:

What do you intend to say to this miser and tightass?

Andre:

I don't want to talk to you, I want to speak to the father of Mr. Edward Richly who is in two words an imbecile and a fool.

Richly:

Roger--

Roger:

He's telling you the truth, sir. Mr. Edward does owe him--

Richly:

And you told me of his exemplary conduct.

Roger:

Yes, sir. It's a result of his careful management that he owes this money.

Richly:

What--borrow money from a loan shark.

(To Mr. Andre)

I see by looking at you, sir, that you're in the right line.

Andre:

Yes, sir, and I believe that you are also in the same profession.

Roger: (aside)

How easily honest men recognize each other.

Richly:

You dare to say this is the result of his superior management!

Roger:

Peace! Don't say a word. When you know the bottom of this thing you will be enchanted. He has bought a house--a mansion for ten thousand pounds--

Richly:

A house for ten thousand?

Roger:

And easily worth fifteen. He didn't have enough cash, so in order not to lose the bargain, he borrowed money from this honest swindler you see here. You are not so angry as you were, I bet.

Richly:

On the contrary, I'm overjoyed. Oh, sir, this Mr. Edward who owes you the money is my son.

Roger:

And this gentleman is the father--got it?

Andre:

I've overjoyed as well.

Richly:

Don't worry about your money. I approve what my son has done. Come back tomorrow and you will have your money--in cash.

Andre:

I'm your servant, sir.

(Exit Mr. Andre, delighted)

Richly:

Now tell me in what part of town is the house located?

Roger:

In what part of town?

Richly:

Yes, there are several neighborhoods. This one here for example.

Roger:

Well, indeed, it's also located in this quarter.

Richly:

Good--so much the better. Where exactly?

Roger:

Hold on--(pointing) Do you see that house with an arbor where the windows have been repainted?

Richly:

Yes, well--?

Roger:

That's not it. But a little farther off. The one with the big gatehouse which is right next to the other one. Well, it's a little behind that on the next street. Cattycornered to it.

Richly:

I don't see that one from here.

Roger:

I can't help that.

Richly:

Isn't that the home of Mrs. Prim?

Roger:

Right. Mrs. Prim. Couldn't remember her name. Good buy, isn't it?

Richly:

Absolutely. But why did the stupid woman sell off her inheritance?

Roger:

One can't foresee everything that will happen in life as the philosophers say. She's been very unfortunate--she's gone plum crazy.

Richly:

Gone crazy?

Roger:

Raving. Her family tried to stop her. And her son who is a rake gave his house for a fraction of the money hers was worth.

(Low)

I'm getting in deeper and deeper.

Richly:

But she doesn't have any son that I know of.

Roger:

She doesn't have a son?

Richly:

No. I'm sure of it.

Roger:

Must have been her daughter then.

Richly:

I'm irritated by this mischance. But I've amused myself long enough.

Open the door for me, will you?

Roger: (low)

Ouf! Now we've reached the crisis.

Richly:

What's the matter? Has something happened to my son?

Roger:

No, sir.

Richly:

Has someone stolen something in my absence?

Roger:

Not at all.

(Low)

What will I tell him?

Richly:

Explain everything. Speak.

Roger:

I can hardly keep from crying. Don't go in, sir. Your house--this dear house--which you love--has for the last six months--

Richly:

Well--my house--for the last six months--

Roger:

The devil is haunting the place, sir. He made us take up residence elsewhere.

Richly:

The devil is in my house?

Roger:

Yes, sir. Haunts the place. In fact, that's what has forced your son to buy another house. We couldn't live there any more.

Richly:

You're kidding me. It isn't possible.

Roger:

There's no sort of malicious trick they haven't put on me. Sometimes

they mock me when I'm unable to move my feet. Sometimes they shave my beard with a red hot razor--and without fail every night they affront me with the stench of sulfur.

Richly:

And now I say again, you're putting me on.

Roger:

Not at all, sir. What hasn't happened to me? We've brought the best exorcists in London. There's no way to force them out; this spirit is furiously tenacious--he's the one that possesses women when they have the devil in them.

Richly:

A horrible thought has occurred to me. Tell me, I beg you, have they been in the wine cellar?

Roger:

Alas, sir, they forage everywhere.

Richly:

I am lost. I buried fifty thousand pounds in that wine cellar.

Roger:

Fifty thousand pounds! Sir, there are fifty thousand pounds in your house?

Richly:

In the wine cellar.

Roger:

In the wine cellar. That's exactly where they hold their Sabbath.-- Oh, if only we had known this. And where in the wine cellar if you please?

Richly:

To the left as you enter. Under a big block of stone near the door.

Roger:

Fifty thousand pounds under a big block of stone! You should have told us--we could have saved you from this unlucky pass. It's on the left as you go in, you say.

Richly:

Yes. The place is easy to find.

Roger:

I'll easily find it. But you know, sir, that it's worth your life-- you're risking your neck to go in there? And the whole sum is in gold?

Richly:

All in pure gold.

Roger: (aside)
Good. Easier to carry.

(Aloud)
Oh, as to that, sir, since we know the cause of the evil it won't be hard to find a remedy. I believe we'll--manage. Leave it to me.

Richly:
I have trouble believing all you tell me. You tell me so many stories about these matters that I don't know what to believe. I'll trust you for now, but I'll find out what's what. What reversals one sees in life! One can't make a little money without men or the devil trying to get it away from you. The devil is not going to have it!

(Exit Richly)

(Enter Lucy)

Lucy:
Ah, my poor Roger. Is it true that Mr. Edward's father has returned?

Roger:
Only too true, but to console us, I have found a treasure.

Lucy:
A treasure?

Roger:
In the wine cellar, as you enter--to the left under a large black stone--a sack which contains fifty thousand pounds.

Lucy:
Fifty thousand pounds.

Roger:
Yes, child, and I tell you that will be plenty--run find the sack, the sack--hurry!

Lucy:
But--

Roger:
The devil take you with your butts. Mr. Richly will return. Save yourself--hide, quickly. To the treasure. To the treasure.

(Exit Lucy)

We are about to have a nice explanation. Now to navigate your ship and bring it into port.

(Reenter Richly)

Richly:

You see I wasn't long. I found my porters near here and I've told them to wait because it seems a good idea to store my goods in the house my son has bought.

Roger:
A new fix!

Richly:
I don't recognize the place too well, so you can take me there yourself.

Roger;
I want to, sir, but--

Richly:
But what! The Devil isn't master there, too, is he?

Roger:
Mrs. Prim is still living there.

Richly:
Still living there?

Roger:
Yes, indeed. It's agreed that she will stay out her term, and--as her mind is weak--she gets in a furious state whenever anyone talks to her about vacating. She's really crazy, you see.

Richly:
I'll talk to her in a way that will calm her down.

Roger:
You!

(Aside)
All is lost.

Richly:
You're making me very impatient. I absolutely want to speak to her, I tell you.

Roger:
Well, in that case--talk to her--because happily, here she comes. But remember she's a basket case.

Mrs. Prim: (entering)
Well, here's Mr. Richly returned, it seems.

Roger: (low to Mrs. Prim)
Yes, Madam, indeed it is he--but he's lost his wits. His ship was wrecked and he drank salt water. It turned his head.

Mrs. Prim:

What a shame--the poor man!

Roger:

If he happens by chance to accost you, he may say something odd. Don't pay any attention. We're going to have him locked up.

(To Richly)

If you speak to her, have a little patience with her weakness. Think of her as a clock that's a bit cuckoo.

Richly:

Leave her to me.

Mrs. Prim:

There's something strange and distracted about his manner.

Richly:

How her looks have changed. She has haggard eyes.

Mrs. Prim:

Well--it's Mr. Richly. You've come back to England, eh?

Richly:

Ready to render you my devoirs.

Mrs. Prim:

I'm very distressed about the misfortune you've suffered.

Richly:

I have to be patient. They say devils are occupying my house. But it will be all right after we kick them out. They'll be worn out staying there.

Mrs. Prim: (aside)

Devils in his house! I'd better not contradict him, it might make him worse.

Richly:

I'd like, madam, to store some packages that I brought back with me in your house.

Mrs. Prim: (aside)

He doesn't realize that his ship was wrecked. What a pity.

(Aloud)

I am at your service and my house is more yours than mine.

Richly:

Oh, madam, I have no intention of abusing you of the condition you are in.

(To Roger)

But really, Roger, this woman is not as crazy as you said she was.

Roger:

She has a few good moments--but it won't last.

Richly:

Tell me, Mrs. Prim, have you always been as wise and as reasonable as you are now?

Mrs. Prim:

I don't think anybody, Mr. Richly, has ever seen me otherwise.

Richly:

But it that's so your family shouldn't have you locked up.

Mrs. Prim:

Locked up--me--have me locked up?

Richly: (aside)

She's totally unaware of her illness.

Mrs. Prim:

But if you are not ordinarily more crazy than at present, I think it's very wrong you should be put away.

Richly:

Me put away?

(Aside)

Now she's out of whack; there it is, there it is. Let's change the subject.

(Aloud)

Well, is it that you're irritated about their selling your house?

Mrs. Prim:

They sold my house?

Richly:

At least it's better that my son bought it at a bargain price.

Mrs. Prim:

My poor Mr. Richly. My house hasn't been sold, and it's not for sale.

Richly:

There! There! Don't upset yourself, I promise you you will always have your apartment--just as if you still owned it--and as if you were in good mental health.

Mrs. Prim:

What do you mean as if I was still in good mental health! Go away, you're an old madman, an old madman who shouldn't be allowed out of Bedlam--of Bedlam, my friend.

Roger: (To Mrs. Prim)

Are you wise to fight with a wacko?

Richly:

Oh, if that's your attitude, you can get out. The house belongs to me, and I'll put my luggage there in spite of you. Just look at this crazy old woman.

Roger: (To Richly)

What are you getting in a rage for with a woman who has lost her mind?

Mrs. Prim:

Just try. I'll be waiting for you. Back to your padded cell you lunatic! Hurry and lock him up, he's becoming dangerous, I'm warning you.

(Exit Mrs. Prim in a huff)

Roger: (aside)

I don't quite know how I am going to get out of this.

Squire: (entering from the house)

What's all this hullabaloo? Beating on an honest man's door and scandalizing the neighborhood?

Richly:

Roger, what's going on?

Roger:

The devils in your house are a little drunk. They frolic in the wine cellar.

Richly:

Some kind of swindle is afoot, I'm sure of it.

Squire:

They say the master of this house has just returned from a long sea voyage--would you be he by any chance?

Richly:

Yes, sir, I am he.

Squire:

I congratulate you, sir. That was a beautiful trip and a wonderful lesson for a young man. You must know, sir, that your son has been learning wonderful manners while you were gone. Really fine manners. The boy is very generous. Doesn't resemble you at all. You are a villain, sir.

Richly:

Sir, sir!

Roger:

These teasing devils are insolent.

Richly:

You are a rogue.

Squire:

We were very upset, very worried--full of concern over your return. In your absence your son was ready to kill himself from malaise. In truth, he disliked everything in life. He gave up all his vanities. Everything that could attach him to this earth: wealth, furniture, honors. This boy loves you so much it's unbelievable.

Roger:

He would have died of worry during your absence if it hadn't been for this honest gentleman.

Richly:

He! How is it you're in my house, sir, if you please?

Squire:

Don't you understand without my telling you? I've just drunk champagne in the best company. He's still feasting which is the best way possible for him to comfort himself in your absence.

Richly:

This swindler will ruin me. I'm going in.

Roger:

Stop! I will not allow you to enter.

Richly:

I can't go in to my own house?

Squire:

No. The company is not ready to receive you.

Richly:

What do you mean?

Squire:

It wouldn't be proper for a son who knows how to live and who has been learning manners from me to receive his father in a house which has nothing in it but the four walls.

Richly:

What--four walls? My beautiful paintings which cost me three thousand pounds--are they gone?

Squire:

We got eighteen hundred for them. Not a bad sale.

Richly:

Not a bad sale. Masterpieces like that.

Squire:

Bah! The subject was lugubrious. The fall of Troy with a villainous wooden horse that had neither mouth nor tail. We made a friend out of the buyer.

Richly:

Ah, gallowsbird.

Squire:

Weren't there a couple of other paintings that represented something?

Richly:

Oh, yes. They were originals by a master some think to be Leonardo--they represented the Rape of the Sabines.

Squire:

Right. We got rid of them, too--because of delicacy of conscience.

Richly:

Delicacy of conscience!

Squire:

A wise, virtuous, religious man like Mr. Richly--and to have immodest nude Sabine women about him--fie! Nudity is not for the young.

(Reenter Mrs. Prim)

Mrs. Prim:

Ah, truly, I have just been warned of some nice business, Mr. Richly. They say your son is marrying my niece.

Richly:

I don't know about your niece, but my son is a rogue, Mrs. Prim.

Roger:

Yes, a rake who has led me astray and who has caused--

Squire:

Let's not complain about each other or speak ill of those who are not present. One shouldn't condemn people without hearing them first. Pay attention, if you please, Mr. Richly. You've got to look on the bright side. If you are happy, the whole world will be happy. Besides, it's not your fault. And you can't do anything about it but kick up a fuss. If you are patient no one will laugh at you.

Richly:

Go to the devil with your sophistries. But what do I see. They're running off with my fifty thousand pounds.

Mrs. Prim:

It's that bitch of a Lucy and my niece.

Richly:
And my swindler son.

(Enter Edward and the others)

Edward:
Daddy, it's no longer necessary to abuse your credulity. All this has been due to the zeal of Roger to keep you out of the house while I married Belinda. I ask you to pardon my past behaviour. Bless this marriage, I beg you.

(Low)
Then you can have your fifty thousand back, and I promise to be better in the future.

Richly:
Ah, gallowsbird, do you mock me?

Roger:
It's true, sir.

Mrs. Prim:
Belinda is my niece--and if your son has married her, I'll give her a dowry which will satisfy you.

Richly:
Can you do that? Aren't you under restraint?

Roger:
That was only my trick.

Richly:
What the house--?

Roger:
Part of the same thing.

Richly:
What a misfortune! But if you will give me my money back, I've got enough sense of humor to give my consent, if you want it. It's the only way to prevent worse from happening.

Squire:
Well, said. That pleases me. Shake, Mr. Richly--you're a brave man. I want to drink with you. Let's go back in and have more to drink and eat. You know it was a lucky thing you came just in time for the wedding.

CURTAIN

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