methuen | drama

Feydeau

Plays: One

Heart's Desire Hotel • Sauce For the Goose
The One That Got Away • Now You See It
Pig in a Poke

Translated and introduced by Kenneth McLeish

BLOOMSBURY

Georges Feydeau
Plays: One

Heart's Desire Hotel, Sauce for the Goose, The One That Got Away, Now You See It, Pig in a Poke

Feydeau was the most successful French dramatist of the *belle époque* and is now widely regarded as one of the greatest of farce-writers and a worthy successor to Molière and Labiche. His series of dazzling hits matched high-speed action and dialogue with ingenious plotting. Reaching the heights of farcical lunacy, his plays nevertheless contain touches of barbed social comment and allowed him to mention subjects which would have provoked outrage in the hands of more serious dramatists. This volume of new, sparkling translations by Kenneth McLeish contains his two masterpieces, *Heart's Desire Hotel* (*L'Hôtel du libre échange*) and *Sauce for the Goose* (*Le Dindon*), and three other plays from the peak of his career, *The One That Got Away* (*Monsieur chasse!*), *Now You See It* (*Le Système Ribadier*) and *Pig in a Poke* (*Chat en poche*).

Georges Feydeau was born in Paris in 1862, the son of the novelist Ernest Feydeau. His first one-act play, *Love and Piano*, was performed when he was 18 and he had his first success with *Tailleur pour dames* in 1887, when he also married an heiress. Among his many plays his best known are perhaps *Le Système Ribadier* (1892), *Monsieur chasse!* (1892), *Un Fil à la patte* (1894), *L'Hôtel du libre échange* (1894), *Le Dindon* (1896), *La Dame de chez Maxim* (1899), *La Puce à l'oreille* (1907), *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (1908), and *On purge bébé* (1910). He contracted syphilis and was committed to an asylum in 1919 and died in 1921.

by the same author

FEYDEAU PLAYS: TWO
(The Girl From Maxim's, She's All Yours,
A Flea in Her Ear, Jailbird)

GEORGES FEYDEAU

Plays: One

Heart's Desire Hotel
Sauce for the Goose
The One That Got Away
Now You See It
Pig in a Poke

Translated and introduced by Kenneth McLeish

BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This collection first published in the United Kingdom by Methuen Publishing Limited in 2001

These translations first published in 2001

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB: 978-0-4137-6170-5
ePDF: 978-1-4725-1756-2
ePUB: 978-1-4725-1755-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Georges Feydeau
Chronology

1862	Born in Paris, December 8
1874	Death of father, Ernest
1871–9	Attended boarding schools
1879	Joined a law firm as clerk
1880	Began to write and recite monologues
1881	*Par la fenêtre* (*Through the Window*), first play to be professionally performed, produced by Rosendaël
1883	*Amour et piano* (*Love and Piano*), Théâtre de l'Athénée Took post as secretary to Théâtre de la Renaissance
1883–4	Military service
1884	*Gibier de potence* (*Jailbird*), produced by Le Cercle Volney
1887	*Tailleur pour dames* (*Tailor to the Ladies*), Théâtre de la Renaissance – his first hit *La Lycéenne* (*The Schoolgirl*), Théâtre des Nouveautés
1888	*Un Bain de ménage* (*A Household Bath*), Théâtre de la Renaissance *Chat en poche* (*Pig in a Poke*), Théâtre Déjazet *Les Fiancés de Loches* (*The Fiancés of Loches*), Théâtre Cluny
1889	Married Marianne Duran *L'Affaire Edouard* (*The Edward Affair*), Théâtre des Variétés
1890	*Le Mariage de Barillon* (*Barillon's Marriage*), Théâtre de la Renaissance
1892	*Monsieur chasse!* (*The One That Got Away*), Théâtre du Palais-Royal *Champignol malgré lui* (*Champignol in Spite of Himself*), Théâtre des Nouveautés *Le Système Ribadier* (*Now You See It*), Théâtre du Palais-Royal
1894	*Un Fil à la patte* (*On a String*), Théâtre du Palais-Royal *Le Ruban* (*The Ribbon*), Théâtre de l'Odéon *L'Hôtel du libre échange* (*Heart's Desire Hotel*), Théâtre des Nouveautés
1896	*Le Dindon* (*Sauce for the Goose*), Théâtre du Palais-Royal

Les Pavés de l'ours (*A Little Bit To Fall Back On*), Théâtre Montpensier, Versailles

1897 *Séance de nuit* (*Night Session*), Théâtre du Palais-Royal

Dormez, je le veux! (*Sleep, I insist!*), Théâtre de l'Eldorado

1899 *La Dame de chez Maxim* (*The Girl From Maxim's*), Théâtre des Nouveautés

1902 *La Duchesse des Folies-Bergères* (*The Duchess From the Folies-Bergères*), Théâtre des Nouveautés

1904 *La Main passe* (*She's All Yours*), Théâtre des Nouveautés

1905 *L'Age d'or* (*The Golden Age*), Théâtre des Variétés

1906 *Le Bourgeon* (*The Bud*), Théâtre du Vaudeville

1907 *La Puce à l'oreille* (*A Flea In Her Ear*), Théâtre des Nouveautés

1908 *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (*Look after Lulu*), Théâtre des Nouveautés

Feu la mère de Madame (*Madame's Late Mother*), Théâtre de la Comédie Royale

1909 Moved into the Hôtel Terminus, where he lived until 1919

Le Circuit (*The Circuit*), Théâtre des Variétés

1910 *On purge bébé* (*Purging Baby*), Théâtre des Nouveautés

1911 *Cent millions qui tombent* (*A Hundred Million Falling*), Théâtre des Nouveautés

Mais n'te promène donc pas toute nue! (*Don't Walk Around Naked!*), Théâtre Fémina

Léonie est en avance (*Léonie Is Early*), Théâtre de la Comédie Royale

1913 *On va faire la cocotte* (*We're going to play cocotte*), Théâtre Michel

1914 Divorced

Je ne trompe pas mon mari (*I'm Not Deceiving My Husband*), Théâtre de l'Athénée

1916 Suffered increasing bad health caused by syphilis

Hortense a dit: 'Je m'en fous!' (*Hortense said: 'I don't care!'*), Théâtre du Palais-Royal

1919 Committed to a sanatorium by his family

1921 Died June 5

Introduction

Feydeau's father, Ernest Feydeau, was a stockbroker and novelist, a friend of Baudelaire, Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers – who mocked him in their *Journals* for an interest in ancient Egypt so passionate that it was 'a form of adultery with him'. He died when his son was eleven, and his wife and her second husband (the drama critic Henri Gouquier) sent the boy to boarding school. At about this time young Feydeau first became fascinated by theatre, and – like his near contemporary Alfred Jarry – wrote skits and sketches to amuse his schoolfriends.

From 1883 Feydeau worked as secretary to the Renaissance Theatre, and his first full-length play, *Tailleur pour dames* (1887), had a successful run there when he was twenty-five. At about the same time he met and married an heiress, and in 1892 he had a hit with *Monsieur chasse!* at the Palais-Royal, the theatre which had previously seen Labiche's greatest triumphs. In the same year, *Champignol malgré lui* opened at the Nouveautés, and it and *Tailleur pour dames* each ran for more than 1000 performances. Feydeau went on to write more than two dozen plays, ranging from one-act sketches to historical spectaculars, and including the *grands vaudevilles* for which he is best known outside France: these range from *Un Fil à la patte* in 1894 to his mature masterpieces *L'Hôtel du libre échange*, *Le Dindon*, *La Dame de chez Maxim* and *La Puce à l'oreille.*

Feydeau's public success was offset by private misery. He spent each afternoon writing or directing, each evening at the show and then at Maxim's (where he had a table permanently reserved); he returned home at three or four in the morning, and began again at noon the next day. His wife shared none of his interests, and eventually asked him to leave. He gambled on the stock exchange, and lost not only the fortune his plays earned but also his valuable art collection. In 1909 he moved to a suite in the Hôtel Terminus (near the Gare St Lazare), and spent ten years there, dividing his time between the theatre, Maxim's and a succession of

whores, from one of whom he contracted syphilis. He stopped writing in 1916; in 1919 he announced that he was Napoleon III, and was committed to an asylum; he died in 1921.

This private anguish is occasionally reflected in the plays. A bitter or bilious note sometimes darkens the hilarity, and collapsing marriages and lonely bachelors are treated with more savagery than the plots seem to warrant. But it hardly impinged on his dazzling public success. He was the most successful dramatist of his generation in France, and regularly had two, three or even four plays running at the same time in Paris. He was an actor and a director whose stage business exactly matched the demonic ingenuity of his plotting and dialogue. By his death he was regarded as one of France's major comic dramatists, a worthy successor to Molière and Labiche, and his work is still performed cyclically at the Comédie Française, two different plays each year.

Feydeau's style

Feydeau was a highly self-conscious stylist. He learned his craft as a schoolboy by writing parodies and imitations of authors he admired, and in later life often wrote scenes and sketches simply as stylistic exercises. He analysed the work of his great forebears and successful contemporaries, borrowing – in a way which can easily be traced – a plot-inflexion here, a type of scene there, a turn of phrase or business somewhere else. Until the late 1890s he regularly worked with collaborators, in the manner favoured by all comic dramatists of the time – not so much sharing the actual writing, as honing ideas together before one or other set the results down on paper. (In Feydeau's case the writing is clearly his own. Each collaborator's role seems to have been mainly to give advice and approval, and in any case by the time of *Le Dindon* he was working, for preference, entirely on his own.)

Feydeau's main sources were Molière, and through him the *commedia dell'arte*, Plautus and Terence. These provided a repertoire of characters and situations, and above all an

attitude to society and human nature, which are the basic stock of farce. His gulled husbands, scheming servants, pompous military men and vacuous idiots may wear the clothes and follow the social conventions of the *belle époque*, but they come directly from this tradition. From Molière, especially, he learned the power of farce to make barbed social comment: he particularly admired *Le Malade imaginaire* and *L'Avare*.

One of the most fertile strands in Molière's output, that of the *comédie-ballet*, had been devised initially as a court entertainment for Louis XIV. These works (*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* is typical) frame straightforward satirical farce with extravagant music numbers, often involving pantomime-like characters (such as genies and mad professors), and using an unlikely mixture of ballet skills and slapstick. This tradition was matched, in popular theatre, by the vaudeville, or *voix de ville*. This was satirical street entertainment, in which the manners and ideas of the pretentious were burlesqued in (often bawdy) verse set to popular tunes, and whose grotesque and slapstick action was sometimes – as in *commedia dell'arte* – totally unrelated to the words being said. In Britain, and later in the United States, the style evolved into 'music-hall' and 'vaudeville' respectively; the sketches were separated from the music-numbers (though both remained satirical) and the physical display was split between slapstick (for example drunk-scenes) in the sketches and displays of such skills as plate-spinning or eccentric dancing (and later, striptease) among the other items. In France, the vaudeville tradition was gentrified into a kind of pastoral opera with spoken dialogue (of which Rousseau, no less, wrote an early example), into operettas like those of Offenbach, and into farcical plays satirising the bourgeoisie, with interpolated songs set to popular tunes of the day.

Labiche was the great nineteenth-century master of this last form, and his *An Italian Straw Hat* (usually nowadays performed without the songs) is a characteristic example of the genre. He also perfected a kind of vaudeville without songs: plays using physical business and rapid crosstalk to

satirise bourgeois manners of the time. They were called *grands vaudevilles*, and are the principal link between Molière and Feydeau, and the main influence on Feydeau's style. In his *grands vaudevilles*, Labiche worked consciously to develop character: the puppet-like figures of *An Italian Straw Hat* are the exception in his work. The comedy is motivated by each character's individuality as well as by the needs of the situation: obsession, irritation and obtuseness, and the misunderstandings they engender, motor every play.

Labiche's plots – and Feydeau's after him – were also crucially influenced by the then-current fashion for the 'well-made play'. In this, the plot (usually in three acts) begins with an exposition which tells us the background history of the characters and also that there is a secret whose discovery will change all their lives. It starts at normal pace, but gathers momentum irresistibly until the first-act curtain comes down on confusion (often caused by revelation of the secret in question). There follows a series of *quidproquos*: mistakes, ironies, deceptions, misunderstandings, which always lead to a reversal of the hero's situation, from heights to depths or vice versa. The third act then explores the way this reversal affects every other character, and tidies up loose ends. Thousands of serious 'well-made plays' were written in the late nineteenth century – Ibsen's prose tragedies are outstanding examples – and the style was a main theatrical form in France, seen at its best in the plays of Augier, Becque and Sardou and of course the farces of Labiche. It was particularly valuable to farce-writers, as its discipline corseted the raucousness of vaudeville, allowing slapstick and hilarity to co-exist with a sustained satirical assault on bourgeois morality and convention.

Although Feydeau's main debt is to Labiche, he also learned from three contemporaries in particular. Maurice Hennequin, in the 1870s and 1880s, had great success with lunatic-action farces, successions of non-sequitur dialogue and slapstick confrontation – the original 'doors' French farces and the models for many of Feydeau's second acts (such as that of *Le Dindon*). Henri Meilhac, 'the Marivaux of the

boulevards', and his collaborator Louis Halévy, wrote, among other things, the books for Offenbach's mythological burlesques, and were masters of the difficult art of letting characters speak apparently airy, natural dialogue while actually articulating the most extravagant passions and bizarre ideas. Their scripts flow as evenly and seamlessly as Hennequin's are unpredictable, and their influence can be seen particularly in Feydeau's opening acts, and in the way he brings back dialogue-interest in his third acts, restoring a kind of urbanity which, while never less funny, produces a welcome change of pace from the breakneck slapstick of the second acts.

Feydeau's mastery of the conventions of the well-made play – not to mention his audience's familiarity with the form – allowed him to ironise and parody both it and its component parts, to deal easily and farcically with subjects which, handled by serious dramatists at the same period, evoked howls of outrage and embarrassment. Impotence, for example, is a subsidiary theme in Act Three of *Sauce for the Goose* (where it arises, if that is the word, from Redillon's sexual exhaustion) and it motivates the whole plot of *A Flea in Her Ear* (where, because Chandebise is impotent, his wife suspects – quite wrongly – that he is 'spending himself' with a lover). Another serious subject which runs through all the plays, to the point of obsession, is the status of women: their equality with men and their 'power' within society and especially within marriage and the household. Feydeau's plots may revolve around adulterous intrigues (or, rather, would-be or mistakenly-suspected-to-be adulterous intrigues), but the meat of the plays is often the way a wife takes control, asserts her individual dignity, even sanity, in a lunatic world. Invariably, he gives his women more richness of character than his men; the men bluster, scheme and flail, while the women change and grow. This gives his plays a dimension lacking in other farces – even in such masterpieces as (in English) *The Rivals* or *The Importance of Being Earnest* – and links them with such later writers as Orton, who explores what might be called the condition of psychological anarchy, or

Ayckbourn, in whose plays psychological inadequacy is a recurring theme. It is the essence of farce that such serious matters – indeed any serious matters – should not obtrude, that silliness should rule. But audiences leave a Feydeau play sated in a different way from most other farces, and I believe one of the main reasons is the way he touches on the darkness in human life and the unpredictable obsession not only at the surface but deep down in human character.

Each of the plays included in these two volumes shows a different aspect of Feydeau's art. *Jailbird* (*Gibier de potence*) is an early work, first performed in 1883, at a semi-private theatre club, organised by the twenty-one-year-old author and like-minded friends. It was one item in a miscellaneous programme of monologues, comic songs and daft poems; Feydeau himself directed and took the part of Plumard. The piece shows occasional apprentice touches: the inconsequentiality of some of the jokes, for example, climaxing in the very last line of all, suggests a group of students giggling together rather than a single-minded artist fully in control of his effects. But the themes of Feydeau's major works are all here, and the misunderstandings and dazzle of the dialogue show his mastery even at this early age. In particular, the 'unmasking' scene and the scene where Lemercier and Taupinier try to outboast one another as assassins stand with his most lunatic, most felicitous inventions.

Pig in a Poke (*Chat en poche*) was first performed in 1888, a year after Feydeau's first big 'hit', *Tailleur pour dames*. It is a masterpiece of construction, not so much an arch as continuous escalation of confusion – and the Meilhac/Halévy influence is especially noticeable, in that the characters' apparently ordinary dialogue (the kind of language you might have heard in any drawing room of the time) belies the astounding content of what the people are saying or the thoughts inside their heads. Examples of Feydeau's scintillating stagecraft in this play are his careful, almost Ibsenish control over the escalation of the daftness in the first act, the

counterpointing in Act Two of the Winstanley/Julie story with the main plot, and the way he keeps back the play's major surprise, the Sistine Chapel business, until the last act, just when we might think that the comic possibilities of the situation had been exhausted. *Pig in a Poke* may be chamber music compared to the grand symphonic structures of *A Flea in Her Ear* or *The Girl from Maxim's*, but it is also one of his most accomplished works.

Now You See It (*Le Système Ribadier*, written in collaboration with Hennequin in 1892), a darker comedy altogether, subverts the vaudeville tradition, even as it follows it, letting the men's obsessions turn them into mechanistic puppets – in a manner English readers may associate with Orton's characters in *Loot* or *What the Butler Saw* – while the heroine's character and personality flower before our eyes. It has one of the smallest casts and tightest construction of any Feydeau farce. It was one of the author's own favourite plays and he revived it in 1909 under a new title, *Nothing Known.*

The One That Got Away (*Monsieur chasse!*, 1892) is a fine example of Feydeau's 'demented clockwork' style of plotting, an effect much heightened by the smallness of the cast. Act One sets up a dozen criss-crossing situations, and shows us a group of people each of whom has something to hide from at least two of the others. Act Two brings all these people together in a situation where they should never, ever, meet, and is a frenzy of mistaken identities, mock-tragic dialogue and slapstick action involving doors, a closet, a double-bed, a man in underwear and a police chase. (Feydeau, who directed his own plays, always made his actors perform the dialogue of such scenes with utmost seriousness, as if they were high tragedy; the action, by contrast, was speeded up, heightened and mechanistic. Dislocation between the two styles made for hilarity – a production-method still followed in France, where Feydeau's farces are performed in rotation at the Comédie Française, but curiously seldom observed in English-language productions, perhaps because our farce-traditions tend more towards the end of the pier in one direction or 'high comedy' in the other.) Act Three picks up

all the dangling loose ends from Act Two, further twists them and then untangles them while at the same time resolving the 'serious' issues of the play: Duchotel's infidelity and the suspicions of Léontine which set the action spinning in Act One.

Sauce for the Goose (*Le Dindon*), which enjoyed a long run at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal in 1896, is a characteristic 'well-made' *grand vaudeville*, with a lunatic second act framed by gentler material. It is, however, driven by character. Each person is clearly individuated and the differences between Redillon and Potagnac or Lucienne and Clotilde make the point that two individuals can share the same approach to life, or the same response to unexpected events, but show it in entirely different ways. Both this play and *Heart's Desire Hotel* (*L'Hôtel du libre échange*), which dates from two years earlier, make use of the hotel setting in order to create a space situated half-way between the private and the public, a space where desires which cannot be spoken of in a polite bourgeois salon emerge and press for satisfaction. Both plays make hilarious use of rooms with several doors, some of which allow for escape, while others lead only into cupboards or bathrooms. And both plays benefit from the sense that hotel guests have of being constantly observed, even spied on, by people they hardly know. *Heart's Desire Hotel* is justly one of the most famous comedies of assumed identity in the repertoire; the fact that the only couple to achieve any satisfaction is the young Maxime and Victoire, while the older characters remain frightened and frustrated, is entirely in keeping with the traditions of farce going back to classical times.

In most of Feydeau's plays the characters are drawn from middle-class society, but the plot of *The Girl From Maxim's* (*La Dame de chez Maxim*, Théâtre des Nouveautés, 1899) turns on a liaison – or rather two liaisons – between representatives of the respectable middle classes and a show-girl named 'Shrimp' (*la môme crevette* in Feydeau's original). After a series of *quidproquos*, all set off as usual by the terrified attempts of

the respectable married man to find a way out of the embarrassing situation his sex drive, combined with a lot of drink, has landed him in, it is the show-girl who saves the day by her cool-headedness and lack of personal pretensions. In this respect, both this play and *She's All Yours* (*La Main passe*, Théâtre des Nouveautés, 1904) come close to the Naturalist plays of the period in which bourgeois hypocrisy, especially in sexual matters, was satirised in more serious dramatic form. The characters of *She's All Yours* are recognisable people, who might be part of a play by Galsworthy. They are trying to come to terms with the modern world (as the play opens Chanal is trying to record a message on a phonograph) and the dilemmas into which they get themselves are at least partly due to their chronic inability to communicate with one another that recalls Chekhov.

A Flea in Her Ear (*La Puce à l'oreille*) was one of Feydeau's greatest successes with the Paris public. It was first produced in 1907 at the Théâtre des Nouveautés, which had become the favourite venue for Feydeau's larger-scale plays. It attracted rave notices, critics commenting on its dazzle of speed and movement (particularly in Act Two), and calling it a classic. It had to be taken off when the character actor Torin, for whom Feydeau had specifically written the role of Camille, died unexpectedly. But it had a triumphant revival in 1915 and has since travelled the world, being considered one of the most perfectly constructed of all Feydeau's farces, a model for the form. Its handling of the theme of impotence with such consummate comic flair made it particularly successful in Britain, the USA and Scandinavia – perhaps the puritan inheritance makes sexual impotence an especially embarrassing topic in these countries – indeed this play has, somewhat unjustly, all but eclipsed Feydeau's other plays.

Translation

Translating farce is risky. We are dealing not just with a foreign country, whose customs and manners are only superficially like our own, but with foreign slang, foreign

preconceptions and foreign ideas of funniness. This is a major part of the appeal, but it can also give the plays, in translation, a kind of exotic, pseudo-literary gloss lacking in the original. Gogol's *The Government Inspector* is a case in point. Its humour depends on a clear view of Russian small-town society at a particular moment in time, and the attitudes of people of that place and time to each other, to visitors, dignitaries and servants, are vital to the jokes. But to go at it head-on, to assume that the audience will know, or pick up, every nuance, would be to produce a play in English whose oddness baffled as often as it seduced. The results might be funny, but would weight the play in a way quite different from the original: it would become first and foremost a literary work, a critique, rather than a piece of straightforward stage entertainment. I have seen foreign-language versions of Ben Travers which unwittingly give the same impression. An alternative method of translation, regularly followed in Britain until the 1960s, is to resite the farce in a local setting, to English it. (In 1896 *Now You See It* was performed in Drury Lane in a version resetting it among the English aristocracy; in 1959 Coward similarly reworked *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* as *Look after Lulu!*) This process of adaptation sanitises the foreignness, but it can also choke the original motor of the humour, replacing the original preconceptions and 'givens' with notions from entirely another place and time.

In this volume, I have treated each of the plays slightly differently, though my purpose has been the same each time: to try to recapture the effect I think Feydeau was aiming at, in a form instantly understandable by modern English-speaking audiences. The translation of *Sauce for the Goose* is ninety-eight per cent meticulous. The first exception is the title. *Le Dindon*, to a French audience, means not only 'the turkey' but also the standard farce fall-guy, the character on whom every indignity is dumped – including, in this case, the reversal of fortune on which a 'well-made' play depends. Potagnac's last line, in the original, is, 'It was written [in the stars]: I'm the dindon' – and so he is. The second exception is the characters

of Brünnhilde and Soldignac. In the original they are English, and speak a kind of strangulated, invented English which must have been hilarious in 1890s France but doesn't work in 1990s Britain. I began by giving them the kind of plum-in-the-mouth English we are used to in farce, but found that this made them more complex than the simple 'volcanoes' Feydeau had in mind, overbalancing their scenes. In the end I made them German, or rather cod-German, as fake as Feydeau's original English.

Pig in a Poke combines farce and comedy of manners, and it seemed to me that a rigid but unspoken social framework ought to underlie the action. Although that of the original (bourgeois Paris of the *belle époque*) is remote from us, it is paralleled in Edwardian England, and I accordingly reset the play in Camberwell in 1909. Since this made nonsense of Pennyfeather's original home (southern France), I transposed him first of all to Wales and then, because this hardly seemed exotic enough, to South America. The play also depends, in part, on the absurdities and pretensions of 'polite language' (which is constantly undercut by the basic situation); for this reason I slightly formalised my English, leaning a little towards the style of Pinero, Grundy, or other farce-writers of the period. When I began work on *Now You See It*, I took notice of Shaw's criticism of the 1896 English production mentioned above. He said that the play would be strengthened if it were dovetailed from three acts to two, and if the action were 'rotated' so as to be seen from the wife's point of view rather than those of the husband or lover. When I tried this, I found that it highlighted Feydeau's exposition of her character, making its development central to the plot. I reinforced this by making Summersby (Ribadier in the original) not merely a pompous, hypocritical businessman but an MP working, officially at least, for female emancipation. I made Shaftesbury-Phipps (Thommereux in the original) come home from India, the British Empire, rather than from Batavia, the Dutch Empire. And finally, I replaced two tiny Feydeau characters, a maid and butler, with the invented character of Oriole. Satisfyingly, despite these shifts and

redirections, it was possible to leave most of Feydeau's original dialogue intact.

Kenneth McLeish, June 1993
(with additional material by David Bradby)

Translator's note: the original French texts, prepared from the prompt script, were full of indications of the actors' moves in the first production ('he goes two steps up left'; 'she sits' and so on). I have pruned these to a minimum, keeping suggested blocking and business only when they seem integral to character or action.

Kenneth McLeish's great passion was for comedy, and he delighted in the skills it demanded from everyone involved. He intended that these plays should be dedicated to all those professionals and amateurs who worked with him over many years to make people laugh. Kenneth also wanted to thank David and Justin Bassett for technical advice in *The One That Got Away*. I am very grateful to David Bradby for his work in completing the introduction.

Valerie McLeish, 2000

This page intentionally left blank

Heart's Desire Hotel

L'Hôtel du libre échange

Characters

Pinglet, *an engineer*
Angélique, *his wife*
Paillardin, *an architect*
Marcelle, *his wife*
Maxime, *a student of philosophy*
Victoire, *the housemaid*
Mathieu, *a visitor*
His daughters
Bastien
Boulot
Ernest, *an acrobat*
Ernest's woman companion
Chervet, *an angry man*
Inspector Boucard
Constables
Porters

The action is set in Paris, in the 1890s. Acts One and Three take place in Pinglet's house, Act Two in Heart's Desire Hotel.

Act One

The studio of **Pinglet***'s house in Passy, on the outskirts of Paris. Centre back, a large bay window, opening on the garden. R, the doors to* **Angélique***'s bedroom and to the entrance hall; L, the door of* **Pinglet***'s bedroom. Upstage C, an elegant drawing-board, flanked by a high stool and covered with papers, plans, pens, pencils, water-colours, rulers, a set-square and other draughtsman's tools, plus a city directory. Upstage L, a glass-doored sideboard filled with samples of tiles and different kinds of stone. Against the wall, a desk covered with books and scattered plans, a writing-set and a vase of flowers; above it on the wall, a mirror and above that a rack with still more plans. Down R, sofa, writing-desk; between the two doors, R, a wall-clock hung and a filing cabinet; bell-pull. Armchairs; chairs. The walls are hung with framed plans and plaster casts of mouldings, corniches and other architectural features.*

As the curtain rises, **Pinglet** *is working at his drawing-board. His back is to the audience, and he is humming and singing to himself.*

Pinglet Hm, hm, hm, the sweet spring . . . hm, hm, pretty birdies sing . . . hm, hm, hm, bells ring ding-a-ling . . .

Enter **Angélique**. *She is holding two samples of dress-material.*

Angélique (*sharply*) Pinglet!

Pinglet (*without turning*) My little cabbage?

Angélique The dressmaker's arrived.

Pinglet (*over his shoulder*) What of it, sweetness? (*He goes back to work.*)

Angélique For heaven's sake pay attention when I'm talking.

Pinglet (*aside*) Here we go again. (*Aloud.*) Light of my life, you don't understand. This is urgent work: the plans I'm doing with Paillardin. The new house.

Angélique The house can wait.

Pinglet Whatever you say.

Angélique (*showing him the samples*) She wants me to choose. This one or that one.

Pinglet Hm. For curtains?

Angélique For an evening dress.

Pinglet I prefer . . . that one.

Angélique Fine. I'll have the other.

Pinglet So kind of you to ask.

Angélique Don't be silly. I ask because I know you've no idea. It's foolproof. Whatever you choose, I choose the opposite.

Pinglet (*aside*) What *was* I thinking of?

Angélique Don't just stand there. Get on with your work.

Pinglet Yes, sweet one.

Angélique *makes a face at him and exit.*

Pinglet Slave-driver. (*To himself.*) Well, it's your own stupid fault. The whole family said 'No', and you said, 'I will, I love her so.' 'I love her so.' (*Back to his drawing-board.*) Twenty years. If we could see what they turn into after twenty years, we'd agree with our families. No, no, no. Too dark to work. (*At the window.*) It's pouring. (*Facing the audience.*) Well, *my* son's not getting married. Not if *I* say 'No'. (*Beat.*) If I ever have a son. And I won't. What, Angélique and I, we should . . . ? No, no, no.

Knock at the door.

Come in!

Enter **Marcelle**. **Pinglet** *goes delightedly to greet her.*

Pinglet Madame Paillardin! Come in.

Marcelle (*flirting*) Tut, tut, Monsieur Pinglet. In a

dressing-gown, in front of a lady?

Pinglet (*full of good humour*) Not a lady: a friend, a neighbour. No need to stand on ceremony.

Marcelle Madame's gone out?

Pinglet Locked in conference with her dressmaker. How's Paillardin?

Marcelle Don't ask.

Pinglet (*taking her hands and looking into her eyes*) Something's wrong.

Marcelle No it's not.

Pinglet Yes it is. You've been crying.

Marcelle It's nothing. Same as always. An argument.

Pinglet Poor sweet girl. Did he . . . shout?

Marcelle If he'd shouted, it would have been all right. He never shouts. I mean less to him than a pair of old slippers. I don't want to talk about it. Where's Angélique?

Pinglet In there. Now don't you worry, I'll have a word with him.

Marcelle No. You'll make things worse. It'd be like . . . like teaching the violin to a one-armed man.

Exit.

Pinglet (*to himself, looking after her*) What a woman. Ah. (*To himself.*) Hah. Your wife says you're past it. And so you are, with her. Who wouldn't be? (*Going back to his drawing-board.*) That poor young girl. And him, that husband, that . . . cockroach of a man. (*Gazing out front, in a reverie.*) Paillardin, your oldest and dearest friend. If you can't call him a cockroach, who can? (*Back to work.*) If only he *wasn't* your oldest, dearest friend . . . and if only she . . . she . . . You mustn't. You're not a Red Indian. You can't do that to your oldest friend, just for a scalp. But

what a scalp . . . ! (*Spreading out a plan, hastily.*) Back to work. To work. What's Mr Cockroach suggesting? Sandstone. *Sandstone?* It's a load-bearing wall. He's joking . . .

He unrolls and compares a plan of his own.

Head in the air. They're all the same. Fancy ideas, no grounding. No science. If we engineers weren't there to . . .

He paces, pondering.

Sandstone! Load-bearing. (*Different tone.*) But what a wife. What a woman.

Enter **Paillardin**.

Paillardin Morning, Pinglet. I'm not disturbing you . . . ?

Pinglet Not at all. In fact . . . this plan . . .

Paillardin What about it?

Pinglet You've suggested sandstone. Here, look. It's load-bearing.

Paillardin So it is. What would you have used?

Pinglet I don't know. Aggregate.

Paillardin (*shrugging*) Aggregate. Bad for bonding.

Pinglet Granite, then. Anything but sandstone.

Paillardin (*as before*) Granite. Pricey.

Pinglet Oh, for heaven's sake! Diorite, andesite, rhyolite, quartzite, basalt, gabbro –

Paillardin You sound like an encyclopaedia.

Pinglet I haven't finished. Portland, Parian, Carrara

Paillardin Now you sound like a gazetteer. What does it matter, so long as it takes the weight?

Pinglet Takes the weight! That's the whole point. You're such a dreamer. You're all dreamers. Architects. If it wasn't for us engineers . . .

Paillardin (*sitting on the sofa*) Yes, whatever you say. Have you seen Marcelle?

Pinglet Marcelle?

Paillardin My wife.

Pinglet I know she's your wife.

Paillardin But have you seen her?

Pinglet She's in there, with mine. That reminds me: what is it you've done to her?

Paillardin What did she say I've done?

Pinglet She didn't. You've only got to look at her.

Paillardin (*in a bored tone*) I don't know. I'm fed up with it. First one thing, then another. What does she want? I don't have affairs. I don't have a string of mistresses.

Pinglet A string of mistresses! There's more to marriage than that.

Paillardin So people keep telling me. I do my best. And she's still not satisfied. Says I'm not *nice* to her.

Pinglet Well, you aren't. Why aren't you?

Paillardin We have to be nice, as well as faithful? Huh! Are you nice to yours?

Pinglet Oh come on. Twenty years . . .

Paillardin They improve with age.

Pinglet Wines improve with age. Not wives. Mine's . . . corked.

Paillardin Well, mine isn't. Not after just five years. Mind you, it feels like a lifetime. *Nice*! If it's *nice* you want, get a mistress, not a wife.

Pinglet Charming.

Paillardin Look, I'm an architect, an artist. I work hard all day, drawing plans, visiting building-sites . . . I get home exhausted, I fall into bed, I sleep. I need it. But does she see that? Of course she doesn't. *Nice!*

Pinglet Don't go on.

Paillardin All that honeymoon stuff. I didn't get married for honeymoon stuff. It's not my style.

Pinglet (*laughing*) All right, all right. You've made your point. You're an iceberg.

Paillardin So what are you? A tropical island?

Pinglet Exactly. The molten core . . . the lava, pulsing, pulsing . . . the eruption! Well, I would if I had a crater.

Paillardin You see. You're no volcano.

Pinglet I'm a bigger one than you are.

Paillardin What d'you mean?

Pinglet You don't go in for lava. You said so.

Paillardin So?

Pinglet So a volcano without lava isn't a volcano. It's a . . . it's a . . . leaky mountain.

Paillardin (*shrugging*) Whatever you say. Look, I came round to ask . . . Can I borrow Victoire?

Pinglet Victoire?

Paillardin Your housemaid.

Pinglet You don't need a housemaid.

Paillardin She's not for me. She's for Maxime. My nephew, Maxime.

Pinglet But he's a student.

Paillardin That's why he needs Victoire.

Pinglet Charming.

Paillardin No, no, no, no, no. He's studying philosophy.

Pinglet At his age? What'll he do when he grows up?

Paillardin (*patiently*) His term starts tomorrow. He goes back tonight. To his lodgings. He needs someone to unpack for him. I gave all my staff the day off, weeks ago. So I need Victoire.

Pinglet Why can't you unpack for him?

Paillardin I'm far too busy. In any case, I'm sleeping in town tonight.

Pinglet Ahah!

Paillardin By myself.

Pinglet Oh really?

Paillardin Yes. Yes! In some ghastly little hotel. Haunted. Or so they say. Poltergeists.

Pinglet No such thing.

Paillardin Exactly. I don't believe in them. Show me a poltergeist, I don't believe in it. It's the pipes. Underground pipes. Knocking.

Pinglet Obviously.

Paillardin But the owner doesn't agree. Wants his rates lowered. The council won't budge. The court's called me. Expert witness. I'm to spend a night there, see what's going on.

Pinglet Gas-pipes. Air-bubbles.

Paillardin Could be.

He gets up to go.

Pinglet Just a minute. This is what it's about. You and your wife.

Paillardin Don't remind me. She's been after me all day. 'You're always out. You're never in. You never spend time with me.' I'm an architect. We don't spend time with wives.

Pinglet Whatever you say. But be careful. Someone else might . . .

Paillardin Someone else might what?

Pinglet It's none of my business. But you're playing with fire. Wives . . . especially your wife . . . they like romance. I'm not suggesting that *you* . . . I'm just saying, don't be surprised if she finds someone else . . .

Paillardin You're joking. My wife? A lover? What d'you think this is, a Feydeau farce?

Pinglet Whatever you say.

Paillardin I *do* say.

Pinglet Your wife . . . a lover . . . what am I thinking of? (*Aside.*) What *am* I thinking of?

Knock at the door.

Come in!

Enter **Maxime,** *a studious lad holding a book.*

Paillardin Ah, Maxime.

Maxime Hello, Nunkie. Sorry if I'm –

Pinglet You aren't, you aren't.

Paillardin What's the matter?

Maxime The thing is, Monsieur Pinglet, I must have . . . I wonder if I . . . you haven't found it? . . . I bought it yesterday . . . a Russell.

Pinglet A rustle? My dear young man, what d'you mean, a rustle? Of what?

Maxime Pardon?

Pinglet You have to have a rustle of something. *Rustle of Spring,* perhaps?

Maxime Not rustle, Russell. The writer.

Pinglet Detective stories, of course. You should have said.

Maxime The philosopher.

Pinglet Philosophical detective stories. Exactly.

Maxime I don't understand.

Pinglet Like architects and engineers. (*With a look at* **Paillardin**.) *Some* of us can be both at once.

Maxime Did I leave it here?

Pinglet Oh. No.

Maxime I need it. Apparently it refutes Bergson's *On the Passions.* I'm doing that for an essay. (*He holds up the book he's reading.*)

Paillardin Passion, eh?

Pinglet You young rascal, hey?

Maxime (*huffily*) It isn't that at all.

He goes upstage.

Paillardin Now look what you've done.

Pinglet Me? I asked him a civil question. If you're learning billiards, you read a book called *On billiards.* So, if you're reading a book *On Passion* . . . Everyone has to learn.

Enter **Victoire**.

Victoire Monsieur . . .

Pinglet What is it?

Victoire Madame needs Monsieur.

Pinglet There's always a first time.

Victoire She's tried on her new dress, and she'd like Monsieur's opinion.

Pinglet (*to* **Paillardin**) Damn nuisance. (*To* **Victoire**.) She never accepts it. You know that. She never . . . oh, all right.

Paillardin (*to* **Maxime**, *who is rooting about in drawers*) What are you *doing*?

Maxime Looking for *Passion,* Nunkie.

Pinglet Well you won't find it in there. Not in *my* drawers. Victoire, you haven't seen it, have you? A book. Hustle, bustle, some such name.

Maxime Russell, Monsieur.

Pinglet Well, Russell. Hustle, bustle, they're all the same.

Paillardin He never could spell.

Victoire I haven't seen it, Monsieur.

Maxime I'll have to buy another one.

Pinglet By the way, Victoire, I'd like you to go with Monsieur Maxime to his digs this evening.

Victoire I'd love to, Monsieur.

Pinglet Don't bother loving to, just go. What time, Maxime?

Maxime We have to be in by nine.

Pinglet Nine-ish, then. All right, Victoire?

Victoire Oh yes, Monsieur.

She goes to tidy papers on the table. **Maxime** *reads.*

Paillardin Thanks.

Pinglet A pleasure.

Angélique (*off*) Are you coming or aren't you?

Pinglet My little temptress. (*Calling off.*) Coming, beloved! (*To* **Paillardin**.) You come as well. Give her your opinion. (*Pushing him off.*) Just keep your face straight.

Paillardin All right.

Exeunt.

Maxime (*reading*) 'Love is a sensation of the spirit occasioned by the attraction of animal spirits to like-minded and appropriate objects.' (*Fervently.*) That's so *good*!

Victoire (*leaning on the table*). Monsieur Maxime . . .

Maxime Yes?

Victoire What are you doing?

Maxime Learning about passion.

Victoire In that position? (*Aside.*) Isn't he divine? (*Aloud.*) I'll help if you like.

Maxime You've studied passion?

Victoire Hasn't everyone?

Maxime You know Bergson?

Victoire Never met him.

Maxime You don't understand.

Victoire You don't want me to help you?

She strokes his knee.

Maxime You're distracting me.

Victoire Don't you like it?

Maxime I didn't say that. I said, you're distracting me. (*Aside.*) What does she *want*?

Victoire It's rude to read when someone else is there.

Maxime I'm not reading. I'm studying. And how can I

study passion, if women keep distracting me?

He sits on the sofa.

Victoire I never heard that before.

Maxime (*reading*) 'There are two kinds of passion, (a) protective and (b) predatory. The love of a father for his children in no way resembles that of a lover for his mistress. Their only point of resemblance is that both are forms of passion. However . . .'

He moves to the other end of the sofa from her.

'However, all emotion of the second kind is subsumed in category (b), and its entire object is predatory, that is to say, for possession . . .' (*To her.*) I say, that's rather nice.

Victoire (*who is stroking him*) Really?

Maxime Ra-ther. Don't stop. (*Reading.*) 'The first category, (a), by contrast, that of a father and his children, in no way involves the impulse for consummation by subsumption . . .'

Victoire Isn't that lucky?

Maxime 'It involves, for example, the entire subsumption of their good in his good.'

Victoire (*stroking his hair*) How sweet, how sweet, oh sweetikins.

Maxime Please. Stroke, but don't talk.

Victoire Monsieur Maxime, has anyone ever told you how . . . attractive you are?

Maxime What? I don't think so. No, wait . . .

Victoire Who?

Maxime When I had my photo taken. I'd ordered a dozen prints. The chappie said, 'An attractive young fellow like yourself. An Adonis. You'll need three dozen.' So I took three dozen.

Victoire Photographers don't count.

She goes back to stroking his hair.

Maxime Except when they're counting your cash. (*Reading.*) 'In a certain sense, it's a purely mercantile transaction.'

She bursts out laughing, and stops stroking his hair. He notices, and looks at her. She starts again. He reads again, or tries to.

'Mercantile, that is, in the sense that it involves two beings coming together for mutual benefit.'

Victoire What do *you* think, Monsieur Maxime?

Maxime About what?

Victoire Things not in the book.

Maxime Good grief, it doesn't tell me *everything.*

Victoire Well, shut it, then.

She shuts it, enclosing his hands in hers.

A young man like you doesn't need books for love. When you learn to swim, you don't sit on the bank, reading. You dive straight in. So . . . dive.

She takes it and sits beside him.

Maxime (*aside*). What's she *doing*?

Victoire (*taking him by the shoulders*) Let me look at you. Look what the cat brought in.

She straightens his clothes.

Those horrible glasses.

She removes them.

Can't you see just as well without them?

Maxime Better!

Victoire And the way you brush your hair. Really,

when Nature makes a man so . . . and he chooses to . . .

She arranges his hair. He closes his eyes.

Maxime I say, that's really rather nice.

Victoire (*pushing him away*) Now, now.

Maxime The hair, I mean the hair.

Victoire So do I. (*Aside.*) I do! (*To him.*) There. Look in the mirror. Doesn't that look better?

Maxime Oh, yes. (*Admiring himself.*) Ohhh . . . yessss.

Victoire There you are, then.

Maxime A great improvement.

Absent-mindedly, he puts his glasses back on, straightens his hair, sits down and takes up the book.

'It may even be a more caring relationship, in that it involves looking after others as if they were oneself.'

Victoire (*throwing up her hands*) Oh, for heaven's sake.

Maxime 'The objects can be totally unaware . . .'

Victoire (*coldly*) Excuse me, Monsieur.

Maxime (*engrossed in the book*) Nine-ish.

Victoire Nine-ish.

Maxime (*looking up*) What's the matter?

Victoire Nothing. Nothing in all the world.

Exit. He's back in his book already.

Maxime 'In the same way, many human beings . . .'

Noise, off. He puts his hands over his ears and tries again.

'Human beings . . . feel affection of the (b) category as well as of the (a) . . .'

Enter **Marcelle**, **Angélique**, **Paillardin** *and* **Pinglet**.

Marcelle *is furious.*

Marcelle Oh! Oh!

Paillardin Sweetheart, what's the matter?

Marcelle I hate you, that's the matter.

Angélique Ha! 'Sweetheart.' Wait till you've had twenty years of it, like me.

Pinglet What d'you mean, like you? I've been so *nice* to you.

Paillardin (*to* **Marcelle**) So have I.

The women (*each to her own husband*) Nice! Huh! Nice!

The men Pre-cisely.

The women You call that nice?

The men Ex-actly.

The women Hah!

The row continues. **Maxime** *gets up, shouts above the racket.*

Maxime Excuse me. I'm trying to read. I'm off.

Exit.

Marcelle I was just saying . . . Oh, he's gone. I was just saying, why did I ever marry a husband who hasn't the faintest idea what a husband should have an idea . . . of.

Paillardin (*beside himself*) Well, really!

Marcelle He doesn't want a wife, he wants a housekeeper, a gardener, a pair of slippers. Nothing else. A chattel, that's what I am, a chattel.

Angélique Poor darling. A chattel. There.

Paillardin She's exaggerating. You don't understand.

Angélique Don't understand? After twenty years of . . . Monsieur? Ha! If he'd ever tried that on me . . . If he'd

just once tried . . .

Paillardin (*aside to* **Pinglet**) Not even once?

Pinglet (*aside to him*) *She's* exaggerating.

Paillardin (*to* **Marcelle**) What is it you want? Tell me, what is it you want? I'm not to go tonight, is that it? My poltergeists?

Marcelle Go, go, who's stopping you? Go, stay, it's all the same to me.

Paillardin What is it you *want?*

Marcelle A change. A proper relationship. Married to you, it's a miracle I've never . . .

Paillardin What?

Pinglet No, she's right, she hasn't.

Paillardin You stay out of this.

Marcelle I haven't, but I could. Any time I liked. Find someone . . . someone *nice* . . .

Paillardin You?

Marcelle You don't have to be pretty to find admirers.

Paillardin (*laughing*) Just as well. Go on, then. Find one.

Marcelle Don't encourage me. I know where to look.

Paillardin Go on, then. Look. Who's stopping you?

Angélique Stop annoying her.

Paillardin Me? Tell her to stop annoying me. And tell her to find one. Someone *nice.* If she does, he can keep her.

Marcelle Oh!

Pinglet (*to her*) He's crazy. (*To him.*) You're crazy. (*To us all.*) He's crazy.

Marcelle Like that, is it. All right! All . . . right!

Paillardin Go on, then. Go.

Angélique Come on, give her a kiss, make up.

Paillardin You're joking.

He stalks to the door. **Angélique** *goes after him.*

Angélique Monsieur Paillardin . . .

Pinglet (*at the door*) You've gone too far, Henri. You've really gone too far.

But **Paillardin** *and* **Angélique** *have gone.* **Marcelle** *sits on the sofa, still furious.*

Marcelle You see how he treats me. How he talks to me. I've had enough of it.

Pinglet (*blurting it out*) Marcelle, Marcelle, I love you.

Marcelle Pardon?

Pinglet I can't keep it in a moment longer. You saw, just now . . . I said all I could, I tried to warn him, I called him Henri . . .

Marcelle I saw.

Pinglet I told him he'd gone too far. He wouldn't listen. He went. Fine. Let him go. You saw. And you saw what he said when you said you wanted to find someone nice . . . 'Go on, then,' he said. 'Go on, then. Go!' He did!

Marcelle He did.

Pinglet You can't say there's no one. There's me. There's me.

Marcelle You mean you –

Pinglet With my own eyes, I saw him. He challenged you. Fine: I take up the challenge. 'Go on, find a lover,'

he said. I accept the challenge. I'll do it. I'll be your lover.

Marcelle You mean you –

Pinglet Exactly! No one challenges a lady in front of me, and gets away with it. My best friend. It's appalling. But . . . chivalry must come first. A lady's good name . . . her honour . . . Marcelle, Marcelle, I love you.

He tries to embrace her.

Marcelle Monsieur Pinglet. No. My wifely duty –

Pinglet Wifely duty! Poor darling. A rose, a rose in a gilded cage. Marcelle, sweetness, there are moments in our journey through life, when we have to throw our duty out of the window.

Marcelle Really?

Pinglet Take me, for example. Take Madame Pinglet. Am I letting her stand in my way? Of course I'm not. There's duty, and there's . . . higher duty.

Marcelle You're right.

Pinglet He challenged us, and when a man's challenged, it's women and children first . . . no, devil take the hindmost . . . no, I mean . . . We must!

Marcelle We must.

Pinglet We must.

He takes her by the hand and tries to lead her out. She resists.

Marcelle Monsieur, I can't.

Pinglet You must. This is no time for pusi . . . pusillan . . . cowardice. *Courage, mon brave!* Have you forgotten, he challenged you? Here on this very hearthrug?

Marcelle How could he?

Pinglet How can you think of your scruples, at a time like this. Did he? His scruples? Did he think of those?

Marcelle He didn't.

Pinglet He cast them to the winds. And when he cast them, he cast yours too.

Marcelle That's right.

Pinglet (*taking her hands*) The most beautiful young woman in all the world, and he takes her scruples and . . . tramples them!

Marcelle *cries. He wipes her eyes.*

Marcelle That's right. (*Taking her hanky from him.*) That's my hanky.

Pinglet He doesn't love you. He's never loved you. He isn't made for love.

Marcelle With a name like that! (*Seductively.*) Paillardin . . . Paillardin . . . (*Furious.*) Ha!

Pinglet (*in her ear*) He must be punished. Revenge must be taken. We must take it. And it must be huge.

Marcelle You're right. You know everything. Revenge. Huge revenge. Oh, yes.

Pinglet (*taking her in his arms*) There, there. I told you, I'm a man of honour. Not to mention tenderness . . . devotion . . . passion . . .

Marcelle (*full of emotion*) You may be ugly, but you're beautiful inside.

Pinglet Oh, thank you.

Marcelle You say such lovely things. If you'd said them an hour ago, I'd have thrown my scruples, then.

Pinglet Ah! At the psychological moment, one waits, one speaks.

Marcelle So now, I say: it's now. This is the moment. Speak!

Pinglet (*hugging her again*) Marcelle, my darling . . .

Angélique (*off*) Pinglet! Pinglet!

Pinglet Hooah! Reality, cold dawn . . . (*To* **Marcelle**, *who has broken free.*) Marcelle, my wife! It's now or never. Tonight, your husband's away, you're free. I'll make myself free as well . . .

Marcelle Oh yes.

Pinglet We'll go, together –

Marcelle Where?

Pinglet I don't know. I haven't decided. I'll tell you. Revenge. Don't forget, re – Shh! She's here.

They separate. Enter **Angélique**, *crossly.*

Angélique Where have you been? I've been looking everywhere. What a charmer your friend is, your Paillardin.

Pinglet Pardon, cabbage?

Angélique What charming manners! All I did was try to calm him down, explain a few things, and what did he say? 'Keep out of it. When I want you to interfere, I'll tell you.'

Marcelle That's him exactly.

Angélique His very words.

Pinglet To you?

Angélique To me.

Pinglet An older woman?

Angélique That's not the point! (*To* **Marcelle**.) It's you I'm sorry for. What a husband.

Marcelle Don't worry about me. I'm going to throw my –

Angélique What?

Marcelle Nothing.

Angélique If my husband ever so much as –

Pinglet Who, me? Beloved? Me?

Angélique No, you're right. You wouldn't.

Marcelle What would you do?

Angélique I'd take a lover.

Pinglet (*trying not to laugh*) I say, Angèlique. You wouldn't.

Angélique Of course I would.

Pinglet (*aside*) I can hardly wait.

Enter **Victoire**.

Victoire Madame, the postman's just come. He says he's left a parcel next door for Madame Marcelle.

Marcelle It'll be my new dress. You don't mind if I –

Angélique If you think dresses are the cure for a marriage in tatters. (*Kissing her cheek.*) Till later, then.

Marcelle Till later. (*To* **Pinglet**, *without inflexion.*) Till later.

Pinglet (*formally*) Till later. (*Then, urgently, aside to her.*) You do mean – ?

Marcelle Of course. (*Aside to the audience.*) He does like things clear.

Exit.

Victoire Madame, the post.

Angélique Bring it over here.

Pinglet Find somewhere. Quiet, discreet. Where? How do . . . ?

He knocks on the table as if to say, 'Got it!'

The street directory!

Angélique Don't make such a racket. I'm trying to read. Victoire, I won't be in to dinner.

Pinglet (*aside*) It's fate! (*Aloud.*) Not in to dinner? You'll be . . . ah . . . somewhere else?

Angélique I'll be in Ville d'Avray. With Marisette.

Pinglet Oh, Auntie.

Angélique She isn't well. See for yourself. (*She passes him the letter.*) I'll see how bad she is. I may have to stay the night. Have you got that? If I don't come back, I'm staying the night.

Pinglet Excellent. Excellent.

Angélique You understand, Victoire? Just one for dinner tonight: Monsieur.

Victoire Yes, Madame.

Exit. **Pinglet** *is thumbing through the street directory.*

Pinglet Hotels . . . hotels . . .

Angélique (*who has opened another letter*) Hm. Bill from the hatshop.

Pinglet (*triumphal shout*) Got it!

Angélique What d'you mean, Got it?

Pinglet Eh? Oh. I mean, 'Got it! The hatshop bill!'

Angélique *You* intend to pay it?

Pinglet No.

Angélique Then kindly don't shout about it.

Pinglet Whatever you say, beloved. (*To himself, reading.*) Hotel Thermidor . . . no. Hotel King Penguin . . . no.

Angélique (*who has opened yet another letter*) Well, really!

Pinglet What's the matter?

Angélique Leaflets. Hotel leaflets. What do I want with hotels like these?

Pinglet Hotels like what?

Angélique Just listen. 'Discretion guaranteed. Heart's Desire Hotel, 220 rue de Provence. Speciality: parliamentarians and married couples, together or separately. Full Room Service.'

Pinglet Full Room Service? Together or separately? It really says that?

Angélique See for yourself. (*She gives him the leaflet.*)

Pinglet So it does.

Angélique We all know what goes on *there.*

Pinglet Oh, we do. (*Aside.*) We do. (*Aloud, reading.*) 'Prices to fit every pocket.'

Angélique (*who is reading another leaflet*). 'Reductions for bulk purchase.' It's unbelievable.

Pinglet Well, strenuous. (*Aside.*) I'll keep it. (*He pockets the leaflet.*)

Angélique I'd like to give them a piece of my mind. Posting things like that.

Enter **Victoire**, *showing in* **Mathieu**.

Victoire This way, Monsieur.

Pinglet It's Mathieu. From last summer. Come in, come in.

Angélique How lovely to see you.

Mathieu *kisses her.*

Pinglet How very nice.

Angélique Do sit down.

Pinglet Give me your umbrella. Poor man, you're soaked.

Mathieu Thanks. I'm de . . . de . . .

Pinglet Pardon?

Mathieu I said I'm deedee, deedee . . .

Angélique No: Mathieu, Mathieu . . .

Mathieu No, no, I st . . . I st . . .

Pinglet Iced? What's he mean?

Mathieu You must be surprised to su . . . su . . . see me.

Pinglet What *is* the matter with him? My dear Mathieu, something dreadful's happened.

Mathieu Ha . . . ha . . . How?

Pinglet I mean, you can hardly speak.

Angélique You were perfectly all right when we stayed with you last summer.

Mathieu Last su . . . . su . . . Ah! It's because of the su . . . su . . .

Pinglet Su-su?

Mathieu Let me f . . . finish. Because of the su . . . su . . . (*Stamping his foot to get the word out, in a huge explosion.*) . . . Nshine. Sunshine.

Pinglet I'm sorry?

Mathieu Because of the su . . . su . . .

He stamps again. This time **Pinglet** *does the explosion.*

Pinglet Nshine. You said that . . .

Mathieu When there's su . . . . su . . .

Pinglet (*prompting him*) . . . Nshine . . .

Mathieu I speak quite normally.

Angélique How interesting.

Mathieu But when it's po . . . po . . . , when it's po . . . po . . . po . . .

Pinglet Post? Porcelain? Port? Any port in a storm?

Mathieu POURing . . .

Pinglet Just as good. Go on.

Mathieu That's when my pa . . . pa . . . , my pa . . . pa . . . , my pa . . . paHAH . . . pa . . .

Angélique Take your time.

Pinglet Your paHAH . . . pa . . .

Mathieu My pa-hah-ROBlems start.

Angélique How embarrassing.

Pinglet A human barometer.

Mathieu And as for li . . . li . . . , li . . . li . . . thunder-and-lightning – nothing.

Pinglet Nothing.

Mathieu Du . . . du . . .

Pinglet Dud?

Mathieu Dumb.

Pinglet No.

Mathieu Yes.

Pinglet Yes.

Mathieu A real ho . . . ho . . . , ho . . . ho . . .

Pinglet Very funny?

Mathieu Ho . . . ho . . . (*Stamping.*) OLDup in my profession.

Pinglet Ah. OLDup. Naturally. (*To* **Angélique**.) Holdup in his profession.

Angélique Well, he *is* a barrister. My dear Monsieur Mathieu, when it's raining, whatever do you do?

Mathieu I ask for a def . . . def . . . , a de . . . de . . . def . . .

Pinglet Deaf judge?

Mathieu Def . . . (*Stamping.*) ERRal.

Pinglet (*startled*) Oof. Thank goodness you don't live in India. You'd go out of business. Wet season.

Mathieu No dou . . . no dou . . . (*Stamping.*) BTofit.

Pinglet Well, anyway, it's wonderful to see you. After all this time!

Mathieu The pleasure's entirely my . . . my . . .

Pinglet Mymy?

Angélique Mine. The pleasure's entirely mine.

Pinglet No, his.

Mathieu That's right, my . . . my . . .

Pinglet Such a silver tongue.

Mathieu You said, last time we me . . . me . . . MET, 'If you're ever in Pa . . . pa . . . Paris, do come and see us. Stay as long as you wa . . . wa . . . WANT.' So here I am.

Pinglet Ah.

Angélique What a lovely surprise.

Pinglet Stay as long as you want, of course. Two days . . . three days . . . you can squeeze in three days?

Mathieu No.

Angélique Oh, please.

Pinglet I'm afraid you must.

Mathieu No, no.

Pinglet We'll have to insist.

Mathieu Not three day . . . day . . . DAYS, four weeks.

Pinglet *and* **Angélique** (*not quite so warmly*) Ah. Good. How nice.

Mathieu If you can put up with me that long.

Angélique Four weeks. A month.

Mathieu Unless you –

Angélique No, no. We wouldn't dream of . . . Unless you . . .

Mathieu No, no, no, no, no.

Pinglet Well, I'm glad that's settled.

Mathieu *takes off his raincoat. Meanwhile:*

Angélique (*aside to* **Pinglet**) It's too long. You'll have to tell him. We only stayed two weeks.

Pinglet (*aside to her*) But there were two of us. Two and two make four. (*To* **Mathieu**.) Mathieu! Ha, ha, ha.

Mathieu You're sure it's no trou . . . trou . . .

Pinglet Not the slightest trou-trou. We've plenty of room. I mean, you won't mind . . . bachelor quarters . . . just you, your one small suitcase . . .

Mathieu Aha. I've a little sur . . . sur . . . sur . . . (*Stamping.*) PRISE for you.

Pinglet (*to* **Angélique**) A little surprise for us.

Angélique How nice.

Enter **Victoire**.

Victoire Madame, there's a man with a trunk.

Mathieu That's the one.

Enter **Porter**, *with trunk. Exit* **Victoire**.

Porter Where d'you want it?

Mathieu Why don't you pu . . . pu . . .

Porter Poopoo. What's he saying?

Mathieu Pu . . . (*Stamping.*) TIT-there?

Porter Tit-there?

Pinglet Put it there. For heaven's sake. Don't you understand plain French?

Porter Right.

Helped by **Pinglet**, *he puts down the trunk.*

Mathieu How much do I owe you?

Porter Forty, mate.

Mathieu *pays.*

Angélique It's the biggest trunk I've ever seen.

Pinglet A portable bedroom. I mean, we'll put it in your bedroom.

Enter **Victoire**.

Victoire In here. Madame, the others are here.

Enter four more **Porters**, *with luggage.*

Mathieu They're mine.

Angélique Four of them. Why four?

Mathieu Because of the su . . . su . . . su . . . (*Stamping.*) Rprise.

Pinglet It's getting out of hand.

Angélique Why all this luggage? Does your surprise

need all this luggage?

Pinglet Perhaps the luggage *is* the surprise.

Mathieu I say . . . my dear fellow . . . I wonder if you'd . . . I've run out of change. For these good fe . . . fe . . . fe . . .

Pinglet (*stamping and finishing – on* **Mathieu***'s foot*) ELLows.

Mathieu Ow.

Pinglet Sorry. Right, you chaps. Here you are . . . and you . . . and you . . . and you . . . . and you . . . Now, go with this young woman, to the kitchen, and she'll find you each a beer.

Porters (*separately*) Right, mate. Thanks, mate. Cheers, mate.

Exeunt with **Victoire**.

Pinglet (*aside to* **Angélique**) One trunk, four suitcases. Quite a surprise. They do themselves well, down south.

Angélique We'll open them right away.

Mathieu Pardon?

Angélique For the surprise.

Mathieu No, no, no.

Angélique We're not to open them?

Mathieu The luggage is for la . . . la . . . (*Stamping.*) ATER.

Pinglet (*who has stamped as well, but too late*) Missed! This is ridiculous.

Angélique If you want us to wait, of course we'll wait. But it's only fair to warn you, we've seen the luggage.

Pinglet I mean, I've heard of generosity, but this is ri-di . . . ri-di . . . ri-di . . .

Mathieu (*coldly and clearly*) Ridiculous.

Angélique Oh, well done!

Pinglet I do believe he's got it.

Mathieu I never have trouble with ridiculous.

Enter **Victoire**.

Victoire Madame, there's a carriage at the door. The young ladies . . .

Mathieu Ah. They're the ones. Bring them in.

Victoire Yes, Monsieur.

Exit.

Mathieu Ha, ha, ha! Your faces! *Now* you're surprised.

Pinglet *and* **Angélique** No, no . . .

Mathieu You didn't know, did you? When you stayed with me . . . you thought I was a bachelor. No, no, no. It's eight years now since Madame Mathieu pa . . . pa . . . PASSed on –

Pinglet Ah.

Mathieu I had my girls brought up in boarding school. But they've just had to close the school, because so many girls were having . . . ha . . . ha . . . having . . .

Pinglet We can guess what they were having.

Mathieu Mumps.

Pinglet Oh, mumps.

Mathieu So I thought, I'll take them to Paris. Monsieur and Madame Pinglet, they've never met them. It'll be such a surprise.

Pinglet *and* **Angélique** Of course.

Mathieu I left them at the station, and came on ahead.