

THE SURPRISE OF LOVE

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A Play in Three Acts

by

Terry Glaser

Inspired by a play by  
Pierre Carlet de Marivaux

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## Cast of Characters

<u>Flaminia, Madame the Marquise:</u>	A young, widowed noblewoman.
<u>Lisette:</u>	Maid to Flaminia.
<u>Dubois:</u>	Valet to Dorante.
<u>Hortensius:</u>	An academician.
<u>Dorante, Monsieur the Chevalier:</u>	A noble gentleman.
<u>Eraste, Monsieur the Count:</u>	A noble gentleman.

ACT I

SETTING: Paris, 1727. Summer. A lovely garden.

AT RISE: FLAMINIA enters in an exaggeratedly miserable manner. LISETTE follows her, unbeknownst to FLAMINIA.

FLAMINIA

(Striking an exaggerated pose of melancholy and sighing heavily.)

Ah!

(LISETTE mimics FLAMINIA'S pose and mouths a silent "Ah!".)

FLAMINIA

(Striking a different exaggerated pose of melancholy and sighing heavily.)

Oh!

(LISETTE mimics FLAMINIA'S pose and mouths a silent "Oh!".)

FLAMINIA

(Striking yet a different exaggerated pose of melancholy and sighing heavily.)

Ee!

LISETTE

(Mimicking FLAMINIA'S pose and speaking aloud.)

Ee!

(FLAMINIA screams and jumps in fright; that frightens LISETTE, who jumps and screams, as well.)

FLAMINIA

(Turns and sees LISETTE.)

Oh, it's only you, Lisette.

LISETTE

Yes, Madame, it's only me, Lisette.

FLAMINIA

What were you screaming, jumping, and ee-ing about?

LISETTE

I thought we were having a conversation.

FLAMINIA

When I want to have a conversation with my maid, I'll call for you.

LISETTE

But you did call for me, Madame. So I came. Then you wafted into the garden, so I wafted, too.

FLAMINIA

Well, now that you've wafted in, you can waft yourself out again. I want to be alone with my melancholy misery.

LISETTE

Doesn't misery love company?

FLAMINIA

No, Lisette, misery desires only to be left by itself to wallow in its inconsolable solitude.

LISETTE

That doesn't sound like much fun.

FLAMINIA

On the contrary, there's nothing I love better than weeping and wailing and gnashing my teeth.

LISETTE

I couldn't possibly leave you alone in this condition!

FLAMINIA

My condition is my affair. Now go away and let me sink into the slough of despond in peace.

LISETTE

What kind of loving servant leaves her lady to languish in a slough?

FLAMINIA

The kind of loving servant who wants to stay employed.

LISETTE

No, Madame, I refuse to let you die of despair.

FLAMINIA

And how exactly do you, a mere maid, propose to prevent me?

LISETTE

First, by showing you that it's not sensible for a drowning man to argue about the size of the lifeboat.

FLAMINIA

(Yelling in anger.)

I'm not arguing, I'm ordering – take your lifeboat and rescue somebody else! And, besides, I'm not a man!

LISETTE

(To the audience.)

We're making progress. Yelling is better than crying.

FLAMINIA

Now where was I? Um ...

(She tries to strike an exaggerated pose of melancholy but can't seem to get it right.)

Oo ...

(She tries another pose but still can't get it right.)

Er ...

LISETTE

(Helpfully.)

Ah?

FLAMINIA

See what you've done? I forgot what I was sighing about.

LISETTE

(To the audience.)

More progress.

FLAMINIA

Oh, now I remember.

(She strikes a successful  
melancholy pose.)

My dear husband. A lifetime of sighs is not enough to assuage my grief. Two years of loving courtship, a month of married bliss, and one second of inattention at the archery range, and I'm left a widow at ...

(She clears her throat self-  
consciously.)

Nineteen.

LISETTE

What are you complaining about? I know a lady who lost her husband after two days. At least you got a month out of yours.

FLAMINIA

I'm telling you, when I lost my beloved, I lost everything.

LISETTE

How can you say that? The world is full of available men.

FLAMINIA

What are other men to me? Just bits of flotsam in a sea of sorrow.

LISETTE

(To the audience.)

Does she ever listen to herself?

(To FLAMINIA, suggestively.)

You know what they say. A bird in the hand ...

FLAMINIA

How can you speak to me of birds when all I want to do is jump in a hole and never come out? It is only by a great effort of will that I'm still above the ground and not below it.

LISETTE

You expect me to believe that, when I see a sparkle in your eye

—

FLAMINIA

Tears!

LISETTE

And a spring in your step –

FLAMINIA

Ready to jump!

LISETTE

Not to mention the fact that you ate a brace of partridges for lunch, washed them down with a flagon of wine, and topped it all off with a basket of sweets.

FLAMINIA

Well, I have to keep up my strength.

LISETTE

And a good job you're doing, too. In fact, Madame, if I may speak frankly, a better job than when your husband was alive. When everything in life was handed to you on a gilt-edged platter, you let yourself go to seed. Now that you and life are engaged in a fight to the finish, there's a radiance to your complexion, a playfulness to your glance, and a bounce to your stride that are positively captivating. War clearly brings out the best in a woman.

FLAMINIA

That's ridiculous. I was up all night with a sick headache, and I'm sure I look a fright.

LISETTE

(Examining FLAMINIA  
critically.)

Hmmm ... I won't deny your hair could use a few more curls, perhaps here ...

(Playing with FLAMINIA'S  
hair.)

And here ... and one more draped demurely over your eye. There! It strikes a perfect balance between the sophisticated coquette and the naive flirt. Take a look for yourself and see if you don't feel like dancing a jig.

(LISETTE takes a hand mirror  
out of her pocket and holds  
it up for FLAMINIA to look  
in.)

FLAMINIA

(Backing away in horror.)

What are you doing?



FLAMINIA (CONT.)

(Petulantly.)

I won't look!

LISETTE

(To the audience.)

A woman who won't look in a mirror? This is serious!

(To FLAMINIA.)

You won't look in the mirror? Maybe you are ill. Don't make me send for the apothecary. You remember what happened the last time he came. You couldn't -

FLAMINIA

I remember, I remember!

LISETTE

For a whole week.

FLAMINIA

I don't need an apothecary. I already have Doctor Hortensius.

LISETTE

Hortensius is a Doctor of Philosophy. The only thing he can cure is insomnia.

(Proffering the mirror.)

Come now, just one tiny little peek. It'll be over before you know it.

FLAMINIA

What difference does it make whether I look like a dewy bud at dawn or a withered husk at dusk? I'm not planning on having visitors.

LISETTE

And what of your self-respect? Your esthetic responsibility? To abandon all sense of *amour-propre* is simply not natural in one so young. Madame, you force me to speak plainly. If you think grief at the expense of vanity improves your appearance, you're making a big mistake.

FLAMINIA

My appearance no longer concerns me.

(Melodramatically.)

I am done with earthly affairs.

LISETTE

Even if I tell you that, despite your artless glow, the evidence of neglect is undeniable?

FLAMINIA

Done, done, done.

LISETTE

Fine. If that's the way you feel about it, there's nothing more to be said.

(Keeping the mirror just out  
of FLAMINIA'S reach.)

I'll take away all the mirrors and break them into a thousand pieces. I'll hide the spoons, the plates, the silver trays, any surface where you could catch even a fleeting glimpse of your rosy cheeks, your shining tresses, your delicately pouty lips.

FLAMINIA

I couldn't possibly. Rosy?

LISETTE

Cheeks.

FLAMINIA

It's out of the question. Shining?

LISETTE

Tresses.

FLAMINIA

I categorically refuse! Delicately pouty?

LISETTE

Lips.

FLAMINIA

(Snatching the mirror  
eagerly.)

Oh, all right, but only to get rid of you.

(She examines her image  
critically.)

Hmmmmmm. Evidence of neglect, you say?

LISETTE

Undeniable.

FLAMINIA

(Handing the mirror back to  
LISETTE.)

You're right, Lisette. I look absolutely ghastly.

LISETTE

To let a beauty like yours fade, Madame, would be nothing short of a crime. Leaving nature to its own devices is the swiftest road to ruin.

(She takes various little pots out of her pocket and dabs at FLAMINIA'S face.)

A puff of powder here, a dab of crimson there, and – *voilà!* The lilies and roses are once again in bloom. As for your eyes – ah, those eyes! What a pair of naughty little devils! Two scorching sizzlers in a bed of smoldering coals.

FLAMINIA

A pair of burned-out cinders, more likely.

LISETTE

A flame once lit can easily be rekindled. Strike a spark in a tinderbox and watch despair go up in smoke!

(Looking offstage.)

And speaking of sparks, here comes Dubois, valet to the Chevalier Dorante. He's a lackey always good for a few rustic diversions.

FLAMINIA

I told you – I am not receiving!

LISETTE

Let's at least hear what he has to say.

(DUBOIS enters and bows.)

DUBOIS

Madame, I beg your pardon for the disturbance ...

(DUBOIS bows again.)

LISETTE

Are you going to beg and bow all day, or do you have something to say? You seem to think Madame has nothing better to do than stand around and be disturbed.

DUBOIS

(To the audience.)

What a cutie!

(To LISETTE.)

And you, my dear, seem to think I have nothing better to do than stand around and be interrupted.

FLAMINIA

Enough peasant banter. Why have you intruded on my unhappiness?

DUBOIS

I have intruded, Madame, because the Chevalier, my master, told me to tell you that ... oh, now I've gone and forgotten. Your maid has put it right out of my head.

LISETTE

That's right - blame it on me!

DUBOIS

It's not my fault! A pretty face always makes my head swim.

FLAMINIA

Well, swim right back to your master and find out why he sent you.

DUBOIS

Oh, I've got it!

(In an affectedly  
aristocratic manner.)

Monsieur my master wants me to tell you that he and I - that's the Chevalier and myself - having arrived in Paris yesterday - that's the day before today - are now returning to the country - I mean the *countryside*, we're already *in* the country of France - and we're not ever coming back - which is to say not coming back to *Paris*, not not coming back to the *countryside*, which, as I have just indicated, we *are* coming back to - resulting in the Chevalier's not being able to pay his respects to you this afternoon - as is his customary custom - because he has only this morning at your disposal, and he hopes - or should I say is fervently desiresome - that you will find it not unacceptable to receive his compliments - representing, of course, in this case, his ultimate *adieux* - at this early hour - which, going by the sun, is generally considered to be *much* too early to pay a visitation - and not be inconvenienced by the unusual - not to say unorthodoxical - nature of these arrangements. In other words, my master -

LISETTE

(To FLAMINIA.)

Wants to see you now.

DUBOIS

(Confused.)

Didn't I just say that?

FLAMINIA

I don't suppose you could tell me yourself – in twenty words or less – what your master wishes to convey? I am, as you can see, in the depths of despair.

DUBOIS

Of course, Madame. He wishes me to ask if you would have the goodness to grant him a mere quarter-hour of your time for colloquation.

LISETTE

(Who has been counting the words as DUBOIS speaks; to the audience.)

That's twenty-two words, but maybe he can't count.

DUBOIS

(Very sadly.)

As for the depths of despair, Madame, don't trouble yourself about that. He has deep enough depths of his own. In fact,

(Starting to cry.)

We're all, every last one of us, very, very miserable.

LISETTE

(To the audience, in disbelief.)

Is he crying?

DUBOIS

(To the audience.)

Look, I'm crying.

LISETTE

(To DUBOIS.)

For heaven's sake, stop that pathetic blubbering.

DUBOIS

I was holding back out of politeness. You should see the buckets I shed when I'm alone.

FLAMINIA

(To DUBOIS.)

Very well. Tell your master that he may attend me. I will retire to my boudoir until his arrival.

(To LISETTE.)

And you, Lisette, let me know the moment Monsieur Hortensius returns from the bookseller's. I am sure he has bought several illuminating publications for my edification.